

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Workshop

Tuesday, April 22, 2025 - 9:00 AM

Council Chambers, 1121 N. Lake Park Boulevard, Carolina Beach, NC



MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Barbee called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

PRESENT

Mayor Lynn Barbee

Mayor Pro Tem Deb LeCompte

Council Member Jay Healy

Council Member Mike Hoffer

ABSENT

Council Member Joe Benson

ALSO PRESENT

Town Manager Bruce Oakley

Assistant Town Manager Ed Parvin

Finance Director Debbie Hall

Town Clerk Kim Ward

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Employee Recognition

Mayor Barbee recognized Mr. Oakley for 5 years of service. Council Members praised his leadership.

Mr. Parvin recognized Public Works Director Brian Stanberry for 25 years of service, praising his patience. Council Members commended Mr. Stanberry's listening skills.

Mayor Barbee said all the Town's department heads have been on staff for quite a while, and this continuity results in a better organization.

2. Update from the Beautification Committee

Beautification Committee Chairman Cindy Dunn gave a presentation on heritage trees. The committee is asking Council to consider designating the live oaks on the Town Hall campus near Council Chambers as heritage trees, which are important because of their great size, notable longevity, and unusual form. She said heritage tree ordinances are developed to place limits on removal and dictate care, and she suggested placing signage on them so the public will know they are heritage trees. Ms. Dunn said the committee's recommendations, in celebration of Earth Day and Arbor Day 2025, include the following:

- Consider designating the Municipal Complex live oaks as heritage trees.
- Have them inspected by a certified arborist to ensure their health and safety to the public.
- Get public input on starting a Town-wide heritage tree program.
- Modify the Town's tree protection ordinance to include a public heritage tree program.

Ms. Dunn said the trees on the north side of the bridge should also be examined by an arborist to improve the look of the Town's entranceway. In addition, she said there are others across from Town Hall that could use some attention.

Ms. Dunn said the committee is willing to look at the Town's native plants list to see if there are any updates or additions that should be made.

Mr. Stanberry said staff has already been looking into the live oaks around Town Hall, and there is money in the current budget to take some action and spruce up the area for this year's Centennial Celebration. He said the trees across the bridge are on N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) property, but historically the Town has taken care of them.

Mayor Barbee said he likes what the committee and Mr. Stanberry are proposing, adding that it's hard to impose rules on the public when the Town doesn't take care of its own trees. He said these trees are important to the community.

Council Member Hoffer said he supports the tree proposal and hopes it includes oak trees on the Town's new property next door.

Council Member Hoffer also asked about clearing underbrush on Spartanburg Avenue. Mr. Parvin said this will be handled.

3. Consider Approving an Encroachment Agreement on 1810 Canal Drive

Council is considering an encroachment agreement that would allow the Town to use 1810 Canal Drive to maintain one dumpster. The owner would allow members of the public who use the parking lot to use the dumpster at the Town's sole risk and expense.

Mr. Parvin presented the details. He said the Town purchased the property over a year ago, but the dumpster has remained in the same place on the edge of the property. He said the previous owner of the property wants to leave the dumpster there for their use and the Town's use, and the previous owner would maintain the contract on the dumpster.

Council Member Hoffer asked if the previous owner is not happy about people using the dumpster 5 years from now what would happen. Mr. Parvin said the contract could be renegotiated or eliminated, requiring the previous owner to move the dumpster off the Town's property. He said the Town Attorney and the previous owner's attorney have worked together on this agreement to make sure this won't be an issue.

ACTION: Motion to approve the encroachment agreement on 1810 Canal Drive as presented

Motion made by Mayor Barbee

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

Motion passed 4-0

4. Board of Adjustment Committee Appointment

An alternate position on the Board of Adjustment is vacant, with the term ending June 30, 2027. Mayor Barbee said this is the result of a former Board Member moving off the island.

Council appointed Dana White to the position.

5. Budget Presentation

Mr. Oakley presented preliminary budget numbers. He said the current tax rate for Town property is 0.235, and revenue-neutral for FY 25/26 would be 0.1552, which is what staff is proposing. Mr. Oakley said if New Hanover County or City of Wilmington don't go revenue-neutral, the Town gets stuck with less sales tax and has to make up the difference, so staff will have to wait and see what happens before finalizing these numbers.

Mr. Oakley said 6 new positions are being requested: 3 in Police and 3 in Fire. He said there have been 30 new businesses added during the current fiscal year, and he also went over trends, including:

- 61 residential new construction permits
- 122 certificates of occupancy (plus Proximity 250 residential units and 57,000 square feet of commercial space)
- 26 demos
- 557 vacant lots

Mr. Oakley also listed other recent accomplishments: Centennial Park, removal of derelict vessels from the harbor, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, the updated Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), completed resurfacing of 15 street segments, Boardwalk improvements, expansion of the Mike Chappell Park Skate Park, the Brandy Myers Memorial Playground, and the new Boardwalk bathroom facility. He also highlighted upcoming projects, including:

- Lake Park Boulevard paving – fall 2025
- Carolina Sands to Lake Park sidewalk – late 2025
- Spartanburg Avenue crosswalk – late 2025
- Scotch Bonnet Lane and Canal Drive bulkhead – summer 2025
- 2nd Street extension – summer 2025
- Saint Joseph Street multi-use path – fall 2026
- Paving (roads, Alabama Avenue, Mike Chappell Park) – spring 2025
- Spot Lane – spring 2026

Mayor Barbee said if the Town can't stick to the revenue-neutral tax rate, it can be shown that additional funds are going to public safety, which everyone understands is necessary because the Town is growing.

