

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Workshop

Tuesday, November 22, 2022 - 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 Jay Healy

Council Member Joe Benson

Council Member Mike Hoffer

Council Member Deb LeCompte

ALSO PRESENT

Town Manager Bruce Oakley

Assistant Town Manager Ed Parvin

Finance Director Debbie Hall

Town Clerk Kim Ward

Town Attorney Noel Fox

Mayor Barbee said he would like to change the order of the agenda to get old business out of the way first. He proposed moving the committee items after the Manager's Update and parking and leased property discussions.

ACTION: Motion to make that change

Motion made by Mayor Barbee

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

Council Member LeCompte

Motion passed unanimously

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Manager's Update

Mr. Oakley gave an update on progress for the Strategic Plan 2022-23.

Priority 1 – Infrastructure

- Objective 1A: Develop a funding plan with timelines by the end of the fiscal year (June 2023) to address headworks. This funding plan is not limited to but should include permitting, construction, and competition.

The Town has applied for a grant to pay for this project, and although the application was not selected in the first round of funding, staff is hopeful that it will be successful in the second round. Doing a good job may have hurt the application, as the Town did not have any violations that would've scored it higher.

- Objective 1B: Develop a funding plan with timelines by the end of the fiscal year (June 2023) to address water shortage.

A preliminary engineering design report to get funding is in the budget and will soon be underway.

- Objective 1C: Town Manager will develop an alternative plan regarding the Lake Dredge Project with cost estimates by mid-summer (2022).

The Town is awaiting signoff from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and can then put this out to bid.

- Objective 1D: "Close the deal" on Freeman Park.

The Town not only finalized the project with financing but also received a grant to refund the loan so the Town will own Freeman Park outright. Some steps remain before receiving the money, which should happen in about five months.

Priority 2 – Communication

- Objective 2A: Town Manager will present options and recommendations regarding the Public Information Officer position during the budget process (February-May 2022).

This was budgeted but has not yet been advertised or filled. There is a job description that is a work in progress, as staff thinks there may be some different uses for this position.

- Objective 2B: Council will continue to serve as champions and ambassadors for the Town.

This has been successful.

- Objective 2C: Staff will enhance the community room that helps citizens be informed.

There is money in the budget to improve recording and streaming meetings.

Council Member Hoffer asked if part of this objective was improving the entranceway to Town Hall. Mr. Oakley said yes, this has been funded and designs are drawn up, so hopefully work will start soon.

- Objective 2D: Town committees will define their mission and have this mission approved by Council. Members of committees will implement their overall mission and act as liaisons to the community under the direction of Council.
 - Town Attorney and Town Manager will educate committee members on legal issues (February 2022).
 - Town Attorney will lead trainings with committee members on structure (February 2022).
 - Town Clerk will provide an updated document on committees to Council (February 2022).
 - Council will evaluate the proposed mission/purpose of each committee and approve as appropriate (April 2022).

- Objective 2E: Staff will continue to update the Town's website.

Priority 3 – Quality of Life

- Objective 3A: The Town will complete the following components of the Pedestrian Plan:
 - Spartanburg Avenue crossings: These are still in the works.
 - Saint Joseph Street: This has been approved and will hopefully be underway before too long.
 - Hamlet Avenue: This is still in the hands of the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT).
 - Ocean Boulevard sidewalk: This is moving forward, and DOT will review final plans soon.
 - Carolina Beach Avenue: The Town hopes to be paving there in the spring.

Mayor Barbee said the Town got notification from DOT about the request for light changes at Cape Fear Boulevard and Lake Park Boulevard. He said all the materials are finally available, and it sounds like work will begin in January.

- Objective 3B: The Town will continue to focus on being a family beach for both citizens and tourists and seek solutions for how to keep people from using illegal fireworks.

The Town is still working on solutions. The North End pier recently caught on fire due to fireworks, but someone promptly reported the fire and it was quickly extinguished.

- Objective 3C: Town Manager, Town Attorney, and Planner will present options to Council for ways to address flag concerns by summer 2022.

Staff was waiting until the Town owned Freeman Park before tackling this. Now that the sale has occurred, Council can discuss this at the upcoming budget retreat.

- Objective 3D: The Town will discuss the topic of a 10-year parks and recreation plan during the budget process (February-May 2022).

Council heard ideas about this during past budget proceedings, and staff will present more ideas this year, including proposed changes to Lake Park made possible by the Brandy Myers playground funding.

