

City of Graham
City Council Special Meeting Minutes
February 17, 2025
8:30 AM



The City of Graham City Council held a special meeting at 8:30 am on February 17, 2026, in the Council Chamber, City Hall, located at 201 South Main Street, Graham, NC.

Council Members Present:

Mayor Chelsea Dickey
Mayor Pro Tem Ricky Hall
Council Member Bobby Chin
Council Member Bonnie Whitaker
Council Member Jim Young

Staff Present:

Megan Garner, City Manager
Aaron Holland, Assistant City Manager
Bryan Coleman, City Attorney
Bob Ward, City Attorney - *Absent*
Renee Ward, City Clerk

CALL TO ORDER: Mayor Chelsea Dickey

RFQ – SESQUICENTENNIAL PARK:

City Council reviewed submissions for the requests for qualifications for the movement of Sesquicentennial Park and considered awarding a contract.

Mayor Dickey shared that this meeting was called by Mayor Pro Tem Hall and Council Member Whitaker to review submissions for the request for qualifications for the movement of Sesquicentennial Park and the Council may consider awarding a contract.

Mayor Dickey shared the public's concerns and questions, such as how to pay for the park if it is moved and what the projected maintenance costs would be for a new, larger park. She also asked what studies have been done to show the possible contamination mentioned at the current location.

Public Works Director Burke Robertson stated that chromium, a heavy metal, was detected. He stated that the amounts indicate that, while it would not have to go to a special landfill, it would have to go to a lined landfill, such as the Alamance County Landfill.

Mayor Dickey asked whether bids were accepted to repair the memorial or only to move it. She stated that bids were received to repair as is, but those bids are now outdated. She noted there were no cost estimates for moving the park, and that was one of the community members' questions.

Mayor Dickey asked City Attorney Brian Coleman to summarize the findings of North Carolina General Statute 100-2.1.

City Attorney Coleman stated that at the last Council meeting, they were asked to provide our interpretation of North Carolina General Statute § 100-2.1. **Protection of monuments, memorials, and works of art.** The question before the Council was whether it was an object of remembrance and whether it was on public property. He stated the park was an object of remembrance, and it was on public property. He shared that several factors triggered the Statute. When appropriate measures were required by the state or political

subdivision to preserve the object, or when necessary for construction, renovation, or reconfiguration, etc., those two things trigger the Statute.

City Attorney Coleman stated Council could relocate the object temporarily, and if you do that, then you are required to bring that object back to the same place within 90 days after the renovations or construction have been completed, and those renovations or constructions that were caused by the relocation in the first place, or you could relocate it permanently. He stated that if Council relocated the park permanently, it would have to place it in a location of similar prominence, visibility, walkability, and accessibility. Those were the two options.

City Attorney Coleman further stated that another option was that a building inspector, engineer, or someone of the like could determine that the property posed a public safety hazard, in which case it could be removed.

Council Member Young received an email from a citizen and read it. "Could you please ask the Mayor and Council where the grant money was that Ms. Dickey said she could get, and why she discouraged someone from forming a fundraising committee?"

Mayor Dickey stated it was the grant that would expire on June 30, 2026, which was approximately \$483,000 projected for renovation costs for Sesquicentennial Park at its current location. The projected renovation cost for Sesquicentennial Park at its current location was around \$400,000.

Council Member Young asked about the grants that the Mayor had been talking about since being elected, such as Duke Energy and Impact Alamance.

Mayor Dickey stated there would be opportunities to apply for grants through Duke Energy and Impact Alamance. She noted that there was also over \$400,000 in grant funds that could be used and would be lost if not used.

Council Member Young stated at the last Council meeting he had asked staff to check with the contractors who had submitted bids to repair the park to see whether they would honor those bids, and was told they would not. He said the staff would have to send out bid requests again.

Assistant City Manager Holland stated it would be around 20 days for the type of bid for this project.

Council Member Chin shared that since we have heard back from the Attorneys that the first condition was about location and that the visibility conditions would be met with the new location. He shared that instead of placing the park behind the museum, it should be considered placing it on West Elm Street beside the Coffee Depot, with an entrance off West Elm Street. He noted that if you were at Court Square, you would be able to see the park. He asked City Attorney Coleman if that would meet the conditions.

