

PRESS RELEASE

Statement on Graduate Tuition Reimbursement

You may have seen recent news coverage about the Town's reimbursement for my graduate studies. I want to talk about it directly because honesty matters, and you deserve to hear the full context from me.

More than two years ago, a bit after I retired, I started thinking about what kind of further education would help me better serve Cary. I began pursuing additional schooling entirely on my own, with no expectation or intent that the Town would pay for it. I even looked into law school. After speaking with academic leaders, including people from the UNC School of Government, it became clear that a policy degree would be a better fit for the work I do and the work I care about. To date, I have invested hundreds of hours pursuing additional education and insight to make me a better public servant. I genuinely believe this is time well spent.

Unfortunately, UNC doesn't offer a stand-alone Master's of Public Policy without the undergrad work there or another degree, so that wasn't a possibility. I continued those conversations with practitioners and with a number of people who pointed me to various MPP programs. In 2024, I eventually enrolled in an online Master of Public Policy at Northwestern.

Around that time, our Town Manager, in line with the Town's emphasis on professional development, offered to have the Town support my tuition. I did not request this support, and it came only after I had already decided to pursue the degree on my own. In fact, I initially declined. Later, after confirming with the Town Manager, HR, and Legal that tuition reimbursement was permissible, I accepted the offer with the honest belief that it aligned with the Town's approach to ongoing learning.

Recently, I learned that this proposal to pay had not been shared with all of our Council. A senior staff leader had told me that all Council members would be informed, and I relied on that assurance from a trusted person. I regret not following up with each member myself to ensure they heard it directly from me. Also, the total cost of Northwestern's program is high and, in hindsight, exceeded what is reasonable for me to ask our taxpayers to pay for, for professional development. Looking back, I recognize that accepting the reimbursement was a mistake.

Once I became aware of concerns, I reimbursed the Town in full. I did this to eliminate any doubts about the use of public funds and to uphold the trust you have placed in me. I shared this with the news outlet when they reached out, but only parts of my statements were printed. Looking back, I wish I had spoken directly to all of you sooner. I am sorry for not posting this earlier, and for any confusion or frustration it may have caused.

I acted in good faith and followed the guidance I was given. I also recognize that the communication around this was not what it should have been. Going forward, I am committed to working with my colleagues to ensure expectations and processes are clearer and more openly shared.

I also want to state clearly that there is no connection between the tuition miscommunications I have described and the questions many of you understandably have about the Town Manager's leave.

Serving Cary has been one of the greatest honors of my life. My commitment to accountability, ethical governance, and earning your trust every single day remains unchanged. Thank you to everyone who has reached out with thoughts, questions, and concerns. I hear you, and I remain fully dedicated to this community.