

Environmental Advisory Committee Minutes

June 16, 2022

Present: Margaret Johnson, Allen Dearry, Pam Johnson, Maureen Burns, Carolina Candelaria, Kerri McCullough, David Merkle, Skip Cox

Staff: Matt Kirkland, Rick Patterson

Guests: Sue Davidson

Absent: Lee Maxwell, Chris Reigert

Meeting called to order at 8:30AM

Pam made a motion to adopt the agenda with no changes. Kerri seconded and the agenda was unanimously approved.

Margaret welcomed the newest committee members and the new staff liaison.

David Merkle is the Smart Yards coordinator and has been appointed after being an ad hoc member. He has shared his background at a previous meeting, but gave a brief review for the new members. His home and yard were flooded after Hurricane Florence. During the process of rebuilding and regrading he had bio-retention ponds (also referred to as rain gardens) installed. He contacted Lee Butzin about the smart yards certification. His yard was certified. Lee informed him the yard scored the highest points ever awarded in town.

David also let the committee know that he has spoken with the deputy director of the North Carolina Coastal Federation and the organization expressed interest in featuring Oak Island's Smart Yard program.

Allen Dearry introduced himself to the committee. He and his wife Barbara moved to Oak Island four years ago from the Durham/Chapel Hill area where they lived for over 30 years. Shortly after they moved in their house also suffered extensive damage during Hurricane Florence due to roof leaks. They rented a place for 18 months while their house was gutted. Work also included mold remediation. His career has been in the field of human health and biomedical research for the NIH office at Research Triangle Park. His work focused on environmental health and the prevention of disease. He also served on an environmental board in Durham.

Margaret commended the new members on their longitudinal experience on environmental issues.

At this time Matt Kirkland passed out a one page guideline sheet on EAC from Lisa.

Maureen inquired about the committee handbook that was distributed in the past. Matt said Lisa is in the process of updating the handbook.

Margaret commented there is a lot of energy from the committee and with the new council having been favorable to the advisory committee, there may be opportunities for action. She reiterated the importance to reign in enthusiasm yet push the envelope while following the guidelines. Initiatives come from the committee to Margaret to Matt to be presented to town staff/ leadership.

In regards to the guideline sheet, Carolina asked what does stormwater pertain to. Rick answered that it includes a multitude of areas, such as what type of materials are used, to tree ordinances, etc. He will continue to keep the committee informed.

Pam made a motion to accept the May minutes. Kerri seconded and the minutes were unanimously approved

Announcements:

The police training room was unavailable this morning. There are still concerns of a large group meeting in a small room due to continuing Covid infections. Matt will look into future availability of the police trading room.

Staff Report: Matt

At this point Matt introduced himself to the committee. He is the new and only planner at this point. His roles include zoning and planning as well as the staff liaison for this committee.

He is originally from Tarboro on the Tar River. That location was hit hard by Hurricane Floyd. He remembers as a teenager and new driver, the entire town was surrounded by water. His career includes zone enforcement in Johnson County before moving to Wilmington. He was the senior planner in Leland. He started that position one day after Hurricane Florence. There has been much development during the time he was in Leland. He is excited to be in Oak Island. He started May 31st. He is generally happy with the ordinances that are in place.

He had no report at this time since he only recently found out about the meeting. He shared that the planning board is considering potential changes to various vegetation ordinances. He also mentioned there is discussion about the placement of trees, concerns about where trees are being placed i.e. in the backs of yards. At this point it is just discussion and will continue. Staff have been asked for what they would like to see, as well as a broad look at what other towns are doing and best practices. He will bring any potential changes to EAC, back to the planning committee, then to council. The council will likely hold public forums.

He mentioned his door is always open for any concerns or discussion.

Margaret reiterated the protocol for the EAC is, with the committee approval, the chair will submit to the planner who then presents to staff and council on the committee's behalf.

Rick mentioned the \$1000 for outreach and education in this year's budget must be spent by July 1st. David and Carolina requested Smart Yard brochures. There is a possibility that next year's funds may be used for information packets for restaurants to educate on alternatives to plastic straws.

Rick shared with the committee the possibility of a new living shoreline proposal on Yacht Drive. He will be meeting with the NCCF.

