

Environmental Advisory Committee Minutes July 21, 2022

Present: Margaret Johnson, Chris Riegert, Lee Maxwell, Kerri McCullough, Skip Cox, Allen Dearry, Carolina Candelaria, David Merkle, Maureen Burns

Absent: Pam Johnson

Staff: Matt Kirkland, Rick Patterson, Scott Thornall

Guests: Elise Snavelly, Sue Davidson

Margaret asked Kerri if she would like to add a discussion for a proposed recognition of groups protecting nature and wildlife to the agenda. Kerri made a motion to add this topic to the agenda, Lee seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

A motion was made to adopt the June 16, 2022 minutes. Lee seconded and the June minutes were unanimously approved.

No announcements.

Margaret asked guest Elise Snavelly to introduce herself. Her background is in marine conservation. She noticed the living shoreline at Veterans Park was in need of maintenance. She contacted Eric Falkenberg at the rec center about the project, as well as Bonnie Mitchell, NCCF Coastal Education Coordinator. On the morning of Wednesday, July 21, a small group picked up the open oyster bags, as well as trash and debris. The area still needs work. She is hoping the town would fund the purchase of 30 new oyster bags. The NCCF has requested the town or a group adopt the natural shoreline.

Maureen described a program she and Lee Butzin participated in back in 2017 or 2018 sponsored by NCCF. Residents, college students and interns measured grasses and opened bags to evaluate the contents. She suggested this might be a good opportunity to partner with South Brunswick Middle School NHS, similar to the program for planting native trees in the same park last spring.

Margaret asked what maintenance of the shoreline would involve. She asked Elise to bring a written proposal to the next meeting.

Staff Report: Matt, Rick

Margaret reviewed the procedure for adopting new initiatives. Initiatives are discussed as a group, then presented to Margaret, who then presents to Matt. He will then vet, give feedback and make sure the proposals get to the right place.

Matt also reviewed the procedure. He said this is an advisory committee. The first step would be to come to a consensus on a broad recommendation. He emphasized the benefit to building a consensus. Next, initiatives will pass on to Matt for input and presentation for staff/council. He suggested again, it is a good idea to keep ideas broad.

He gave an example using the planning board. Recently a citizen brought a concern to the planning board. It was discussed at a meeting and there was agreement on a text amendment on vegetation that will most likely be presented to council.

Another suggestion he made was that budget issues are best brought up close to budget consideration.

Matt reminded the committee that next month begins an audit of the UDO. The town has contracted with the Cape Fear Council of Government. The contract includes three committee meetings. Wes McLeod, who filled in as interim planner, will be doing presentations and getting feedback. However, Wes is unavailable on Thursdays.

Carolina asked how long this process will take. Matt suggested a bare minimum of six months.

Kerri commented that previous EAC initiatives have been presented to staff and seem to get lost. She asked about receipt and acknowledgment. Matt agreed.

The audit will kick off with a meeting with the planning board. He also suggested perhaps small group meetings with representatives from each committee.

Matt also reviewed the planning board's discussion on placement of trees on lots. The planning board is concerned about streetscape. Property owners tend to leave trees in the back of the lot. The planning board is working on a recommendation to have a small number of trees in the front yard. This would not change the total number of trees required.

Chris asked Matt, when presenting initiatives, how much information is ideal. Matt suggested, as a committee, to prioritize. Margaret also reminded the committee that she can ask in advance for more time to present at a council meeting.

Rick reported that the stormwater department is evaluating three living shoreline projects. The department has been under pressure to approve these programs but staff would like more time to review. One is a wave energy dissipator, which includes a headwall with a 5 foot opening. Another is simply an earthen berm with vegetation. Rick is especially supportive of the oyster bed living shorelines. Several of these projects are cost shared through NCCF.

Rick also shared educational materials purchased with monies from the 2021-22 stormwater outreach and education budget. He informed the committee that there are funds in the coming year's budget. The funds need to be spent by June 2023.

Scott clarified that the stormwater budget used to be part of Public Works but is now its own budget. Carolina asked about the Tree City budget. That is folded into the public works budget.

Rick has reevaluated the fee schedule. For example, to clear a lot only one truckload is allowed, more than one truckload requires a permit. There is also a parking pad permit. These fees will be implemented moving forward.

There was a question about the estuaries committee now being part of the environment advisory committee. Maureen remembers there were several committees combined to form the EAC. These committees are listed in a handbook. Matt said the handbook is being updated currently.

Scott said there are many requests for bulkheads. He commented that the cost of bulkheads has more than doubled recently. There is a current project for \$32,000. Carolina asked about encouraging alternatives. Rick commented that "living shorelines" need to be better defined.

Margaret asked committee members to explore alternatives to bulkheads. Lee volunteered to do research.

Carolina made a motion to explore alternatives for bulkheads. David seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Old Business

Last Plastic Straw Initiative: Lee

Lee has paired down his research to 3 to 4 bullets to encourage voluntary elimination of plastic straws on the island. These include education, providing tools (ie samples from suppliers), providing website information, as well as a recognition program.

Kerri inquired if Lee had talked to restaurants. Lee has canvassed several restaurants.

Chris asked about places that sell straws such as Food Lion. Lee responded that would be the next step.

Kerri asked about cost and would higher cost be prohibitive. Lee responded the sample straws he was providing are about one cent more than plastic. Sue commented that not serving straws to some customers might help offset the costs. Carolina also recommended reusable straws. Chris inquired how restaurants purchased straws. Lee said usually in cases of 1000.

Skip and Maureen commented that the fact that there are many restaurants already either offering straws only on request and/or alternative straws demonstrates there is interest and support from business owners.

