

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Retreat

Tuesday, August 22, 2023 – 9:00 AM

Multipurpose Room 1121 N. Lake Park Boulevard Carolina Beach, NC



MEETING MINUTES

Council Members Present

Mayor Lynn Barbee

Council Member Joe Benson

Council Member Deb LeCompte

MPT Jay Healy

Council Member Mike Hoffer

Staff Members Present

Town Manager Bruce Oakley

Finance Director Debbie Hall

Executive Assistant Sheila Nicholson

Parks and Rec Director Eric Jelinski

Public Utilities Director Mark Meyer

Deputy Town Manager Ed Parvin

Town Clerk Kim Ward

Planning Director Jeremy Hardison

Police Captain Scott Hettinger

Mayor Barbee opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Bruce Oakley welcomed everyone and explained how the retreat would be structured.

Debbie Hall reviewed the estimated FY23 fund balance. The estimated available fund balance is expected to be around \$8 million or 40%. The final number will be in after the audit in October.

The property tax collection rate for FY23 is currently 99.95% and is expected to be 100%. Council Member LeCompte asked the finance director to provide Council with the FY21 numbers.

Sales and use tax came in well above the projected rate. Collections are up 23.92% over FY22. Council Member Hoffer reminded everyone that sales and use tax is not specific to Carolina Beach, but to New Hanover County as a whole, unlike the ABC tax which is specific to Carolina Beach.

Other revenue such as the interest on investments is doing well. The Year-to-Date interest on investments is at \$440,418. The Town is also able to earn interest on grant money received, but the interest earned must go toward the project.

An increase in parking revenue and reduction in expenses resulted in a gain over the prior fiscal year by \$256,674. Council Member Hoffer asked to see how many parking citations were issued last year compared to this year. He added that he was surprised to see the revenue for citations increase since adding the early pay incentive.

Room Occupancy Tax collections are up 4.18% over last fiscal year. Council discussed the increase in VRBO's over hotels.

The overall budget vs actual came in at 91%. All departments came in at or below budget.

The utility fund collections are up over the prior fiscal year. Connection fees are reduced if water and sewer taps already exist. System development fees are charged only when new customers are added to the water/sewer system or the meter size increases.

MPT Healy asked how many buildable lots are left in CB. Mr. Hardison estimates in the mid 500's.

The budget vs actual for the utility fund is \$498,752 to the good.

Mayor Barbee asked Mrs. Hall if she had any concerns regarding future budgets. Mrs. Hall replied that she had no concerns.

Ed Parvin reviewed the 2025 infrastructure plan and provided a spreadsheet listing all the projects scheduled during this time frame.

Mark Meyer discussed the automated meter integration system (AMI). The current system is within 2 years of its lifespan. The Town will have to upgrade in 2025. The technology is so much more advanced and user friendly. The new system will save a lot of time and money.

The WWTP digester has been running for 27 years. It was designed to run constantly.

Some of the projects are dependent on MOTSU permitting and their timeline.

Mr. Parvin said that MOTSU seems positive about allowing a new water tank on their property. They are waiting on the Town to submit a design for their approval.

Ms. Fox reminded Council that committee members need to report to their Council liaisons and should not be communicating directly with state and local officials as a representative of the Town. She said she reads committee minutes and noticed during public comment that they mention they are communicating directly with outside agencies without going through staff or Council. This could potentially cause unnecessary liability on the Town and Council Members.

Council mentioned that hiring a grant manager/project manager has been a great benefit to the Town and has more than paid for the investment.

Mr. Parvin reviewed the progression on achieving identified goals in the FY23/24 Strategic Plan. A copy of the Plan and the accomplishments are attached.

MPT Healy mentioned that the contractors made a lot of progress at the lake this week. He also mentioned that there have not been many geese since they stopped mowing the banks. Residents around the lake informed him that the contractor told them that they could use the left-over rock to

make fire pits in their yards. He is concerned that they are giving the material away that the Town has paid for. The Town could utilize the left-over material.

Bruce mentioned that there are days that the dredge boat does not move more than 10 inches depending on where it is on the bank. There is also a guy that is walking around compressing the bags which may appear that he is just walking around not doing anything. This is a completely different project than what most people are used to seeing. This is a much more environmentally friendly way to do this project. The project should be complete by the middle of November.

Staff presented the renderings of the new boardwalk restroom that is scheduled to start this winter and be completed before the 2024 season. This project will be reimbursed by the Room Occupancy Tax fund.

Council Member LeCompte reported that the Carolina Beach Police Foundation recently held their first meeting. The Foundation is a means for the group to raise money for police department needs. The Police Advocacy Committee will not go away.