He also mentioned the council has been supportive about changes in the fee schedule that he has proposed. These changes could result in \$500,000 of additional revenue. He shared that his office reviews 1000 structures a year. The most difficult plans are for swimming pools

Maureen asked about T-shirts for Edward Lovett and the Davis Canal Cleaners. This is also a possibility, however, it would be difficult to coordinate for this year's budget.

Margaret thanked Rick for his interest and involvement.

The Last Plastic Straw: Carolina

Lee shared his report via email.

Carolina showed some of the materials to share with restaurants.

The proposal was tabled to the next meeting when Lee can attend.

Maureen mentioned the need to create a new thread for the Last Plastic Straw initiatives to include the newest members.

Tree Intern: Carolina

Carolina shared that the Davey tree proposal did not make it into the budget. Carolina will share her information with Matt. Staff and council have expressed interest in preserving the unique canopy. It will be hard to do that without mapping the canopy. Carolina shared that Southport invested \$20,000 in the service. The original Davey proposal was for \$12,000, of which EAC recommended only \$5000 but did not make it into the budget.

Carolina suggested the Davey Resource Group present directly to council.

Carolina reviewed for the new members there were 2 separate potential projects to map the town's tree canopy. The first being a professional mapping project (Davey) and the second would be hiring an intern paid with a grant. Matt said he would review the proposal.

Kerri asked about the Brunswick County survey done a few years ago. Pam suggested that it could be used as a baseline but there have been many changes. Carolina also mentioned that committee guest, David Soddenfield, had offered to help with the intern. He had suggested a post grad student.

Matt will reach out to Brunswick County for their data. Rick shared that we must remember that this is private land and that ultimately the town is limited. He suggested concentrating on land that the town owns for getting the most bang out of the buck.

Kerri asked what the requirements are at this time. Matt answered that a new development requirement is dependent on the square footage of the lot.

Trees can be removed if essential to the development but they need to be replanted.

The average lot size of 6000 square feet requires 10 trees. And these trees are usually left in the back of the lot as there is no requirement for where to plant. In addition, there are many requirements for parking, stormwater, on very small lots. What the town does not want is to have an ordinance where property owners need to go for a variance anytime a house is built.

Kerri asked if the tree requirement must be met for a CO. Matt confirmed.

Maureen asked about previous recommendations that included credits for large and native trees. Pam commented that it is very convoluted.

Matt says the ordinance has a lot of stick and not a lot of carrot. He would like to see allowances such as waiving fees to preserve trees.

Kerri would like to see the tree canopy mapped and to educate the community about what the reduction of the tree canopy looks like. Carolina would like to see the focus on preservation. Maureen asked what would be the most efficient way to get information directly to the property owner. Pam suggested educational information sessions. Allen suggested reaching out to developer/builders. David commented it is important to educate yet not appear condescending.

Margaret says the code is in a state of flux and information services for the public would be beneficial. Maureen mentioned a presentation for builders/homeowners on the stormwater requirements put on by the stormwater department a few years ago.

Margaret suggested committee members think of suggestions for the next meeting. She thanked Carolina for her efforts and her persistence as we knew this was a going to be a mountain.

Pam commented on reviewing ordinances from different communities and would like to see Oak Island's ordinances stronger.

Maureen reminded the committee that Lee Butzin was a long time member of EAC and now serves on the planning board.

Matt shared the town has contracted with the council of governors. This contract includes a certain number of meetings. First they are going to look at ordinances that are problematic, out of date and need to be changed. Staff is doing a deep dive. Ordinances changes will be incremental. There are always health and safety issues to evaluate as well.

Maureen shared that Carolina has demonstrated the itree program. It is interesting and easy to use and possibly an easy way to share the value of trees on individual properties. Carolina used the program with great success on Earth Day.

Kerri suggested a one page flyer with pertinent information.

Allen suggested realtors as a way of reaching property owners.

Sue suggested using the tax base for contact information.

Margaret asked Carolina to reach out to Steve Edwards for the best way to disseminate information on the benefits of tree canopy.

Matt shared that, for development, a land development permit is issued first then the building permit.

Kerri also suggested advertising the town's Tree City status, perhaps displaying the flag at prominent locations. Maureen let the committee know that she found an additional Tree City flag with old material turned over by a previous member.

