CAROLINA BEACH

Planning and Zoning Commission Special Meeting

Tuesday, August 4, 2026 - 6:00 PM

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

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Hogan called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

PRESENT
Chairman Jeff Hogan
Vice Chairman Bill Carew
Commissioner Melanie Boswell
Commissioner Ethan Crouch
Commissioner Todd Piper
Commissioner Lynn Conto
Commissioner Brad Jones

ALSO PRESENT
Community Development Director Jeremy Hardison

SPECIAL JOINT MEETING WITH TOWN COUNCIL

1. Discuss a Zoning Map Amendment and Text Amendment to Article 3 of the Unified Development Ordinance to Rezone 204 Cape Fear Boulevard, 206-217 Cape Fear Boulevard, and 3 South Third Street from Mixed Use (MX) to a New Zoning District Called Commercial Transition (CT)

Mayor Lynn Barbee opened the meeting by clarifying the purpose of the joint session. He said Council had not yet formally heard the matter, and no public input would be taken this evening. A public hearing before Council was scheduled for the following Tuesday. Mayor Barbee emphasized the goal was not to reach consensus but to allow Council to understand the Commission's concerns. The Commission discussed the matter in July but tabled it without making a recommendation.

Mr. Hardison presented a review of the proposal. He reviewed existing conditions in the area – including three single-family residences, four vacant lots, a parking lot, two retail uses, and a hotel – and noted its pedestrian-friendly character with on-street parking, wide sidewalks, and street trees.

Mr. Hardison highlighted that the area is classified in the Land Use Plan for higher-density, mixed-use development with buildings oriented toward the street, potential heights of four to five stories, and a pedestrian-oriented environment. He confirmed that, of the non-vacant properties in the area, only one was currently conforming under existing Mixed Use (MX) standards.

Mr. Hardison reviewed the timeline: Property owners were consulted in May with no negative feedback received, the matter was brought to the Commission in July, and the joint meeting was being held to address the Commission's concerns prior to Council's public hearing.

He described the proposed Commercial Transition (CT) district standards. Key elements included reducing the front setback from 20 feet to approximately 5-10 feet to encourage buildings closer to the street and promote active ground-floor uses, side setbacks of 0-5 feet to encourage connected storefronts, no change to the rear setback, an increase in lot coverage from 40% to 60% to align with other commercial districts, a density of 20 units per acre as a mid-range figure, parking located to the rear of buildings, and a narrowing of permitted driveway widths to reduce the loss of on-street public parking spaces. Mr. Hardison noted that parking requirements – unlike in the Central Business District (CBD) – would not be waived, and building height would be capped rather than subject to conditional approval.

He presented a comparison between the proposed CT district and the CBD, noting that CT would retain minimum lot sizes, impose setback requirements, cap building height at three to four stories, and maintain a 65% impervious surface limit – all restrictions absent in the CBD. Mr. Hardison stated the two primary drivers of rezoning requests to the CBD are typically height and parking and that the CT proposal would not change either relative to MX.

Chairman Hogan noted that the Commission had not previously dealt with upzoning an entire area, so Commissioners felt they needed more time to deliberate. He acknowledged that at 29 units per acre, the existing Russo's Motel already exceeded the proposed density, and that approval of the CT district would bring 8 of 10 lots into conformance – a stated goal of the Land Use Plan. Chairman Hogan expressed support for requiring pervious surfaces or stormwater retention if lot coverage were increased beyond 65% so as not to push additional runoff onto neighboring properties.

Commissioner Boswell said she felt this decision was being rushed and expressed concern that the rezoning would primarily benefit one property owner or future buyer rather than the broader community. She questioned whether residents on Third Street would welcome the potential for more intensive commercial development adjacent to their properties.

Commissioner Crouch cited concerns about the growth of high-density commercial spaces creeping further into residential areas and cautioned that once this change is made, downzoning would not be possible. He said his intention is to preserve the character of the Town and do what residents want.

Commissioner Piper acknowledged the area was visually unappealing and served as a poor gateway to downtown. He presented AI-generated renderings illustrating the difference in street presence between a building set 22 feet from the street versus one set 12 feet from the street, noting that a smaller setback could create a canyon effect. Commissioner Piper expressed concern that approving the new district by right would eliminate the Town's bargaining leverage, comparing it unfavorably to Conditional Zoning (CZ) processes used in prior projects where the Town negotiated concessions such as increased green space or stormwater improvements in exchange for reduced setbacks or increased height. He suggested the Town consider incentives such as reduced permit fees, stormwater assistance, or tax reductions to encourage redevelopment rather than simply loosening standards outright.

Mayor Barbee summarized the discussion by asking whether the Commission wants to preserve the by-right standards of MX while allowing for CZ as a pathway to additional flexibility for CT. Commissioner Piper said the preference is to retain the MX district with the possibility of CZ.

Council Members thanked Commissioners for the discussion on this matter.

ADJOURNMENT
ACTION: Motion to adjourn
Motion made by Chairman Hogan, seconded by Commissioner Conto
Voting Yea: Chairman Hogan, Vice Chairman Carew, Commissioner Boswell, Commissioner Crouch, Commissioner Piper, Commissioner Conto, Commissioner Jones
Motion passed unanimously

Chairman Hogan adjourned the meeting at 7:00 PM.