

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

SPRING/APRIL 2023

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CHRIS J.
Suggs
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Kinston City Council



GREETINGS, KINSTON!

It is a pleasure to share with you my Spring 2023 Community Newsletter! I'm honored to serve as a member of the Kinston City Council, and I believe that this community newsletter is an additional avenue for me to update you on the successes and challenges our community faces and the work I do on behalf of Kinston's 19,546 residents to address those issues.

I invite you to join me at a future city council meeting, during my community office hours, or by reaching out to me directly to voice your concerns, share your ideas, and find out ways that you can get involved in our community. Thank you for reading, and remember—we're just getting started!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris".



Chris J. Suggs was elected to the Kinston City Council in November 2021 and is currently the youngest elected official in North Carolina. Outside of his work on the council, Chris works as a nonprofit executive and communications strategist.

SMOKE ALARM INSTALLATIONS

This February, I was proud to join the Kinston Department of Fire & Rescue and Kinston Teens for their Smoke Alarm Blitz event. The Smoke Alarm Blitz is an effort led by our firefighters to install free smoke alarms into the homes of our community's residents to increase safety.

Our department has a goal of installing at least 1,000 smoke alarms this year throughout our community. This project has been made possible thanks to the generosity of local and national partners.

If you would like smoke alarms installed at your home or in your neighborhood, please do not hesitate to contact the Kinston Department of Fire & Rescue at 252-939-3164.



ACQUIRING REAL PROPERTY FROM THE CITY OF KINSTON

During its regular meeting on Tuesday, March 7, the Kinston City Council voted to approve a list of properties to be made available for purchase by interested members of the public.

I am excited that the City of Kinston has moved forward with making some of our unused properties available for purchase through the upset bid process. The City of

Kinston owns several hundred vacant and unused properties. Maintaining these properties is a strain on our city's resources, and as a member of the city council, I've worked to put these properties back in the hands of our community.

In October 2022, I introduced a policy aimed at promoting the sale of vacant city-owned properties and streamlining the city's property bidding process. The policy was on the agenda for the city council to discuss during its October 18 meeting, and, after careful consideration, the council unanimously voted to approve it. The policy directs city staff to present a list of properties to the council each year to be made available for bid.

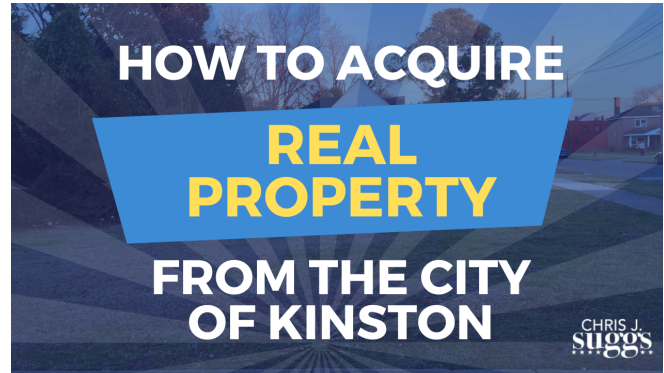
Most of the properties owned by the City of Kinston are empty and overgrown lots. None of the properties on the list approved by the council this week have structures or homes on them, and present a unique opportunity for fresh development.

It is my goal that this effort helps increase economic and community development opportunities for our city. Kinston has a lot of potential for growth, but it will take us working together—both the local government and the community—in order for us to achieve our desired progress.

To help community members navigate the process of acquiring properties from the City of Kinston, I have published a guide on my website that includes a template for how to submit a bid to the city. That guide can be found at www.chrisjsuggs.com.

The list of available properties* can be found on the City of Kinston's planning department website at www.ci.kinston.nc.us/152/Planning or by calling the department at (252) 939-3271.

**The list of properties is not an exhaustive list of all city-owned properties. This list is a current inventory of properties that the city council is advertising for purchase.*



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES CONGRESSIONAL CITIES CONFERENCE



This March, I had the opportunity to join thousands of city officials from across the country for the Congressional Cities Conference, or CCC, in Washington, D.C. The CCC is an annual convening hosted by the National League of Cities for local officials to learn about federal issues impacting towns, cities, and villages nationwide and collectively advocate to our federal legislators.

