

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Retreat

Thursday, January 26, 2023— 9:00 AM

Fort Fisher Air Force Base 118 Riverfront Road Kure Beach, NC



MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

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

Council Members Present

Mayor Lynn Barbee

Council Member Mike Hoffer

Council Member Joe Benson

MPT Jay Healy

Council Member Deb LeCompte

The Town Attorney and department heads were also present.

Margaret Henderson from UNC School of Government facilitated the meeting.

Council Members reviewed the results from the citizen survey that was posted on the Town's website. Below are some of the comments Council had regarding the survey results.

- We hear similar comments from individuals.
- Our population of young families is growing. They are interested in quality-of-life more than tourism.
- I appreciated our offering the survey. Surprised about the number of comments on Canal Drive and those in favor of increasing parking fees.
- The survey provided residents the opportunity to express opinions and release frustrations.
- The narratives expressed on Facebook do not match the opinions expressed in the survey.
- We still have a gap in educating the public about the process and content of our decision-making.

When the facilitator asked Council what they would like to do moving forward, Council Members made the following recommendations:

Before Council meetings:

- Share the proposed agenda items with all Council Members so no one is surprised and explain why the topic is on the agenda.
- Have the Town Clerk include Council when sharing the draft agenda so they can review and comment.
- Identify topics for the next month's Council meeting during the monthly workshop.

- Choose to over-communicate about upcoming agenda items. We want to be prepared for our discussions.
- Add allocations of time for workshop agenda and clearly communicate time limitations ahead of time to those presenting to Council. Set expectations up front for public comment. It's OK to exercise discretion in briefly exceeding 3-minute time limit to wrap-up comments.

The Town Attorney cautioned Council on setting time limits and suggested using this only for workshops.

- Council would appreciate receiving presentation materials ahead of time when possible. Drafts are acceptable. The goal is to help elected officials prepare for discussions.
- Council felt it was OK to ask for breaks in the meeting when needed.
- Council felt it was OK to re-order the agenda to meet immediate concerns of timing or participation.
- The Town Manager is good at asking for time to prepare for unanticipated questions.
- Staff would like to hear questions ahead of time if possible, so they can prepare.
- Council appreciates informal discussions/retreat/work sessions to prepare for decision-making.
 - Do not use these meetings to micro-manage staff.
 - Use these meetings to inform Council of the flow of work; stay focused on the big picture.
- Try having a budget review meeting at the half year mark (about February). Connect discussion to strategic goals.

During the meetings:

- Council would like to keep public comment in the beginning, ahead of business decisions.
- Council should not engage with Q&A with residents making public comment. Refer to staff as necessary.
- Council needs to remember the public expects them to act professionally. Stay off phones during the meeting.
- Public talking behind staff during the meeting makes it hard for staff to hear the Council. Mayor needs to be made aware when that happens so he can intervene. Council suggested keeping the foyer doors closed for noise control.

After the meetings:

- Meet and greet all who come to meetings, not just the ones you know and are already comfortable with.

Upholding decisions:

- Debate – Decide – Uphold the Council's decisions.
- Council agreed that it is OK to have biases in upcoming votes. It is advisable to avoid making promises before hearing all relevant information in most situations.

- Residents participate more in informal meetings. Council Members suggested holding more open house events with a specific focus. Start with Infrastructure, wastewater/water, not potholes.

Relationships with external authorities:

- Council suggested alternating representation at external events so more relationships can be developed.
- Increase presence at County Commissioner meetings.
- Encourage public praise and strategic invitations to participate in local events.

Council Members were asked to conduct a project timeline exercise. Some of the comments included:

- The public needs to be educated about a recession. Council and staff need to explore new revenue streams, possibly an increase in water rates.
- The Proximity project will increase revenue from mixed use development.
- Municipal Service District/Canal Drive: Council will have to push the effort and potential enabling legislation generated by state representatives.
- Coastal Storm Damage Renourishment: Monitor and provide input. Keep good relationships with Corps of Engineers.
- Needed paving is happening in Carolina Beach.
- Lake dredge: Respond to proposal will soon be received.
- Current building inspector is leaving. Staff and Council need to decide whether to keep this position in-house or contract out with County.
- How to upgrade IT: Council to decide if they want to completely outsource IT services or a combination of in-house and contract. The VC3 contract expires June 2023.
- Develop a model to pay for infrastructure needs in the future. Staff should develop the plan for Council to vote on.
- Parking: Planning more future paid spots as others disappear.
- Well 15-H and Headwaters project: Council to decide on funding.
 - Likely to require service fee increases.
 - Will consider study to be completed.
 - Develop communication for public.
 - Consider seeking competitive rates for bonds.
 - Hold open house on infrastructure to discuss with public.
- Boardwalk restroom: Permitting is in progress but the project is not budgeted.
- St. Joseph multi-use path: Revisit costs and payments

- Project is bottle-necked by DOT now.
- Mooring field expansion: Decide whether to use fund options to diversify types of mooring. Give Council cost/benefit analysis to inform their questions.
 - Council appreciates the “ambassador” role of the Harbor Master.
- Figure out funding for 1-million-gallon water tower

Figure out best options for traffic control. Either physical structures (bollards) or increased police presence is necessary to manage crowds on Cape Fear Blvd & Canal Drive.

Ms. Henderson asked Council to give direction on preparing for budget workshops. The following comments were mentioned:

- Make the goal of Fiscal Responsibility #1.
- Council wants to receive fiscal implications of all staffing changes to be considered.
 - Council expressed understanding of the benefits of shifting the Beach Ranger from the Fire to Police Department (authority to enforce, readiness to respond)
 - Council interested in hearing options for funding relevant positions (General Maintenance, for example) with ROT.
- Council supports renovation in progress at Town Hall.
- Council appreciates receiving project timelines for the purpose of communication with public.
- Create a communication plan for infrastructure timeline.
- The Council as a body gives direction to the Manager, who in turn directs staff; individual members should not give direction to staff. Similar expectations apply to the Town’s advisory boards and committees.
- Parking discussion:
 - Distinguish between regulatory and operational decisions that Council makes or pursues.
 - Council discussion revealed differences of opinion about the best way forward but there was no collective will to reconsider the current plan.
- Signage for parking:
 - Prefer clear visual clarification of parking options in signage.
 - Refer to the related ordinance for enforcement and definitions.
- Handicapped parking spaces:
 - Council was interested in increasing the number of spaces.
 - Staff plans to bring a proposal back to Council shortly.
- Room occupancy tax:

- Interest expressed in using funds for permanent improvements.
- Funding purposes are limited by definition.
- Council to consider pursuing changes in enabling legislation to seek more flexibility in managing Town's portion of ROT.
- Parks & Recreation:
 - Skate park: Could schedule construction over two years. Council is supportive of hearing proposal or shifting funds as needed.
 - Small dog park: Council was supportive of efforts to fundraise for the expansion.
 - Additional employee: Council inquired if non-town resources could support this expense.
- Potential projects:
 - Short term rentals: Council is interested in seeing options for a zoning decision.
 - E-bike ordinance: Council wants to explore options for an ordinance. Let other beach towns or the state take the lead. Consider limiting hours e-bikes can be on the beach.
 - Golf carts: Council will revisit this discussion. Bring draft ordinance back for Council to consider in Feb/March 2023.
 - CBD mixed use parking garage: Council is not interested in this project being funded by the Town.
 - Pedestrian access from Hamlet Avenue to Cape Fear Blvd.: Identified in land use plan.

Council directed the Manager to review the full list of potential projects and make recommendations for priorities/most feasible ideas.

Mayor Barbee adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.