



Appearance Commission Agenda

Town of Swansboro

Thursday, September 17, 2026

I. Call to Order

II. Business

a. **Appearance Project Program** ***Presenter: Cynthia LaCorte – Chair***

A draft of the Appearance Project Program Proposal will be reviewed.

Recommended Action: A motion to recommend the Appearance Project Program proposal to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

b. **Appearance Recognition Program** ***Presenter: Cynthia LaCorte – Chair***

A draft of the Appearance Recognition Program Proposal will be reviewed.

Recommended Action: A motion to recommend the Appearance Recognition Program proposal to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

c. **Tree City USA Certification** ***Presenter: Alissa Fender, MMC – Town Clerk***

The requirements to achieve the designation of Tree City USA by the Arbor Day foundation and the National Association of State Foresters will be reviewed.

Recommended Action: Review and discuss.

d. **Tree Workshops & Mulch Initiative** ***Presenter: Cynthia LaCorte – Chair***

Introduction and discuss potential opportunities to develop Tree workshops and mulch initiatives.

Recommended Action: Discuss and provide direction.

e. **Appearance Commission Strategic Plan** ***Presenter: Larry Philpott – Commission Member***

Board review and discussion of the proposed framework for creation of the Appearance Commission Strategic Plan.

Recommended Action: Review and discuss next steps.

III. Chairman/Board Thoughts/Staff Comments

IV. Public Comments

V. Adjournment



Appearance Commission Meeting Agenda Item Submittal

Item To Be Considered: **Appearance Project Program**

Board Meeting Date: **September 17, 2026**

Prepared By: **Cynthia LaCorte – Chair**

Overview: A draft of the Appearance Project Program Proposal will be reviewed.

At the August 20, 2026, meeting, the Appearance Commission discussed potential project focus areas and Chair Cynthia LaCorte and Vicechair Doug Rogers were tasked with preparation of a detailed project proposal for Commission consideration. Discussion included cleanup, maintenance, landscaping enhancements, gateway improvements, cemetery improvements, downtown beautification efforts, and public park enhancements.

Background Attachment(s): Draft Appearance Project Program Proposal

Recommended Action: A motion to recommend the Appearance Project Program proposal to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

Action: _____

Appearance Project Program Overview for Consideration

The purpose of the Appearance Project Program is to identify properties or areas that would benefit from exterior cleanup and beautification and coordinate appropriate improvements through community partnerships and volunteer efforts. The program is intended to complement—not replace—the responsibility and work of the Town’s public works and maintenance. The focus will be on positive, visible improvements that enhance both the selected property and the surrounding community.

The primary goals of the program are to:

- Improve the overall appearance and visual appeal of Swansboro.
- Assist with targeted cleanup and beautification projects that provide a noticeable community benefit.
- Encourage residents and property owners to maintain and improve their properties.
- Promote civic pride and community involvement.
- Create opportunities for local businesses, organizations, committees, and volunteers to participate in beautification efforts.
- Strengthen partnerships between the Town, residents, businesses, and community organizations.
- Preserve and enhance the welcoming, historic, and coastal character of Swansboro.
- Use completed projects as positive examples that may encourage additional private-property improvements throughout the community.

Potential project properties may be identified through recommendations from the Appearance Commission, Town representatives, property owners, residents, or community organizations. Properties should be evaluated based on factors such as visibility, overall need, potential community impact, feasibility of the proposed improvements, available resources, and approval by the Board of Commissioners.

Depending upon the needs of the selected property and available resources, projects may include exterior cleanup; removal of litter, debris, weeds, or overgrowth; trimming and general landscape maintenance; planting flowers, shrubs, or other appropriate landscaping; mulching and enhancement of planting areas, installation or improvement of decorative features, and other reasonable beautification activities approved as part of the project. The program is intended for cleanup, beautification, and minor cosmetic improvements to landscape and is not intended to provide major construction, structural repairs, code remediation, or property rehabilitation. All work will comply with applicable Town ordinances, policies, permitting requirements, and other legal requirements. Projects requiring specialized, licensed, hazardous, structural, electrical, plumbing, or similar professional work will not be performed by The Commission or volunteers.