During this year's conference, I had the opportunity to meet and learn from White House leaders such as Shalanda Young, Director of the White House Office of Budget & Management, and First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, among others.



I am grateful that the City of Kinston is a member of the National League of Cities and I look forward to our community continuing to benefit from this great resource.



DID YOU KNOW?

In 2022 all of the City of Kinston's employees—full and part-time—received a pay increase. This was part of an effort to increase employee recruitment and retention. As a member of the City Council, I am excited to continue making strong investments in our workforce that ensure our local government is a thriving, healthy, and safe place to work.

KINSTON NAMES PERMANENT POLICE CHIEF

Congratulations to Chief Keith Goyette who has been named permanent Police Chief for the City of Kinston, North Carolina and Kinston Police Department on February 2, 2023.

Chief Goyette has been with the City since 2001, and has risen through the ranks as Police Officer, Crime Scene Investigator, Captain, Major, and most recently served as Interim Police Chief. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Mount Olive University and a Masters of Science in Criminal Justice from Tiffin University, among many other educational programs and certifications.



Kinston City Manager Rhonda Barwick conducted a nationwide search receiving over 60 applicants for the position, and Chief Goyette stood out with the most qualifications and attributes best suited to lead our Police Department. I have enjoyed projects like the Coffee with a Cop, CLEAR initiative, and our DMC/Reducing Racial & Ethnic Disparities program under Chief Goyette's leadership as Interim Chief, and I look forward to continuing to work with Chief Goyette to build a better and safer Kinston.

who hires who?

IN THE CITY OF KINSTON, NORTH CAROLINA



YOU!

The more than 12,000 registered voters who live in the city limits of Kinston are responsible for electing a Mayor and City Council.

MAYOR

The Mayor serves as Chair of the City Council and presides over all its meetings. The Mayor only votes on the council in the case of a tie.



CITY COUNCIL

The City Council adopts ordinances, approves the City's budget, and appoints a City Manager, Clerk, and Attorney.

CITY MANAGER

The City Manager implements the budget, ordinances, plans, and policies developed by the City Council. They oversee the day-to-day operations of the city, including hiring and removing staff.

CITY CLERK

The City Clerk is responsible for preparing and filing official records for the City. The City Clerk also oversees our public cemeteries and prepares correspondences such as letters, proclamations, and resolutions on behalf of the City Council.

CITY ATTORNEY

The City Attorney serves as the Legal Advisor for the City.

CITY STAFF

The City Manager hires Directors (or Department Heads) to lead our Police, Finance, MIS, Human Resources, Parks & Recreation, Planning & Code Enforcement, Fire, and Public Services departments.



The City of Kinston has more than 350 full-time employees that provide essential services to the more than 19,000 citizens of Kinston.

KINSTON MOVES FORWARD WITH PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER POSITION

During its February 21 meeting, the Kinston City Council authorized city manager Rhonda Barwick to move forward with hiring a Public Information Office for the city.

I am excited that my colleagues on the city council have agreed to move forward with the hiring of a public information officer for our city. The City of Kinston is a growing

organization, with nearly four hundred employees and serving nearly 20,000 citizens. It's important that an organization of our size has a member of our team dedicated to communicating effectively with the media and members of the public.

The position was budgeted in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget adopted in July 2022, but the city council could never reach a consensus on the pay and structure of the position. During Tuesday night's meeting, the council agreed to use the \$40,278 budgeted for the position to hire a part-time employee.

The city manager has shared concerns with the council that we may not be able to attract a multi-media professional with the level of experience that our city needs at this current funding level, and I wholeheartedly agree with her concerns. I'm hopeful that the council will revisit this item in our upcoming budget meetings this spring to ensure that the person who fills this role is adequately supported with the hours, compensation, and resources needed for this type of work.

The city manager's office hasn't shared a timeline yet of when the position will be posted, but once it is posted interested individuals will be able to find this position along with other job opportunities at www.kinstonnc.gov.



TOWN HALLS PLANNED FOR 2023

The Kinston City Council is tentatively planning a series of town hall events throughout the remainder of 2023 to share important updates and resources with our citizens and gain helpful feedback to help move the city forward.

These events were discussed during our January 26 strategic planning meeting and again during our February 21 meeting. The council has not yet solidified the details for each event, but the first is tentatively scheduled for May 18 in conjunction with the Kinston Police Department.

