

Oak Island Planning Department



2022/2023

Year In Review

Matthew Kirkland, Planning Director

Oak Island Planning Department Annual Report

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DEPARTMENTAL MESSAGE

The Planning Department is pleased to present a review of the for 2022 and 2023 along with a one-year strategic plan. In the past 12 months, we have made significant strides in improving our services to the community and working to implement the Town's vision. This has only been possible with the help of the community, administration, and the dedicated team of employees both within the department and throughout the Town organization.

In the past 12 months, the Department has made efforts to improve processes throughout the organization as well as take steps to implement the vision of the Town. To that end, the Department has worked with the Cape Fear Council of Governments (COG) to audit the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) to assess the Town's tree canopy, and internally with Building Inspections, Permitting, Coastal Area Management Act Local Permit Officer (CAMA LPO), Floodplain, Stormwater, and Public Works to improve processes within the Town.

In addition to these efforts, we have strengthened the Department by emphasizing additional training and certifications for the team. Our CAMA LUP/Floodplain Administrator underwent training which culminated in receiving a Floodplain Manager certification from the North Carolina Association of Floodplain Managers and two of our team members are undergoing training with the University of North Carolina School of Government which will grant them status as a Certified Zoning Official. Other training efforts have included Geographic Information Systems (GIS), land development regulation, and CAMA.

The Planning Department is focused on working to ensure that the Town's vision is implemented and kept current with the regulatory environment in which we find ourselves going forward.

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VISION STATEMENT

Oak Island will be a community which preserves, protects, and enhances its natural and cultural environment including shoreline access, waterway, beaches, dunes, water accesses, residential areas, and recreational opportunities for all ages and abilities. The Town's unique scale and character will continue to provide a desirable place in which to live, work, and vacation. Multi-modal transportation options including efficient sidewalks, bikeways, and roadway systems will provide for an accessible community. Economic development will be coordinated with preservation of the Town's residential areas.

DEPARTMENTAL VALUES STATEMENT

We strive to provide professional service to everyone who interacts with our department, commit to the ethical standards of our profession, and diligently improve the services and value provided to the Town.

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ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