City Attorney Coleman stated it was of similar prominence, it was walkable, accessible and it was visible.

Council Member Whitaker stated in last month's Council meeting it was voted to move the park and voted to go out for RFQs, which was what we are here to talk about today.

Assistant City Manager Holland stated that two different RFQs had been received. One was from Stewart Inc., and the other was from Concord Engineering and Surveying, Inc., CSI. He shared that the Staff, the Public Works Director, and the City engineer had reviewed both firms, and based on their credentials,

timelines, and past experience, Stewart was the firm the Staff felt could provide the product they were looking to have done. He asked whether this was the Council's will to move forward with relocating the park and to use Stewart, Inc.

Mayor Dickey stated that the community had spoken that the funds needed to be used to keep the park as is. She also expressed concern about a schedule that was too tight. She said Mr. Holland sent a proposed timeline and said we needed 20 days to bid it out, and this was only allowing 10 days. She shared the project manager was out of Charlotte, it would need new utilities, construction would start week three, and there was so much going on here, and she did not want to push through a project that did not have community engagement and did not have buy-in from the community, and how would it be funded.

Council Member Chin shared that the grant funds could not be used for the Graham Regional Park, but only for downtown.

Council asked to see the drawing of the proposed new park off Elm Street.

SESQUICENTENNIAL PARK ON W. ELM ST.



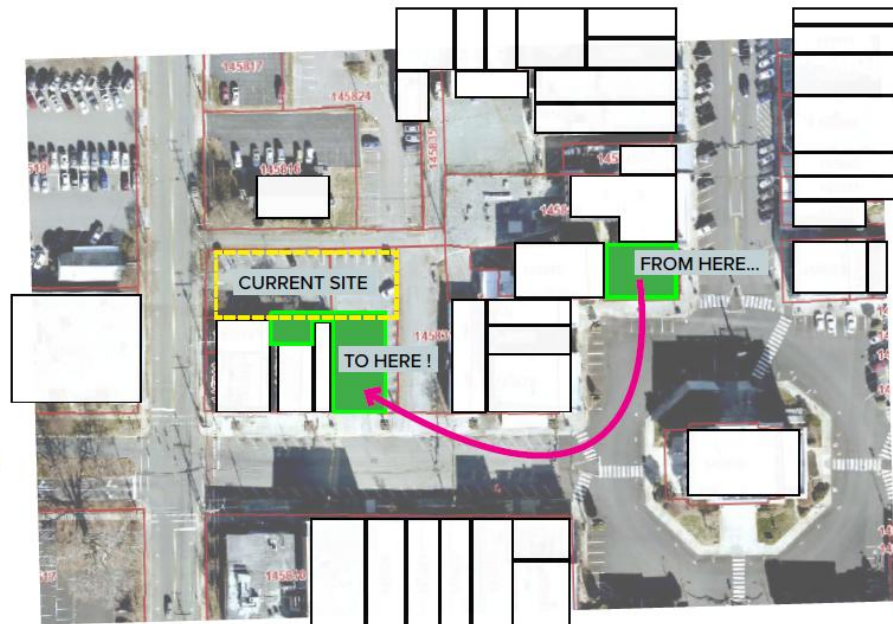
ALTERNATIVE SITE PROPOSAL

- 5,697 SF site,
- +-30 public parking spaces,
- Preserves service access to retail/restaurant,
- Highly visible on W Elm St,
- Connected to primary public realm,
- 12 parking spaces lost,
- Utilize parking for special events,
- Location supported by Downtown Master plan



URBAN CONSIDERATIONS

- Better visibility,
- Better access,
- Better edges,
- Better pedestrian experience,
- Adjacent activity,
- City controlled land,
- Less parking loss,
- Preserves service behind shops
- Supported by Downtown Masterplan



Assistant City Manager Holland stated bids would have to be put out regardless of the location.

Mayor Dickey expressed concern about parking spaces that would be taken away, and she understood that County parking had not been locked in.