Priority 4 – Fiscal Responsibility

- Objective 4A: Council came to consensus on an approach to parking.
 - The current contract will be continued: The Town is still in its contract with Pivot Parking.
 - Town Manager will present a report to Council with data and staff recommendations regarding the contract. Council will evaluate the success of the contract quarterly: Pivot Parking has been doing this.
 - The Town will find 100 more new parking spaces: The town found 74 new parking spaces, but there could be much more coming in future. The Town will be losing a few lots but will continue to search for opportunities.

- Objective 4B: The Town will continue to increase the fund balance as feasible.

The fund balance increased again this year.

- Objective 4C: Staff will continue to research grants and sources of funding for the Town's needs and apply as appropriate. Staff and Council will also discuss the feasibility of a potential grant writer position.

The Town is a victim of its own success, as it has received so much outside funding that staff is overwhelmed with projects. The upcoming budget process will add a public input session and community survey before Council's retreat.

Grant/Outside Funding

The Town has received \$12,701,420.54 in grant/outside funding from 2020 to present:

- \$1,000,000 - Brandy Myers Playground (Office of State Budget and Management)
- \$175,000 – Lake Park Playground (Land and Water Conservation Fund)
- \$485,100 – Ocean Boulevard Sidewalk (Office of State Budget and Management)
- \$2,000,000 - Lake Park Dredge and Improvements (Office of State Budget and Management)
- \$1,019,672.47 – Stormwater Projects and Premium Pay (American Rescue Plan Act)
- \$2,112,493.60 – Town Marina (Golden LEAF Foundation)
- \$1,019,672.47 – Town Marina (American Rescue Plan Act)
- \$343,332 – Saint Joseph Multi-Use Path (DOT)
- \$131,250 – Starfish Lane Access (Coastal Area Management Act)
- \$4,000,000 – Freeman Park (Land and Water Conservation Fund)

Grant/outside funding is in progress or there are plans to pursue it for the following projects:

- Headworks
- Water storage

Council Member Benson said Mr. Oakley forgot to mention the Carolina Beach Avenue North project that was funded in conjunction with the Ocean Boulevard sidewalk.

Mayor Barbee said the Town has done a phenomenal job going from minimal outside funding to this.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said the Town needs to go for as much grant/outside funding as it can get and hire more people to handle the projects if necessary. Mr. Oakley said he is leery to take on too much without additional employees because if projects are not completed on time, this may not reflect favorably on the Town when it applies for funding in the future.

Mayor Barbee praised staff for implementing changes that have resulted in this level of accountability and transparency.

Council Member LeCompte said the Town needs to ensure the public is aware they are welcome to attend budget retreats. She said recording these would be beneficial.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said he was not aware of the previously mentioned fire at the pier. Mr. Oakley said this happened about two weeks ago.

Council Member Benson asked if the marina project will offer an opportunity for traffic redesign. Mr. Oakley said staff has talked internally about how coming up Canal Drive and moving into Carl Winner Drive is awkward and potentially dangerous. He said it would be ideal to shift the turn lane for a straight shot.

2. Parking Discussion

Council Member LeCompte requested a parking discussion after collecting data on the 2022 parking season and compiling a presentation. She said she asked Pivot Parking for the top five towns using parking, and they went above and beyond by gathering a list of the top 20 parking users by ZIP code by month from March to October.

Council Member LeCompte said Wilmington ZIP codes 28412 and 28409 represent one-quarter of the Town's parking revenue. She said Sheila Nicholson, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager, helped pull data for 2021 non-resident passes, and the Wilmington area accounted for 563 of the 656 passes sold; Kure Beach only accounted for 14.

Council Member LeCompte reviewed the history of the Central Business District (CBD) and Boardwalk. She said the Town created the CBD with zero setbacks and no parking requirements, so there is an implied promise for the Town to provide parking in the CBD. Council Member LeCompte said Boardwalk improvements have been funded exclusively by taxpayer dollars and room occupancy tax (ROT) funds. She reviewed the steps that have been taken to protect the Boardwalk, including recent changes to the parking program, and proposed the following steps to protect parking revenue:

- Free parking in November and December
- Grace period for expired parking before a ticket is issued
- Increase in the in-season daily parking rate (Memorial Day through Labor Day)

- More shoulder season activities at the Boardwalk
- Use of more ROT marketing dollars to promote the Town's holiday season activities

Council Member Benson asked if the management fee for Pivot Parking is the same every month. Ms. Hall said there is a set base fee but also expenses for employees, so this will fluctuate based on the number of employees.