6. Review Standing Town Committees

During the 2025 budget retreat, Council discussed the Town's committees and considered the option of converting them into ad hoc committees or merging them with non-profit groups that share similar goals. Council requested additional time to consult with committees and asked to revisit the matter as a group during the April workshop.

Mr. Oakley presented the details.

Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte said the general consensus of the Police Advocacy Committee was that they don't want to operate under the Police Foundation because the committee does not focus on fundraising but instead offers volunteer support for events, so they would like to remain a Town committee.

Council Member Healy said the Parks and Recreation Committee has good meetings but tends to talk about the same topics all the time. He said groups can often get more things done if they are attached to a 501(c)(3).

Council Member Hoffer said committee meetings give people an avenue to speak in a more comfortable environment than a Council meeting, which can be intimidating, but he also understands the government efficiency part of it and the rationale for trying to condense them. He said he did a study of 15 towns, and there was an average of 2.7 committees per town, whereas the Town has 5. Council Member Hoffer said they should discuss which committees are doing the most good and filling a role that would otherwise be unfilled. He said he is leaning toward sunseting the Operations Advisory Committee and wants to try to keep staff members from feeling obligated to attend all committee meetings that apply to their departments.

Mayor Barbee asked for staff recommendations. Mr. Oakley said while committees do a lot of good and handle matters that staff may lack the time to tackle, there can be issues such as creating work for staff – including research, minutes, and agendas – legal concerns, and communication problems with Council and staff. He said he likes the idea of combining some committees, and perhaps committees could consider meeting only when they have an assigned task. Mr. Oakley also suggested a Town Hall meeting every quarter with staff involved to keep committees in the know, and he added that the Parks and Recreation Department has a volunteer database that any committee can use.

Mayor Barbee said in his opinion, the real problem with committees is that Council is not good at telling them what to do as a majority because Council does not convene and drive consensus on these matters.

Mr. Oakley said committees must follow the same rules and laws as Council when it comes to public records and meetings.

Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte said committees are a good way for citizens to get involved in Town government.

Council Member Healy said he agrees that the Town should sunset and combine some committees and make others ad hoc.

Mayor Barbee said the Operations Advisory Committee often struggles to figure out what to do. He said this committee might be a good one to sunset, while the Marketing Advisory Committee could become ad hoc. Council Member Healy said an ad hoc committee usually has an end date, and they agreed this might not be appropriate in this case.

Mayor Barbee said they may want to think about combining the Parks and Recreation Committee and the Beautification Committee.

Parks and Recreation Director Eric Jelinski said the Town wants to create more involvement in the community, not less. He said the volunteer list and the Friends of CB Parks & Greenways group are good resources. He said he loves the Parks and Recreation Committee meetings but wonders how beneficial that time is vs. being out getting things done.

Council Member Hoffer said it's not the end of the world to keep a standing committee operational while the workflow ebbs and flows. He said he would have a hard time getting rid of valuable committees.

Mr. Oakley said the Town could have standing committees but not standing meetings.

Council Member Hoffer said it's not a burden for Council Members to participate in committees, but the key is to shield staff from unnecessary meetings.

Mayor Barbee said he wants Council Member Benson's input on the Operations Advisory Committee because he is the liaison to this group. He said he agrees that the Town wants more participation, not less, but the goal is to make the process more efficient. He said groups such as Friends of CB Parks & Greenways offer shorter-duration opportunities for people to give time when they have it as opposed to having a standing commitment. He asked staff to summarize what they heard from Council tonight and bring it back in the future for a vote of the full Council.

Council Member Hoffer said if someone wants to get involved or make things happen, being on a standing committee is not necessary.

Mayor Barbee said the goal is to reduce the after-hours staff burden if possible and give committees more focus from Council about what they should work on. He suggested they discuss the matter again at the next workshop.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte said the Blessing of the Fleet event went well, and they are planning to expand it next year. She said the boards for the Rainbow Bridge at Lake Park are about to be ordered, and the project recently got some local news coverage. Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte requested that Goose Masters be asked to not harass the goslings at Lake Park, and she said there is an alligator hanging around the Lake now.

Council Member Healy said this past weekend was busy and feels it is an indication of a busy summer.

Council Member Hoffer asked for an update on the traffic pattern at Canal Drive and Carl Winner Drive. Mr. Oakley said it's a simple fix to get rid of the designated left-turn lane, but the Town has not gotten official plans to make it happen yet. Council Member Hoffer requested that the Town include more bike racks in the next budget, and he asked to have the landscaping cleaned up around the welcome sign on the north side of the bridge.

Mayor Barbee said he was pleased with staff's proposed revenue-neutral budget and thinks it will be fantastic if staff can pull that off, but he thinks the Council and the public will support adding Police and Fire resources because first responders are phenomenal and greatly needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Barbee adjourned the meeting at 10:30 AM.