

Town of Swansboro
Appearance Commission
September 17, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Cynthia LaCorte, Doug Rogers, Larry Philpott, Claire Cole, and Nancy Palbicke. Kim Kingrey, and Linda Thornley were absent.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 am.

Business

Appearance Project Program

Chair LaCorte presented a draft Appearance Project Program Proposal for review. Discussion focused on the scope of the program and the distinction between projects occurring on public versus private property.

Staff advised that the Commission's enabling ordinance authorizes activities on public property, including rights-of-way, parks, and green spaces, but does not provide authority for projects on private property. Staff further explained that landscaping activities within NCDOT rights-of-way are limited and that Commission efforts in those areas would primarily involve cleanup and maintenance rather than planting or physical enhancements.

The Commission reviewed the draft proposal and discussed the program's goal of enhancing the appearance and visual character of the community through beautification efforts and recognition programs. Members acknowledged that the proposal could be revised as needed following Board review and implementation.

On a motion by Mr. Philpott, seconded by Vice-Chair Rogers, recommendation of the Appearance Project Program proposal to the Board of Commissioners for approval was unanimously approved.

Appearance Recognition Program

Chair LaCorte presented the draft Appearance Recognition Program Proposal. The Commission discussed the intent of the program, emphasizing that it is designed to recognize and celebrate property owners who have made positive contributions to the appearance of their properties rather than directing or funding improvements.

Members discussed the proposed signage for recognized properties and considered whether more approachable wording similar to a "Yard of the Month" or "Business of the Month" designation would be preferable to formal program terminology.

Town Clerk Fender recommended removing specific sign wording from the proposal and allowing the Commission to determine the final signage design and language at a later date. The Commission agreed with this recommendation.

On a motion by Vice-Chair Rogers, seconded by Mr. Philpott, recommendation of the Appearance Recognition Program Proposal to the Board of Commissioners with the removal of specific signage language was unanimously approved.

Tree City USA Certification

Town Clerk Fender presented information regarding the requirements for obtaining Tree City USA designation through the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters. The Commission was advised that all qualifying activities must be completed and documented within a single calendar year prior to application and reviewed the various requirements associated with the program.

Discussion included funding and support for tree-related activities, tracking volunteer participation, community outreach opportunities, and existing Town ordinances that may assist in meeting program requirements.

It was noted that Swansboro had previously held the Tree City USA designation and the commission expressed support for pursuing certification again. The Commission discussed the planning activities necessary to meet future application requirements and expressed consensus that pursuing the designation would be beneficial.

On a motion by Mr. Philpott, seconded by Chair LaCorte, moving forward with planning efforts necessary to pursue Tree City USA designation was unanimously approved.

Tree Workshops & Mulch Initiative

The Commission discussed opportunities to incorporate tree workshops and educational programming into future activities. Members also explored the concept of a mulch initiative utilizing the towns collected yard waste rather than disposing of the material at a landfill.

Town Clerk Fender advised that implementation of a mulch program would require changes to existing yard waste operations, capital investment in equipment or contracted services, and potentially amendments to Town policies, ordinances, or fee schedules depending on the structure of the program. Staff further noted that any such initiative would need to be presented to the Board of Commissioners through a formal proposal.

The Commission agreed that additional research and proposal development would be necessary before further consideration.

Members also noted that tree workshops could support future Tree City USA certification efforts and agreed to consider incorporating educational programs into those planning activities.

No formal action was taken.

Appearance Commission Strategic Plan

Mr. Philpott presented a draft framework for an Appearance Commission Strategic Plan developed from research and discussion conducted since the Commission's formation. The proposal included consideration of existing and future Commission initiatives such as the awards program, Tree City USA certification, public space improvements, signage, wayfinding, and community identity elements.

Chair LaCorte spoke of a separate draft framework focused on identifying priorities, developing project concepts, establishing implementation strategies, identifying partnerships and funding opportunities, and developing long-term maintenance considerations.

Town Clerk Fender suggested that a traditional strategic plan may not be necessary for an advisory board and suggested consideration of a project priorities plan that would identify and organize the Commission's focus areas and this type of working document is not required to be approved by the Board of Commissioners. Individual projects could then be presented to the Board of Commissioners as they are developed rather than requiring approval of a comprehensive strategic plan document.

The Commission agreed that both draft frameworks were pursuing similar objectives and discussed the value of developing a consolidated document to guide future efforts, assist new members, and coordinate activities with staff and other advisory boards.

Mr. Philpott and Chair LaCorte agreed to work together prior to the next meeting to combine the two drafts into a unified document for further discussion.

Chairman/Board Thoughts/Staff Comments

Chair LaCorte thanked all members in attendance and shared her excitement on their decisions made at this meeting.

Ms. Cole shared for the committees knowledge that the High School had a garden club and consideration of partnerships could be researched.

Public Comments

No comments were made.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Philpott, seconded by Mr. Rogers, the meeting adjourned at 10:04 am.