Council Member Hoffer said the proposed steps did not include non-resident parking passes and asked Council Member LeCompte for her thoughts on this. Council Member LeCompte said with Wilmington ZIP codes 28409 and 28412 being the top-paying parking customers, offering non-resident passes would significantly decrease parking revenue. She said the Town must be proactive and not reactive in finding revenue to pay for its aging infrastructure to the tune of \$53,512,342 for the 10-year capital improvements program. Council Member LeCompte said a lower figure offered at a previous meeting did not include stormwater improvements. She said parking and Freeman Park revenue is a way for tourists to share the cost with residents.

Council Member LeCompte offered the following proposed timeline:

- December 2022 Council meeting – parking options open for public and Council discussion
- January 2023 – review the parking revenue expenses for November and December
- January 2023 – Council vote on implementation

Council Member Hoffer said this speaks to why he was not a fan of the Council vote on parking in October. He said information was still coming in, and that's why he voted against the motion and was frustrated.

Mayor Barbee said there are three numbers missing from the presentation: ROT, sales tax, and Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) tax revenue, all of which are off the charts. Council Member LeCompte said she did not cover these because they are not controllable revenue.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said he thinks it would be difficult to manage a grace period after parking expires. He said he is OK with offering free parking in November and December if data supports this. Mayor Pro Tem Healy said some business owners are responsible for putting out negative publicity and hurting the Town's welcoming vibe.

Council Member Hoffer said he wants to follow Council Member LeCompte's proposed timeline and vote on parking in January.

Mayor Barbee asked how many more months Council is going to work on parking and said a small number of people are manipulating the facts. He said considering more changes to the parking program in January will cost money. Mayor Barbee said he doesn't know how to stop the ongoing parking discussions and apologized to the public.

3. Discussion on Leased Property

Council Member Benson said the Town's small piece of land on the Boardwalk is currently leased for amusement rides. He said in keeping with the goal of establishing, maintaining, and enhancing a family-friendly vibe, it would be in the best interest of the Town to extend a lease for as long a term as possible. He said his proposal is for five years and includes working together to bury aerial cable lines and seeking a non-compete for some of the food sold by the vendors based on the menus of adjacent restaurants.

Ms. Fox said the current lease is fairly simple, and tying additional terms, particularly those related to regulating food sales and other commerce, is probably not advisable.

Mr. Oakley said the cost to bury aerial cable lines is estimated at \$85,000. He said this endeavor was part of a previous project but was not done, likely because the AT&T line may have still been tied to the beachwear building at that time. He said that project was funded and completed, and he thinks the Town spent all the allocated funds to complete what was done.

Council Member Hoffer suggested negotiating, offering a longer lease only if the vendors are open to burying aerial cable lines and not competing with adjacent restaurants. Ms. Fox said the Town would have to figure out how to do this in a legal manner. Mr. Oakley said the Town could require a new Conditional Use Permit and eliminate the food service use.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy said he thinks the Town should stay away from the food issue, but he thinks everyone would like to see the aerial cable lines go underground.

Council Member LeCompte said any way the Town can work with the property owners to keep things going on the Boardwalk is beneficial to the Town. She said this is one step toward keeping things from going vertical in that area.

Mayor Barbee said he is fully supportive of the rides, but the agreement was to get things started initially and then revisit to draft a plan for the area. He said there were some brainstorming discussions, but once the rides went up there hasn't been much more movement. Mayor Barbee said he feels like the Town got bait and switched in the deal and that he expected to see a plan for a redesigned area and how the Town and property owners could partner together.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy asked what happened to a draft plan the Town came up with that included a land swap. Mr. Oakley said Planning Director Jeremy Hardison came up with a drawing, and several Council Members saw it individually. He said it hasn't been formally presented to property owners, who were talking about hiring a land planner and doing something similar, and there has been no feedback from them.

Mayor Barbee said he wants to see this go forward, but he is not in favor of changing any conditions without a plan.

Council Member Hoffer said signing a longer lease doesn't preclude development of a plan, but Mayor Barbee said the Town would lose leverage if it allowed the lease now.

Council Member Benson said he thinks the Town should move on something before too long.

Council Member Hoffer said he is willing to hear a proposal about cost sharing for burying the aerial cable lines.

Mayor Barbee said he is not trying to quash anything, but he thinks the cart is in front of the horse.

Council Member LeCompte said the cable lines were part of the original project, so the Town is just going back to correct something that got overlooked.

