

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Budget Retreat Day 2 of 2

Tuesday, January 30, 2026 – 8:30 AM

Riverview Restaurant 121 Riverfront Road Kure Beach, NC 28449



MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Barbee called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM.

PRESENT

Mayor Lynn Barbee

Council Member Jay Healy

Council Member Vince Losito

Mayor Pro Tem Deb LeCompte

Council Member Wayne Rouse

ALSO PRESENT

Town Manager Bruce Oakley

Finance Director Debbie Hall

Fire Chief Alan Griffin

Public Works Director Brian Stanberry

Parks and Rec Director Eric Jelinski

Community Development Director Jeremy Hardison

Attorney Noel Fox

Deputy Town Manager Ed Parvin

Town Clerk Kim Ward

Police Lieutenant Sonny Russell

Public Utilities Director Mark Meyer

Executive Assistant Sheila Nicholson

Human Resources Director Holly Brooks

Town Council Roundtable

What Is Working Well?

Mayor Barbee opened the roundtable by noting the lack of public pressure for change following the recent election, indicating overall citizen satisfaction.

Council Member Wayne Rouse agreed that residents feel happy, noting the Town has been well-run with money in reserves. Council highlighted visible improvements that residents appreciate, such as the marina, playground, Mike Chappell Park, and the public bathrooms.

Mayor Pro Tem Deb LeCompte reflected on progress since 2003, stating they've made great strides in making Carolina Beach "a great place to live and to raise a family for generations to come." She credited staff, particularly police and fire departments, for creating a safe environment where she feels comfortable walking alone late at night.

Council Member Healy shared a resident's observation that the biggest difference in Carolina Beach compared to 10 years ago is that it's "cleaner" and more of a Town. He also mentioned that Carolina Beach has become more of a player in regional politics, partly due to LeAnn Pierce being elected as a county commissioner.

Council Member Losito mentioned that you would be hard pressed to find a Town that has better financials than Carolina Beach. We see higher end investors coming here and they expect higher level services. That is a sign of success.

Where Can We Improve?

Council Member Healy raised concerns about downtown areas needing improvement. He noted that some business owners who don't live in Carolina Beach don't maintain their properties properly. Business owners need to have "skin in the game" and properly maintain their storefronts.

The discussion focused particularly on dilapidated buildings on the northeast corner of downtown, with property owners who live out of state and are difficult to work with. Staff noted they would use fire code enforcement and building inspections to address these issues in the spring.

Council also discussed the carnival rides that had been permitted, with Council expressing frustration about how the conditional use permit had been implemented. MPT LeCompte noted she had "no idea they were responding to permanent rides until they were being installed." The group discussed issues with noise, grease disposal, and the need for better oversight in the future.

Code enforcement was identified as an area needing improvement. While Council acknowledged the difficulty of enforcement without appearing heavy-handed, they agreed more consistent enforcement was needed, particularly for absentee owners of rental properties.

There was discussion about improving communication with military leadership at MOTSU to better coordinate on matters affecting the Town.

What Policies Do You Want to See Implemented?

Council discussed potential policy changes related to maintaining decorum during Council meetings. Attorney Noel Fox suggested they could be more formal, such as asking people not to call out during non-public comment periods and requesting phones be silenced.

Council Member Healy mentioned that he would like to see hats removed before entering Council Chambers.

Council Member Rouse emphasized the importance of the Council being unified on their strategic plan and sticking to it without deviation.

What New Programs/Projects Do You Want to See Implemented?

A significant discussion occurred about improving employee benefits and compensation to retain quality staff. Lieutenant Sonny Russell noted that insurance costs are a major issue, with family coverage costing nearly half of their salary. Council Member Rouse advocated for improving benefits, comparing it to property maintenance: "deferred maintenance is much more expensive than preventative maintenance."

Holly Brooks, Director of Human Resources, mentioned she was working on a family leave policy that could apply to both the beginning of life (new children) and end of life (caring for elderly parents).