Recycling: Sue, Maureen

Sue gave an update on her recycling efforts.

- *DOT Signage at bridges redisplayed "No plastic bags in recycling bins, please." She sent a thank you email to Rose Braam.*
- *Emailed Town of Caswell Beach requesting same signage.*
- *She shared with committee members and Councilman Craft a report from the Town of Caswell Beach from a group call with DEQ and Sonoco.*

- *She called Sonoco asking if there were any plans to install equipment to open plastic bag recyclables. No plans in near future.*

Future Actions

- *2023 tax of 2 to 3 cents per plastic bag dispersed at merchant levels. Money to go to town environment projects.*
- *Connect with Beach Patrol and Citizen patrol to encourage public education to reduce plastic bagged recyclables in bins.*
- *Rewrite recycling tip sheet for publication and electronic info to groups*
- *Petition Publix, Food Lion and Lowes to develop action plans at State as well as local levels, to reduce then eliminate plastic bag usage.*
- *Another insight. Much of the itinerant tourists use the beach until dusk or sunset when labels on bins cannot be seen. Thus need for multiple ways to get info out.*

Kerri shared that the most common comment she receives is how to get the recycles down if not using plastic bags.

Sue suggested reusable plastic bags.

Skip mentioned he asks beach goers to empty the plastic bags into the recyclable and put the bag in the trash.

Pam asked about the possibility of providing each house with a small plastic bin. Sue answered that would be GFL and they do not have funding.

Maureen shared that per last meeting she contacted Carol Adkin from NCDEQ about a custom-made Recycle Away decal for public carts including items usually brought to the beach, i.e., aluminum cans, plastic bottles, paper. The decal would also include the no plastic bag graphic as well as the name of the town. Carol expressed support for the recycle away graphics and mentioned the success other communities have had. She shared a sample of graphics NCDEQ designed for Carolina beach. Maureen said this would most likely take coordination with Public Works and Michael Emory and the committee can discuss at a future meeting.

Maureen expressed the need to move forward with getting recycling magnets printed and distributed to rental homes. She briefly filled in Matt and new members that 9000 magnets were mailed to residences as part of a grant award from the Carolina Recycle Association and USDA in summer/fall 2021. However, many Oak Island property owners use their primary addresses, not located in Oak Island. There is \$2000 award from the Carton Container Council grant for recycling public outreach and education. The original intention of pursuing that grant was getting additional magnets. Rick suggested the stormwater outreach and education budget could cover costs of 2500 magnets (>\$450 Seaway printing quote)

At the May meeting Sue shared higher quality magnets Micki Bozeman/Brunswick County had printed in Southport. Sue has an inquiry into the cost of those magnets, however has not heard back.

David made a motion to use part of stormwater budget funding to purchase additional magnets to distribute to rental homes. Pam seconded and the motion was approved unanimously.

Maureen will get an invoice from Seaway printing and return to Rick as soon as possible.

BBS/AHH: Skip

1. AAH- Very successful pick up on June 3rd. He will be scheduling the next one around the Labor Day week.

BPSI-

1. There was a very successful beach clean up on Saturday, June 11. All 67 beach accesses were covered, so our whole beach strand got a good cleaning.

2. Flash Sweeps are resuming again. These are 5-10 minute sweeps of the beach on both sides of a pre-selected access. The litter is then returned to the access, where it is placed into categories, counted, and reported to the BPSI, who maintains a database for litter collections. The next sweep is scheduled for Wednesday, June 22, at the Womble Street access. It begins at 9AM. The schedule for future flash sweeps can be found at the BPSI website, which is www.beachoki.org.

3. The next NC Aquarium program is scheduled for July 7, at 2PM at the Rec Center. The program will focus on sea turtles.

New Business:

Kerri suggested offering a shout out to those on the island who help with the critters, for example the Feral Cat Society, Seabiscuit, etc. Margaret asked Kerri to codify and present at the next meeting.

Rick asked the committee if they would like him to use the remaining funds to purchase additional stormwater education handouts, tattoos, frisbees.

David made a motion to purchase stormwater materials. Pam seconded and the motion was passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:07 AM.