Bruce mentioned that there will be a project open house in September and a stormwater open house in the fall.

Council Member Hoffer mentioned that he does not feel that all staff members need to attend the open house meetings. He suggested that only staff members attend that would need to answer questions specific to the open house.

Council Member Hoffer asked staff to review the activity on the Town website. He added that if certain pages are not being viewed, they may be in the wrong place.

Council Member LeCompte mentioned that See Click Fix has different verbiage on a cell phone vs computer. If you are trying to walk someone through how to report a problem, the language may be different.

Council asked staff to research and bring back more information on the AM radio station.

Staff reported that the cost to contract with a border collie handler to manage the geese at the lake would be \$11,000 for September – June. The contract could be canceled at any time. Council agreed to move forward.

Captain Scott Hettinger reported that new beach ranger just started a couple of weeks ago. She records a daily log. Chief Ward suggested that she focus mainly on advisements, then citations as needed. She will be a sworn officer and can issue citations. Council would like to see the beach patrol officer moved to the parks and the boardwalk during the off season. Captain Hettinger agreed that was their vision for the officer as well.

Mr. Parvin reported that the last beach nourishment was in 2022, so that puts us in line for a 2025 nourishment. He said the Carolina and Kure Beach portion would be around \$7 million.

Bruce stated that Mike McIntyre reached out to him about testing water for PFAS. Mark Meyer reported that his department tests every month and so far, all test results have been negative. There was no consensus from Council to move forward. They would like more information.

Council Member LeCompte and MPT Healy requested staff plan a State of the Town presentation at an upcoming Council meeting. Bruce said that he would start putting something together.

Jeremy Hardison gave an update on the status of the building inspector position. Staff would hire an inspector if they knew they could get a qualified level 3 inspector. Council Member LeCompte said that she is worried about post emergency and not having someone on staff. Healy felt it would be nice to have someone in house. Council asked to bring this back for re-evaluation in 6 months.

Council asked about forming a new Freeman Park Ad-hoc Committee with professionals that have a skill set specific to the mission. Mr. Hoffer suggested that they not limit the applications to Carolina Beach residents only. Ms. Fox suggested that staff finalize the entire grant process and the historic preservation first, then establish the committee with specific parameters to maintain conservation.

Council Member Hoffer presented the idea to make the angled parking spaces along Lake Park Boulevard 45°. They are currently at 60°. He calls this the "Take Back Our Sidewalks Project". Mayor Barbee suggested presenting this to DOT and have their engineers come up with the solution. Hoffer feels that would take too long. He would like to get the cars off the sidewalks and have the parking meter poles removed.

Bruce said that he would ask DOT about bump stops to keep cars off the sidewalk.

Mr. Parvin reviewed the traffic circulation study that was conducted in 2014 by Ramey Kemp and Associates, Inc. The study analyzed options for changes to vehicular circulation along Canal Drive and Cape Fear Boulevard near the boardwalk. The study concluded that the current two-way traffic pattern provides the best operational results for vehicles.

Mayor Barbee said that traffic designing is way outside Council's purview. Bruce said there would have to be a public meeting.

Mayor Barbee made a motion to go into closed session to discuss a real estate matter in accordance with NCGS 143-318.11(a)(5) The properties being discussed include Parcel ID# R08807-013-005-000 and R08807-013-004-000. Motion passed unanimously.

Council returned from closed session.

Mayor Barbee made a motion to approve Resolution 23-2297 authorizing the Town to move forward with the submittal of a CAMA grant application for the acquisition of parcels 1808 and 1810 Canal Drive. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Town Council Strategic Plan for the fiscal year 2023/2024

The strategic plan provides a framework, direction, and specific guidance for Town Council, Staff, and the citizens of Carolina Beach. For the second year in a row at the January 26-27, 2023, annual Town Council budget retreat the following four areas were prioritized. The priorities were weighted equally and are not listed in order of importance:

Four Key Priorities

Infrastructure
Communication
Quality of Life
Fiscal Responsibility

Using these 4 areas as priorities the Town Council agreed on specific objectives to be met.

Actions to meet the priorities and corresponding objectives.

1. The Town Council will receive periodic updates from the Town Manager.
2. At public meetings Town Council will provide strategies and updates on their actions to meet these objectives.
3. A July budget retreat will be held to review and evaluate (a) progress towards meeting objectives and (b) setting additional work goals to accomplish these objectives (c) evaluate, add, delete, or refine any component of this plan.

PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Infrastructure

- a) Develop a funding plan to address the upcoming Capital Improvement Projects (i.e. headworks, digester, water tank, etc). The plan should include design, permitting and construction timelines. The Town Manager will work with staff to solidify this plan and will update the community by holding an open house in the Spring of 2023.

At the March 28th Town Council meeting, First Tryon Advisors and Town staff presented a financial plan to pay for infrastructure needs over the next twenty years. The CB2045 Infrastructure Plan lays out the timing of over \$70 million dollars' worth of projects and the needed bonds to pay for the improvements. The plan also includes built-in rate increases and is adjusted for expected inflationary increases.

- b) The Town Manager will continue to implement the Lake Dredge Project and will keep Town Council and the public informed on the progress.

The Carolina Beach Lake Dredge and Stabilization project is underway. A hydraulic dredging process is being used to fill geotextile tubes placed around the perimeter of the lake to create a stable and natural shoreline. All dredge spoils are to be utilized onsite. The goals of the project are (1) gain in stormwater capacity, (2) improved aesthetic appearance, (3) better water quality, and (4) overall healthier ecosystem. The expected duration of construction is November 2023. There will also be a third 12" pump to maintain lake levels and mitigate flooding. This will be implemented in 2024.

- c) Improve the safety of downtown by reconfiguring the traffic design for the portions of Cape Fear and Canal Drive located east of Lake Park Blvd.

This item is on the agenda for a separate discussion. Staff has provided the traffic engineering conducted in 2014 prior to creating the current streetscape. Additional funds were budgeted this year if we want to update the study.

- d) Add mooring balls to the Town's mooring field to increase safety in the harbor and continue to expand the draw for coming to Carolina Beach by water.

A design to add additional mooring balls has been developed. Staff has started the permitting process with CAMA and will be applying for a grant from NC Marine Fisheries to help pay for the moorings. Interviews for the part-time staff to help the Harbor Master will be conducted later this week.

- e) Maintain and expand public bathroom facilities with a focus on the boardwalk.

All variances from the BOA and CRC have been obtained. Engineering/design is underway and was reviewed by TRC yesterday. We will be moving forward with permitting and bid. We anticipate construction starting in early 2024 to be ready for Summer 2024.

Communications

- a) Devise a plan to bid out IT and look at the cost/benefits of adding an IT person that could help manage the Town's website and online communications as well as some key IT functions to improve internal and external customer service.

Staff completed the bid process and hired Hooks Systems Technology. They are here this week implementing our new IT system. The contract is set up to be reduced if we decide to have an in-house IT position.

- b) Town Council will serve as ambassadors to the Town by working together to develop strategic plans to communicate community needs with local, state, and federal representatives.

- c) Staff will work to redesign the front of Town Hall to be safer, user friendly, and informative.

Renovations were completed that included, (1) upfitting the former HVAC room with office space, (2) a secure customer service office, (3) a new Chamber of Commerce space, (4) additional meeting space adjacent to the Chamber of Commerce, (5) Stormwater office, and (6) Planning conference room.

- d) Town Council will consistently communicate what they need from each committee on a routine basis. Committees should be evaluated to determine if they should transition to an existing or new 501C3.

Town Council liaisons report back to Town Council to give the Town Manager Direction. Continue to avoid direction/updates bypassing the Town Council and going to staff. Friends of the Parks continues thrive and the PAC are looking at options for a 501C3 to help support public safety projects.

- e) The Town Manager will organize more open houses for upcoming initiatives to educate the public, gain community feedback, and improve transparency.

Open houses this year have included nine meetings: three for the budget, one for emergency operations, one for water and sewer CIP, one for the 2050 WMPO multi-transportation plan, and three for the P&R Plan.

- f) Continue to update and promote the features of the Town's website. Identify areas that are not being used or updated and develop a plan to revise or remove these sections.

Website news, calendar events, important notices all continue to be updated on a daily basis. SeeClickFix was released and has 485 documented issues addressed.

- g) Use workshops to discuss ideas for upcoming agendas. Share agenda items with all Town Council members so no one is surprised. For urgent matters give a detailed explanation of the item and why it needs to be on the next agenda and should not wait until it is discussed at a workshop.

- h) Clearly communicate and hold true to time limitations for new agenda items and their corresponding presentations and supporting documentation.

- i) Update the manager before the meeting on any discussions/questions Town Council plans to have in the meeting.

- j) Keep the meetings professional and only engage with the speaker during appropriate times. Use the Mayor to facilitate the discussions.

- k) Once a decision is made, support it as a member of Town Council. Don't continue to bring up the same issue unless there is new information to present.