A central component of the Appearance Project Program will be community involvement. The Appearance Commission may seek participation from Town committees, civic

organizations, churches, schools, youth groups, local businesses, nonprofit organizations, residents, and other volunteers. Local businesses may also be invited to support projects through sponsorships or donations of plants, landscaping materials, paint, supplies, equipment, professional services, or other appropriate resources. This collaborative approach can expand the impact of the program while helping create a stronger sense of community ownership and pride.

Keeping with the “Small Project, Big Impact” theme, projects will be kept intentionally simple, affordable, visible, and volunteer-friendly and, upon approval, could include: seasonal plantings and cleanup at signage, plantings at flower boxes/planters and flower beds, cemetery clean-up, town tree prune and mulching, seasonal displays at the pavilion, and other ideas for improvement/enhancement as presented to the Board of Commissioners for approval. Examples of some specific locations that may be of interest for consideration include: Ward Cemetery, Ward Shore Park, Parks & Trails, and the Front Street /Hwy 24 area along the bridge.

Appearance Project Program Proposed Annual Schedule is as follows:

2026

OCTOBER 17, SATURDAY @ TBD

NOVEMBER 14, SATURDAY @ TBD

2027

MARCH 13, SATURDAY @ TBD

APRIL 10, SATURDAY @ TDB

OCTOBER 16, SATURDAY @ TBD

NOVEMBER 13, SATURDAY @ TBD

The Program is designed to have minimal fiscal impact on the budget with minor clean up supplies, products, and debris removal being a potential cost per approved project. The Commission is also open to make efforts to solicit donations that will support the Program’s needs. Volunteers will be encouraged to bring their own gloves, tools, etc.

The Swansboro Appearance Commission respectfully requests that the Board of Commissioners approve the establishment of the Appearance Project Program and authorize the Appearance Commission, in coordination with Town staff, to develop and

implement the program consistent with Town policies, available resources, budgetary requirements, and applicable legal and liability considerations.

Approval of this program will provide the Town with an organized mechanism for bringing residents, businesses, organizations, volunteers, and Town representatives together to make meaningful and visible improvements throughout Swansboro.

The Appearance Project Program represents an opportunity not only to improve properties, but also to strengthen community pride, encourage continued private investment in property appearance, and preserve the beauty and character that make Swansboro a special place to live, work, visit, and do business.

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Appearance Commission Meeting Agenda Item Submittal

Item To Be Considered: **Appearance Recognition Program**

Board Meeting Date: **September 17, 2026**

Prepared By: **Cynthia LaCorte – Chair**

Overview: A draft of the Appearance Recognition Program Proposal will be reviewed.

At the August 20, 2026, meeting, the Appearance Commission reviewed and discussed a draft Property Appearance Recognition Program intended to encourage and recognize efforts that enhance the appearance of properties within the Town. Discussion included recognition opportunities for both residential and commercial properties, nomination procedures, selection processes, award frequency, signage, certificates, and partnerships with community organizations.

Commission discussion generally supported:

- Establishing separate residential and commercial recognition categories.
- Quarterly recognition opportunities.
- Public and Commission nomination opportunities.
- Recognition through signage and certificates.
- Potential recognition at Board of Commissioners meetings.
- Partnerships with the Chamber of Commerce and other community groups.

A formal proposal has been prepared for Commission review and consideration.

Background Attachment(s): Draft the Appearance Recognition Program Proposal

Recommended Action: A motion to recommend the Appearance Recognition Program proposal to the Board of Commissioners for approval.