Margaret asked if Lee would be ready to speak to the council. Lee is prepared. Margaret will approach Lisa about presenting at the next meeting.

Appreciation Statement: Kerri

Kerri reviewed a draft statement of a proposed recognition of groups protecting nature and wildlife shared by email.

BIODIVERSITY is a natural system of all elements of nature: plants, animals and waterways, including the tiniest microorganisms. All these ecosystems working together create a self sustaining system which benefit our human communities ---so long as they are healthy. Trees, wetlands, and natural areas help clean the air and water. Plants and wildlife are part of a community's character. So biodiversity should be considered a continuing part of our land use plan. The Town of Oak Island Environmental Advisory Committee would thus like to recognize and express our sincere appreciation for all the various volunteer groups who help our community be more beautiful, clean our roads and waterways and aid in the protection, education and awareness of the wildlife with which we must co-exist and even those where we must help ensure their existence for future generations. (List groups?) These groups are so important and crucial in efforts to sustain our community environment where Nature and Human well-being are so critically linked. We encourage everyone's support for these volunteer groups that are of such vital importance to our Community. Their efforts and contributions should be a source of pride for Oak Island.

To each and every one of our community friends and neighbors involved in these organizations, We say Thank You and "Well Done".

Margaret asked how this statement would be shared. Kerri suggested at a council meeting.

Kerri asked any changes or suggestions to be emailed to her and she would share with the committee.

Rick also suggested publishing the statement in the Current.

Chris has been contacted from a publication in the mountains about an interview. This may be an opportunity for recognition at a statewide level. Matt reminded the committee anything having to do with the EAC would have to be approved.

Smart Yards: David Merkle

David has done three inspections for Smart Yards. He reminded the committee that one of the goals of the smart yard program is to keep stormwater out of the right of ways. He would like to work on promotion of the program. Currently, a sign is provided for the certified yards and he also leaves brochures to share with neighbors.

He suggested publishing 4-6 articles per year on aspects of the program in the Current. Rick offered to review and edit the articles, then pass on to Mike Emory. Rick also suggested, instead of a set number of published articles, doing features when there is new/exciting information.

Carolina made a motion for David to present 4-6 smart yard articles per year for publication. Lee seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Recycling: Maureen, Sue

Maureen shared samples of the new recycling guideline magnets. 2500 were purchased to distribute to rental homes and throughout the community. The feedback has been very favorable.

Maureen also shared that it is a generally accepted practice to have Recycle Away labels for public carts with simplified messaging to reduce contamination. NCDEQ offers a free custom design service. She suggested having a graphic made for future use utilizing the 'Please Don't Bag Recyclable' graphic. The design would of course be subject to the approval of public works and GFL.

Maureen made a motion to work with the NCDEQ graphic artists to design a recycle away label with the 'Please Do Not Bag Recyclables' graphic. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

Sue reminded the committee she is a private citizen and recycling advocate. She shared her efforts this past month. She has been working with Publix and updated the committee:

The store manager, Ken Kells, helpful in responding to local action as well as helping me get in touch with Corporate for approval of more storewide concerns.

Ken answered my questions about the outside collection bins for recyclables, including plastic grocery bags. He confirmed that the recyclables were picked up and taken to a Georgia facility for recycling. I have had some comments from customers that the bins have been full at times. Ken let me know that the bins are emptied twice a day and if ever full, to let a store employee know. I see the "at times" full bins as great progress in return to vendor capture of items not able to be recycled locally.

He made me aware of the "Tools for Schools" program and that contributors would be given a Publix Reusable bag. I applaud that community effort.

In Brunswick County, plastic bags cannot be placed in recycling bins. The bags bind up the conveyor belts at our Material Reclamation Facility resulting in the conveyor having to shut down for periods of time as the bags are cleared. Also plastic bags in the recycling bins are contaminants that cost the town increased fees and can result in highly contaminated loads having to be abandoned to the landfills. Unfortunately, the "Recycle and Reduce" message on the plastic bags they use, results in people thinking that the bags can be placed in bins, upping our contamination percentage. I am hopeful that a different or no message bag could be used instead.

Ken has agreed to place the for sale reusable grocery bags at the beginning of check out rows to increase their visibility to consumers. I asked him if there was a break event point where free Publix bags could be given out instead of plastic bags. He referred me to Corporate for that question.

Ken is agreeable to placing a small Recycle Right placard in the staff lounge. However he would need to have Corporate permission to place the placard in public area or restrooms.

Sue also shared a No More Plastic t-shirt she had made and receives a lot of positive feedback on.

Tree Canopy: Carolina

Carolina would like the committee to move forward with ideas to preserve the canopy. She asked Matt if the town has GIS capability. Matt has looked into this, however time constraints have been prohibitive. Carolina would like to propose education before development, perhaps providing educational material in the permit packets.

Margaret asked Matt about the tree survey done several years ago. Matt will look into that. He reminded the committee that anything that is a cost to the town involves budget discussions. Carolina would like the committee to attend meetings and educate the community on the value of our canopy.

Maureen reminded the committee that, before the pandemic, EAC sponsored 4 -6 educational programs through the rec center. Former member Linda Seifert made the arrangements. She suggested Carolina focus on the education component to start, perhaps with a community presentation on the Live Oak and native trees. Carolina has a PowerPoint presentation already prepared. Margaret suggested she contact the rec center about the possibility of community presentations.

Adopt A Highway/Beach Preservation Society: Skip

Skip will let the committee know when the next AHH pick up will be scheduled.

BPSI will be replacing four board Members, plus the Chairperson.

Meeting adjourned at 10:04 AM