4. Committee Presentation – Joint Committee Recommendation on Lake Park Boulevard

Representatives of several Town committees presented ideas for improving Lake Park Boulevard in conjunction with the proposed DOT 2025 paving project.

Cindy Dunn and Karen Graybush of the Beautification Committee made an initial presentation in June and since then have gathered additional information from bringing all Town committees together. They said the main goal is to transform Lake Park Boulevard, the major corridor of Town, to be more aesthetically appealing, safe, and pedestrian-friendly.

Ms. Dunn and Ms. Graybush reviewed ideas for funding and implementation and relayed committee feedback from the joint meeting held on August 17. They also went over the proposed timeline and project help resources to consider.

Operations Advisory Committee Chairman Butch LeCompte reviewed the committee's ideas for complementary projects that would fit in with the timing of the 2025 Lake Park Boulevard repaving project. Among them are:

- Signage to designate a recommended alternate safe bike route on Carolina Beach Avenue South
- Relocating 41 parking spaces on Lake Park Boulevard between Harper Avenue and Cape Fear Boulevard and creating safety bump-outs on both sides of the street
- Decorative bike racks

Mayor Pro Tem Healy asked about feedback from business owners in the area affected by the relocation of parking spaces. Mr. LeCompte said he promoted this to at least 50 businesses, and while there were a couple of naysayers who were worried about losing parking spaces in front of their businesses, most resoundingly liked the idea.

Mayor Barbee said this was a good presentation to get Council Members thinking.

Council Member Hoffer said he's intrigued by the idea of the bump-outs, but it would be a big change.

Council Member Hoffer spoke on behalf of the Bike/Ped Committee. He said the group's recommendations are to add bike lanes on South Lake Park Boulevard from Woody Hewett Avenue to Lake Drive, which would be a simple striping solution, make sidewalk improvements at Lake Park, and add bike lanes on South Lake Park Boulevard from Lake Drive to Carolina Sands Drive.

Council Member Hoffer said the Lake Park sidewalk improvements don't have to wait until 2025, so he encouraged the Town to move forward on this recommendation as soon as possible.

Mayor Barbee asked about the path forward. He said some of these items will be easy, and others will be expensive and hard, and at some point the Town will have to put numbers on things. Mr. Oakley said Council can list priorities for the next fiscal year during upcoming capital and strategic planning sessions.

Mayor Pro Tem Healy asked if there can be a conversation with DOT about repaving all the way to Alabama Avenue. Mr. Oakley said the Town can request that the project be extended.

5. Operations Advisory Committee Chairman Update

Mr. LeCompte gave an update on the Operations Advisory Committee's projects. He said committee members set up an information tent at the Lake Park market on October 1, which was a positive experience that allowed the group to meet residents and visitors. Mr. LeCompte said committee members talked about beautification topics and educated the public on how to use online tools to submit ideas.

Mr. LeCompte provided an update on the following major Town projects:

- Carolina Beach Marina
- Canal stormwater
- Starfish Lane stormwater remediation
- Scotch Bonnet Lane tidal containment
- Clam Shell Lane pump #3 new bulkhead
- Lake dredging
- Boardwalk bathrooms
- Lake Park Boulevard repaving
- Water and sewer

Mr. LeCompte said during the public outreach event, the committee received feedback about maintenance issues at the following Town landmark areas:

- Water tower and surrounding area
- Boardwalk
- Joseph Ryder Lewis Jr. Civil War Park
- Freeman Park approach, parking, and entrance
- Bill McDonald Park
- Hamlet Avenue beach access and bathrooms
- Mike Chappell Park
- Lake Park
- Sandpiper Lane beach access, parking, and bathrooms
- Alabama Avenue beach access, parking, and bathrooms
- Florida Avenue/Georgia Avenue kayak launch and fishing area

Mr. LeCompte said the committee would like Council to take an interest in focusing on these areas and send a message to staff to consider these key landmarks and maintain them well.

Mayor Barbee praised Mr. LeCompte for a good presentation.

Council Member Benson said the feedback from the market was useful, and he appreciates committee members going out to solicit that.

6. Committee Appointment

Council made the following committee appointment:

- Marketing Committee – Michael Hannan

Mayor Barbee said there were a lot of applications, and he encouraged everyone interested in serving on a committee to attend meetings now rather than waiting to be appointed.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

7. Council Comments and Requests for December Agenda Items

None

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Barbee adjourned the meeting at 12:10 PM.