Action: _____

Appearance Recognition Program Overview for Consideration

- 1) Properties may be nominated for recognition on the Town's website and/or a dedicated email address furnished by the Town by submitting a photo of the nominated property along with the property's address. The Program and submission process can be marketed by the Town's social media account(s) and at any local business locations willing to display a flyer detailing the program and submission process.
- 2) The Appearance Commission will consider all nominations and vote for two properties at the Appearance Commission regular meeting. The criteria to be considered is as follows:
 - a. Overall appearance and curb appeal
 - b. Landscaping and ground maintenance
 - c. Building and exterior maintenance
 - d. Cleanliness and orderliness
 - e. Creativity and enhancement
 - f. Contribution to the surrounding neighborhood/business district
 - g. Compatibility with the character and appearance of Swansboro
- 3) The Program would be in effect monthly April-September with holiday recognition in the months of October (fall/Halloween) and December (winter/Christmas),
- 4) Within one week of the vote, the town will notify the property owner and signage approved by the Board of Commissioners would be placed on the recipients property for a period of one month. Signage may have the Town's logo and read "Property Appearance Recognized". The owners could also be recognized by receiving a Certificate of Recognition by the Appearance Commission and/or the Board of Commissioners, with the owners and property address being announced by the Chairman at the Appearance Commission meeting and/or announced by the Mayor at the Board of Commissioners meeting. Additionally, the Board of Commissioner's recommendations for any other awards associated with the program such as gift cards, swag bags, etc. are appreciated.

The Swansboro Appearance Commission respectfully requests consideration of the Board of Commissioners to approve the establishment of the Property Appearance Recognition Program.



Appearance Commission Meeting Agenda Item Submittal

Item To Be Considered: **Tree City USA Certification**

Board Meeting Date: **September 17, 2026**

Prepared By: **Alissa Fender, MMC – Town Clerk**

Overview: The requirements to achieve the designation of Tree City USA by the Arbor Day foundation and the National Association of State Foresters will be reviewed.

At the August 20, 2026, meeting, the commission discussed and expressed interest in exploring the opportunity to received certification again.

To achieve Tree City USA certification, an incorporated community or Census Designated Place must meet four core standards established by the Arbor Day Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters.

Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department

- Requirement: Establish a dedicated body or official with legal authority for public tree care decisions.
- Eligible Structures: A volunteer tree board, forestry department, parks and recreation department, public works department, or city manager position.
- Application Proof: Chairperson and member contact details, or department head contact information, along with board meeting frequency.

Standard 2: A Public Tree Care Ordinance ([click here](#) to view the Towns associated ordinance)

- Requirement: Enact community-wide laws or policies that define responsibility for urban forestry and direct the conservation, protection, and maintenance of public trees.
- Eligible Structures: Incorporated municipalities must submit a formal ordinance. Military bases and Census Designated Places may use legally enforceable policies.
- Application Proof: A copy of the active ordinance/policy and its original enactment date.

Standard 3: Annual Expenditure of \$2 Per Capita

- Requirement: Spend at least \$2 per resident annually on community tree care.
- Eligible Expenses: Tree planting, initial care, maintenance, removal, management, utility line clearance, and volunteer time (calculated at the national volunteer hourly rate).
- Application Proof: An itemized breakdown of spending across categories and logged volunteer hours.

Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

- Requirement: Hold a public Arbor Day event and issue an official, annual Arbor Day proclamation signed by the mayor, city council, or equivalent leader.
- Eligible Activities: Tree plantings, educational activities, or community award ceremonies (can coincide with Earth Day).
- Application Proof: Photos, social media posts, or news articles showing tree-focused event activities, plus the signed, dated proclamation.

Key Submission Details

- Calendar Year Tracking: All qualifying activities and expenses must occur between January 1 and December 31.

Recommended Action: Review and discuss.

Action: _____



Appearance Commission Meeting Agenda Item Submittal

Item To Be Considered: **Appearance Commission Strategic Plan**

Board Meeting Date: **September 17, 2026**

Prepared By: **Larry Philpott – Commission Member**

Overview: Board review and discussion of the proposed framework for creation of the Appearance Commission Strategic Plan.