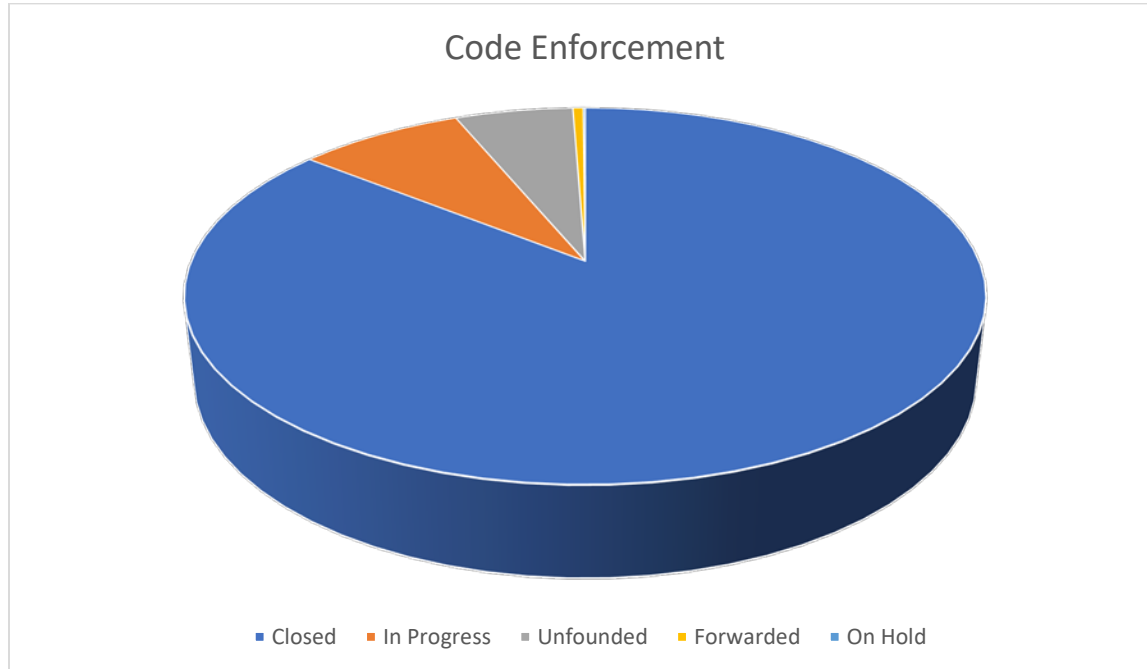
CODE ENFORCEMENT

The past 12 months saw 1,002 Code Enforcement cases opened. These Code Enforcement Cases deal with a wide range of ordinances including trash and debris on property, tall grass, working without permits, and right of way obstructions.

Of those 1,002, 859 were Closed (meaning the site was brought into compliance with the ordinances), 80 are still In Progress, 57 were Unfounded (meaning that there were no identifiable ordinance violations on site), 5 were forwarded to the Town Attorney for legal action, and one remains on hold. The Department averaged approximately 84 Code Enforcement Cases a month over the past 12 months.

Each new Code Enforcement Case requires a Zoning Technician to visit the site to evaluate the potential violation, determine whether one exists, and if one does contact the property owner to assist with coming into compliance with the ordinance. A total of 2680 Code Enforcement inspections were conducted over the 12 month time period.

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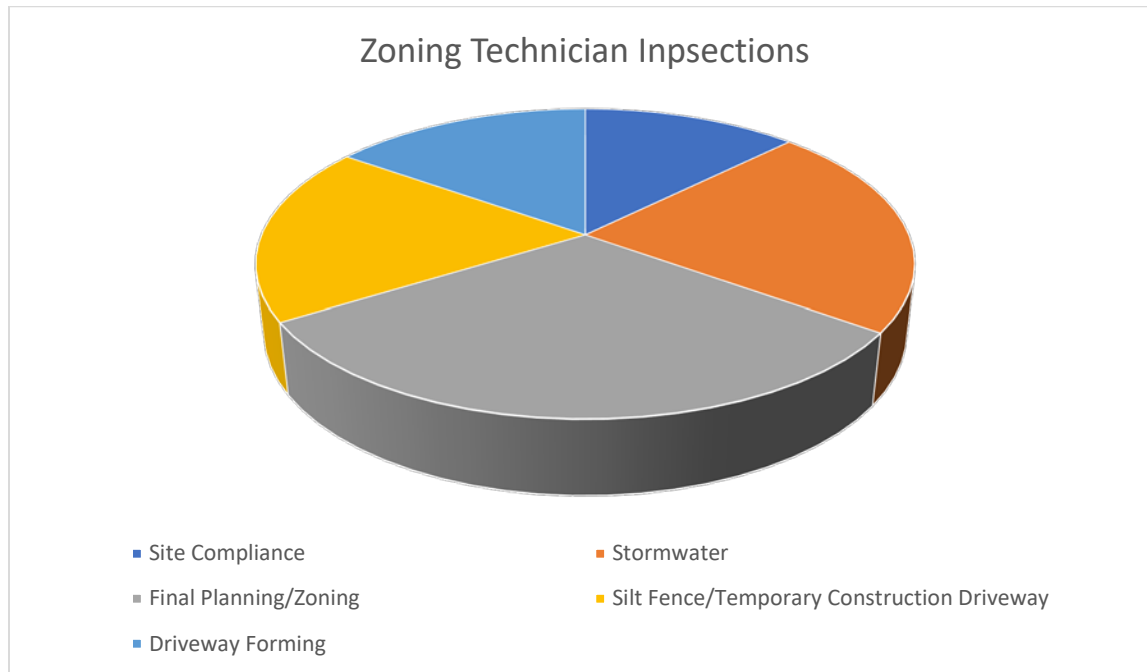


ZONING TECHNICIAN INSPECTIONS

In addition to Code Enforcement, our Zoning Technician staff completes a variety of inspections for the Town. In the past 12 months, they have completed a total of 2,707 inspections including 341 Site Compliance, 604 Stormwater, 846 Final Planning/Zoning, 505 Silt Fence/Temporary Construction Driveway, and 411 Driveway Forming inspections. An average of 225 inspections per month are conducted within these categories.