Assistant City Manager Holland shared that, after speaking with the County, the assigned parking at the Register of Deeds would be difficult to allow the public to use, as it is reserved for their employees. But the larger lot in front of the entrance to the Register of Deeds was already public parking. The County said that if the City needed to use it to promote parking, the City could use it.

Council Member Whitaker suggested discussing the RFQs and moving forward with moving the park. She shared that she liked Stewart, Inc., and the plan to use a portion of the parking lot beside the coffee shop.

After further discussion, Assistant City Manager Holland shared that the first step would be to engage a firm to prepare the conceptual engineering plan, from which the bid can be derived.

Council Member Chin asked for clarity on whether the Council needed to select a firm and provide the conditions for designing the space on W. Elm Street.

Assistant City Manager Holland stated that staff would need a green light from Council to meet with the firm, and based on the guidelines, that could be done in the space and bring back to Council. He stated it would likely need to be done in a special meeting to stay within the timeline.

Mayor Dickey inquired if Council moved forward with moving the park, if a committee could be put together, and still sell bricks and have something put back on the current site.

Council Member Chin stated if the park were moved, they would not want to fix the current location.

Mayor Dickey stated that many people said they wanted to keep it at its current location.

Council Member Young noted that the public should be allowed to raise funds to restore the park to the way it was before. He thinks the Council was going too fast and needed to give the public time to raise funds. He shared the possibility that the grant funds could expire if the park returns to its original location.

Mayor Dickey agreed that slowing the process, talking to business owners, conducting a parking assessment, and letting the community get involved would be beneficial.

Council Member Young stated he spoke to the County Commissioners at its meeting, and the Chairperson asked the City Manager to get in touch to discuss. He stated he hoped they would put some funds toward their own sesquicentennial celebration.

Motion by Council Member Chin to award a contract to Stewart, Inc. and proceed to relocate the park to the property off W. Elm Street, seconded by Council Member Whitaker.

Mayor Dickey asked to confirm right after he had challenged the community to raise funds.

Council Member Chin stated it was separate, but if they wanted to raise funds, they could do so for the new park.

Mayor Dickey asked if the community was allowed to rebuild at the current location.

Council Member Whitaker stated they were not going to fix it.

Council Member Chin stated if the park were moved, then they would not improve the park in the original location.

Mayor Dickey asked, even with charity funds.

Council Member Chin stated you would have to raise the funds to fix the site.

Council Member Whitaker stated the City was not going to fix the site because it was too much of a liability for the City to start digging next to a historical building, and the cost could be tremendous.

Mayor Dickey asked Council Member Chin to restate his motion if the community was allowed to raise funds and then remake the motion.

Motion:

Council Member Chin stated his motion was to hire Stewart, Inc., to review and provide engineering drawings for relocating the park from its current location to W. Elm Street, seconded by Council Member Whitaker. The motion passed 3-2. Mayor Dickey and Council Member Young voted no.

Mayor Dickey again asked if the community was allowed to raise funds.

Council Members Chin and Whitaker stated that it was their choice and that it would be moved.

Mayor Dickey asked whether they would permit the community to rebuild it because it was City land, and we had to tell them whether they could rebuild it.

Council Member Whitaker stated no, and that it was intended to be sold.

City Manager Garner inquired about the motion that reaffirmed last week at the Council meeting, essentially to make the existing park safe, and with the action taken today, it would be helpful to have clarification for staff if it was still our path to make the park safe while Stewart, Inc., was working on the drawings or not at all. She stated she did not want to expend staff resources unless necessary.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall stated we should not use City staff to disassemble the park at this point, because if it is included in the bid to pick it up and move it, we should let Stewart handle it.

City Manager Garner asked whether this was the Council's consensus.

The Council's consensus was to let it stay for now.

City Manager Garner asked for clarification: if the contract was being awarded to Stewart, Inc., would the proposed funding mechanism be downtown revitalization grant funding, and if so, the City would have to go through the process with OSBM to change the scope of work.

Council answered yes.

ADJOURN

Council Member Chin motioned to adjourn, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Hall. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.

Renee M. Ward, CMC
City Clerk