NEW PLAYGROUNDS IN KINSTON

On Tuesday, March 7, the City of Kinston hosted a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of our new playground at Fairfield Recreation Center. I am grateful to have been able to support this project on the City Council and to have assisted with its installation.

In addition to the new playground at Fairfield Recreation Center, this spring we will be installing another new playground at Bill Fay Park. The playground at Bill Fay Park is currently closed to the public while the old equipment is being removed, and we look forward to adding a new and larger structure to this treasured community park.

If you have any questions related to these playground installations, you can contact the Kinston/Lenoir County Parks & Recreation Department at (252) 939-3332 or www.kinstonrec.com.



GOOD NEWS IN OUR AUDIT REPORT

The City Council received our Annual Audit Report for Fiscal Year 2022 during our February 7 meeting and it was a positive report for the City of Kinston, North Carolina.

There were no findings, no accounting policy changes, and no difficulties encountered between the auditor and our staff. A major highlight for the City? **Our revenues increased significantly for FY2022 in comparison to FY2021, along with an increase in our General Fund to \$13,732,131 from previously being at \$8,558,010 in FY2021.**

The City received an Unmodified Opinion from our auditor, which is the highest rating possible by an independent auditor.

I am excited that the City of Kinston continues on a positive trajectory of financial health. Thank you to our City Manager, Rhonda Barwick, for her leadership in making this happen.

THREE CITY COUNCIL SEATS UP FOR ELECTION THIS YEAR

This year will be another election year for the City of Kinston with three city council seats appearing on our ballots. The seats currently held by councilmembers Sammy Aiken and Felicia Solomon, along with the council seat held by Mayor Pro Tem Antonio Hardy, will be up for election.

The filing period for municipal elections typically takes place in the summer. The filing fee is \$10 and is paid by check, money order, or cashier's check to the Lenoir County Board of Elections.

Thinking of running or know someone who should? Now is the time to start planning and preparing yourself. If you have questions related to filing for office, I encourage you to contact our local Board of Elections at (252) 523-0636.

NEW APARTMENTS COMING TO KINSTON

I've had quite a few people ask me about what is getting built off of North Queen Street near Kinston High School. This development will be a 64-unit apartment complex that was approved by the City Council in 2021. Their submitted plans include a mix of 12 one-bedroom units, 40 two-bedroom units, and 12 three-bedroom units.

The name of the developer is Halcon Companies, and they've developed similar apartment complexes in Greenville, Holly Springs, and Elizabeth City. The developer will likely have signage and advertising once they are closer to completion and ready to begin leasing the units. The name they submitted for this development is *Riverstone Crossing at the Neuse*.

Riverstone Crossing at the Neuse
Kinston, North Carolina



THIS PROJECT IS THE PROPERTY OF HALCON COMPANIES. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS DOCUMENT IS TO BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL, INCLUDING PHOTOCOPYING, RECORDING, OR BY ANY INFORMATION STORAGE AND RETRIEVAL SYSTEM.



Want to receive more news and updates from me?

Visit www.chrisjsuggs.com to join my mailing list.

CHRIS J. SUGGS
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Kinston City Council



KINSTON CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

City Council Meetings are open to the public! Community members are invited to join us at Kinston City Hall on the first and third Tuesdays of each month, at 5:30PM and 7:00PM respectively. During these meetings, we review and vote on action items that affect the city's budget, operations, zoning regulations, and more. At the start of each meeting, time is allotted for citizens to share ideas, feedback, issues or concerns with the City Council and our City Staff.

For more information on our City Council meetings, visit www.kinstonnc.gov or the City of Kinston's Facebook Page (www.facebook.com/KinstonCityHall).

How do I reach Councilmember Chris Suggs?

To request a meeting, presentation, or other engagement related to my work on the City Council, contact the City Clerk's Office at (252) 939-3115. For questions related to utilities or public services, contact the City's 24/7 Customer Service line at (252) 939-3282.

A FEW NEW PHOTOS...



This newsletter was printed at no expense to the City of Kinston and was paid for by Chris J. Suggs.
Feedback, ideas, or contributions can be emailed to chris@chrisjsuggs.com or P.O. Box 3355, Kinston, NC 28502.