Similar to Code Enforcement, Zoning Technician Inspections requires the Staff to go on site and evaluate a wide range of criteria based on the type of inspection. From there they can work with the contractor to get the site into compliance if there are any violations on site. Some of these Inspections can be completed simultaneously such as Site Compliance and Silt Fence/Temporary Driveway Construction, which helps the Staff manage a large caseload.

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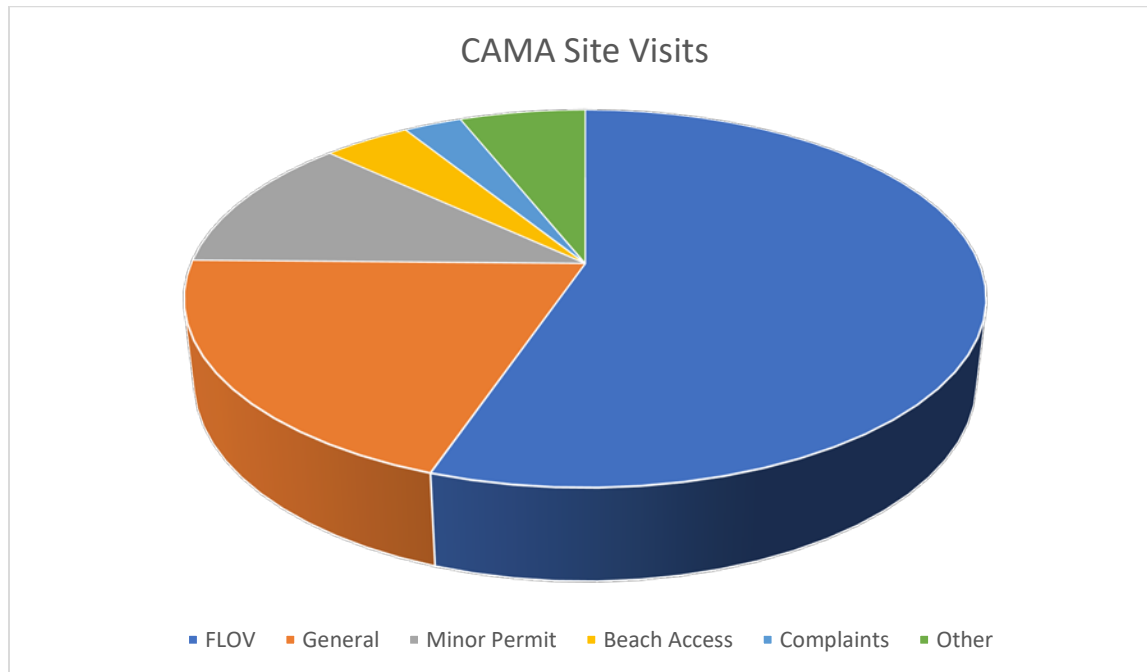
CAMA AND FLOOD HAZARD PREVENTION

CAMA LPO

The Coastal Area Management Act is administered by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ). However, the Town participates in the Local Permitting Office (LPO) program offered by the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA). This program allows some CAMA permits to be issued by a local Town official and helps citizens avoid having to contact a regional office for assistance with permitting in some instances.

Our CAMA LPO conducted 429 Site Visits over the past 12 months to assist property owners with questions related to the CAMA regulations. Of those visits 237 were to determine the First Line of Vegetation, 86 General Site Visits and Consultations, 50 Site Visits for Minor Permit Reviews, 18 Beach Access Final Inspections, 12 Inspections for Complaints, and 26 for other reviews such as escarpments and meetings with NCDEQ.