A Strategic Plan for an Appearance Commission serving under local government leadership (such as a Town or County Board of Commissioners) acts as a critical roadmap. Its purpose is to guide community beautification, protect regional aesthetic character, and align neighborhood design projects with broader town goals.

Because Appearance Commissions function strictly as advisory bodies without final permitting power, their strategic plans focus heavy energy on framework design, community partnerships, and standardized recommendations rather than regulatory enforcement.

Phase 1: Establish the Governance Foundation

Before determining aesthetic goals, the commission must define its operational boundary lines to stay legally compliant and productive.

- **Draft Structural By-Laws:** Establish clear codes of conduct, meeting cadences, voting procedures, and strict adherence to open meeting laws.
- **Define Inter-Board Relationships:** Formally document how the commission interacts with the primary Board of Commissioners, the Planning Board, and the Board of Adjustment
- **Clarify Advisory Boundaries:** Clearly establish that the commission provides non-binding design recommendations to developers and the town board, ensuring it doesn't cross over into building permit vetoes.

Phase 2: Design Standardized Visual Frameworks

Rather than critiquing projects on a purely subjective case-by-case basis, the commission should proactively outline community design expectations.

- **Signage and Lighting Standardization:** Author uniform aesthetic rules for downtown corridors, commercial strip zoning, and public pathways to prevent visual clutter.
- **High-Impact / High-Visibility (HI/HV) Rules:** Create specific design review guidelines for large-scale development projects, oceanfront/waterfront views, or properties touching main historic streets.
- **Indigenous and Ecological Integration:** Build localized plant lists and landscaping requirements that honor regional history, coastal elements, and environmentally sound irrigation practices.

Action: _____

Phase 3: Funding & Project Implementation

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Beautification cannot rely entirely on general city funds. The strategic plan needs mechanisms to support and accelerate actual physical improvements.

- Façade and Corridor Grants: Partner with town economic developers to create community appearance grant programs that subsidize private-property renovations, tree planting, and building exterior enhancements.
- Public-Private Art Partnerships: Build relationships with local non-profits, youth commissions, and private corporations to organize murals, public sculptures, and community gardens.
- Community Beautification Campaigns: Organize ongoing town decorating programs, holiday storefront contests, and neighborhood cleanup days to cultivate pride.

Phase 4: Accountability, Feedback, and Engagement

A strategy is only useful if it evolves and stays transparent to the community it shapes.

- Community Needs Surveys: Periodically distribute community-wide surveys to track how residents feel about local visual quality, park access, and overall town character.
- Annual Progress Reporting: Mandate a comprehensive year-end presentation to the Board of Commissioners outlining completed projects, grant allocations, and milestone targets.

To help customize this strategic framework for your specific community:

- What is the specific town, city, or county jurisdiction this is being designed for?
- Are there immediate visual issues you are looking to address (e.g., historical preservation, commercial urban sprawl, coastal storm damage)?
- What is the current annual budget or funding limit available to the commission?

Background Attachment(s): Resource Links

Recommended Action: Review and discuss next steps.

<https://www.morgantonnnc.gov/media/2726>

<https://www.hickorync.gov/community-appearance-commission>

<https://ced.sog.unc.edu/2020/01/16/downtown-facade-improvement-programs/>

<https://www.fallschurchva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/691/Comp-Plan---Chapter-3-Community-Character-Appearance-and-Design>

<https://www.hickorync.gov/sites/default/files/hickoryncgov/Boards%20and%20Commissions/Community%20Appearance%20Commission/2018%20Finalized%20Appearance%20Grant%20Application.pdf>

<https://www.carync.gov/business-development/developing-in-cary/community-appearance-manual>

<https://cms3.revize.com/revize/wendellNC/Documents/Government/Documents/Strategic%20Plan/Strategic%20Plan%202025%20.pdf>

<https://sanfordnc.net/330/Appearance-Commission>