Council also discussed the need to ensure proper resources for maintaining new facilities and improvements that have been made in recent years.

What Does Success Look Like For 2026/27?

Council Member Wayne Rouse emphasized the importance of fiscal responsibility and staying unified around the strategic plan. He stated the Council should "be super unified and whatever we leave this room with after these 2 days I think we need to stick to this strategic plan."

New Initiatives

Council discussed potential beach access improvements such as flexible decking material that could be used for beach access paths as an alternative to wooden walkways, which was received positively.

Succession Planning

Ed Parvin (Deputy Town Manager) led the discussion on succession planning for the Town of Carolina Beach. He emphasized the importance of developing internal talent and creating pathways for employee growth within the organization.

Ed highlighted several success stories within the Town's departments, including employees who had moved up from entry-level positions to leadership roles.

Ed identified several key principles for effective succession planning:

1. Breaking down departmental silos and encouraging cross-departmental cooperation
2. Creating a culture where knowledge is shared rather than hoarded
3. Developing standardized processes that can be followed regardless of who is in a position
4. Identifying and nurturing talent through individual development plans
5. Creating clear career progression paths for employees

Ed explained that effective succession planning results in higher service levels to the community, improved efficiency, better retention rates, and greater innovation. He emphasized that succession planning isn't about identifying specific individuals to replace current leaders, but rather about building organizational capability.

The Mayor expanded on Ed's points, stressing that investing in people is crucial, even if they eventually leave the organization. He encouraged department heads to give employees opportunities to experience different roles and departments, saying "Never ever resist investing in people."

Several department heads, including Mark Meyer (Public Utilities Director), shared their experiences with succession planning. Mark described how he had developed his team to function effectively during his absence, noting that "the majority of my guys could easily step in and do my job."

Lt. Sonny Russell from the Police Department pointed out that exposure to leadership activities was crucial for development. He recommended that department heads invite their second and third in command to important meetings, saying "I've learned more about you personally and about how the Town runs here than I would in class." Council welcomed the feedback and encouraged staff to speak up with ideas for growth.

The Mayor concluded by emphasizing that succession planning isn't about paperwork but about meaningful conversations with staff. He shared an anecdote about a team-building exercise where a quiet factory worker had the best idea but didn't speak up because she wasn't an engineer, reinforcing the importance of creating an environment where everyone feels their input is valued.

Cyber Security

Mr. Oakley informed Council that a recent Cyber Security audit conducted by the National Guard identified several areas of concern. Dataprise, the Town's contracted IT service provider concurred with the findings and stated that the public email terminal located in the Town Hall lobby exposes the Town to significant liability and recommended that the Town either remove the computer from the public area or discontinue the existing email-forwarding system. Council unanimously concurred with the Town Manager's recommendation to remove the terminal and to route all public records requests through the online public records request portal on the Town's website.

Mr. Oakley updated Council about an incident that occurred after the audit was completed. The Town was a victim of a cyber attack in which someone was able to defraud the Town out of \$487,000. The Carolina Beach Police Department along with the FBI investigated the crime as well as tried to recover some of the lost funds.

Closed Session

ACTION: Motion to go into closed session for attorney/client matters to include:

- Carolina Beach Land Holdings, LLC v. Town of Carolina Beach, New Hanover County File Number 23 CVS 3744
- Oceana Owners Association, Inc. vs. Town of Carolina Beach, New Hanover County File Number 24 CVS 1638
- CBYC, LLC vs. Town of Carolina Beach, New Hanover County File Number 24 CVS 3194
- Callie Ryan v. Town of Carolina Beach et al., New Hanover County File Number 25 CVS 005650-640
- Marlow vs. Town of Carolina Beach, New Hanover County File Number 25CVS002275-640

Motion made by Mayor Barbee

Voting Yea: Mayor Barbee, Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte, Council Member Healy, Council Member Rouse, Council Member Losito

Motion passed unanimously

Council returned to open session and the meeting adjourned at 1:30 p.m.