- l) Follow the chain of command and use it strategically to efficiently and transparently to accomplish goals. Promote and educate others (committee members, other Town Council members, staff, citizens, tourists, etc) on the proper use of the chain of command and explain why that process is in place.

Ensure all communications go through the Town Manager. Communications with and direction given to employees through Town Council undermines management/department heads and leads to confusion and frustration for all involved (employee, dept head, manager, TC member(s)). Maintaining transparency is key to our success.

m) Utilize the Town's resources for conveying information on projects, daily activities, service requests. With the visibility of all of Town Council work with the Manager if adequate information is not being provided.

Continue to promote website resources on the homepage: "Get Help," "Report a Problem," "Projects," "Pay my Bill," and "Construction Near Me."

Quality of Life

a) The Town will continue to pursue components of the Carolina Beach Pedestrian Plan: (a) SLPB and Spartanburg crossings, (b) St Joseph Street, (c) Hamlet Avenue stoplight, (d) Ocean Blvd 6' sidewalk on the south side, and (e) CBAN improvements.

The Town was awarded a grant to develop a combined bike and pedestrian plan. We are working with the MPO on reviewing the guidelines and developing a timeline. St Joseph Street full application with a resolution from Town Council is due in September. If awarded, we would be ready to start construction in the Fall of 2024. Ocean Blvd is still under review. Our engineer is working to finalize comments from DOT. Once DOT gives us the green light, we will start the bid process.

b) Continue to provide a safe community and beach. Monitor and look at options for ordinances that could mitigate concerns with Golf Carts, fireworks, short term rentals, E-bikes on the beach, and other trending activities. Continue to review long range plans and identified projects to see how they can support needed changes.

The Planning and Zoning Commission continues to have monthly meetings to develop the Town's first Unified Development Ordinance. The Police and Fire Department have researched best practices in other coastal communities and are working on strengthening the Town Codes with their findings.

c) Finalize the conservation easements on Freeman Park. Develop a Freeman Park Management Plan and ensure it addresses safety, environmental protection, tourism, and is consistent with local, state, and federal laws. Flags on Freeman Park should be addressed.

The HUD statement is being finalized this week which is the last piece needed prior officially establishing the Conservation Easement. Once complete staff will need to complete a maintenance plan for dredging.

d) Finalize the Parks and Recreation Master Plan update.

Conducted outreach through surveys and public meetings. The contractor is finalizing the plan for review through the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee. We anticipate this being in front of Town Council late 2023 or early 2024.

e) Continue to work with the ACOE on funding of Coastal Storm Damage Reduction.

The last project was completed in the Spring of 2022. The next project is planned for Spring of 2025. Ensuring this project occurs efficiently and effectively remains a legislative priority.

f) Continue moving forward with improvements to Carolina Beach Lake Park and Mike Chappell Park Brandy Myers Memorial Playground will have site work beginning in the Fall. Playground is anticipated to be completed in early 2024.

Fiscal Responsibility

- a) Continue to optimize and refine parking opportunities for residents and tourists and communicate those opportunity using multiple mediums. For example, addition of more parking lots, ADA compliant spaces, and visibility as to where spots are located.

The Woody Hewett Lot was added this year. In addition, Town Council and staff are working to ensure we invest in and preserve public parking across town.

- b) Utilize the budget process to assess service wants/needs and make cuts utilizing Town Council values, gathered information from the community, and staff expertise. Use cuts to help continue to grow the Town's fund balance as feasible.

There is a dedicated agenda item for Town Council to discuss any additions/modifications to the strategic plan.

- c) Staff will continue to research grant opportunities and bring those before Town Council for planning and consideration.

Staff and Town Council continue to work with our partnering agencies and representatives to obtain funding. Projects with additional funding include: Ocean Blvd Sidewalks, St Joseph Street multi-use path, Sidewalks on LPB from the Lake to Carolina Sands, additional moorings, Brandy Myers Park, CB Lake dredge and beautification, Town Marina, Starfish access, Freeman Park, Florida Avenue paving and stormwater.

- d) Develop strategies for increasing flexibility in the use of room occupancy tax for projects designed to develop permanent improvements that will enhance tourism. Identify and implement plans to strategically present these options to key government leaders (i.e. beach breakfast).

This remains a legislative priority.

- e) Continue to evaluate the needs for Municipal Service Districts (MSD) in areas of Town where additional taxpayer dollars are required.

The Town can continue to evaluate cost/benefits of implementing a MSD in areas where portions of the population receive a benefit from taxpayer dollars (i.e. oceanfront, Canal Drive, b