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In addition to visiting sites for CAMA compliance, our LPO program is able to review Minor Permits and Exemptions for compliance with the applicable regulations. The LPO reviewed 133 Exemptions and 75 Minor Permits in addition to reviewing projects to determine what type of CAMA permit would be required based on the regulations.

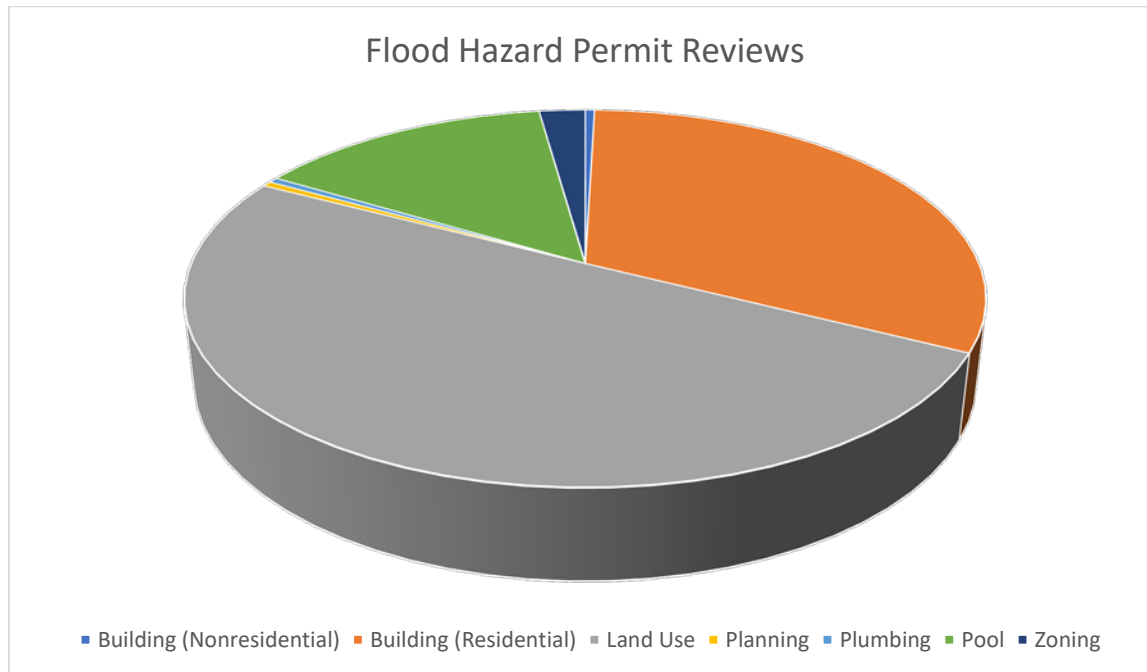
Our current CAMA LPO has begun cross-training additional staff to build our capacity within the Department and provide a broader range of knowledge for the members of the Planning Department.

Flood Hazard Prevention

Our CAMA LPO also administers the Town's Flood Hazard Prevention ordinances. These ordinances allow the Town to participate in the National Flood Insurance Program and by extension permits property owners in the Town to purchase Federally-backed flood insurance. This program involves reviewing development project applications in Special Flood Hazard Areas for compliance with the applicable regulations, inspecting development projects for compliance, and administering the Town's Community Rating System program.

The Town's Floodplain Administrator reviewed 225 development permit applications in the past 12 months to determine compliance with the Flood Hazard Prevention Ordinance. This includes 1 Building (Nonresidential), 72 Building (Residential), 113 Land Use, 1 Planning, 1 Plumbing, 32 Pool, and 5 Zoning permit applications.

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The Floodplain Administrator must also inspect final construction for compliance with applicable Flood Hazard Reduction ordinances. A total of 162 inspections were conducted in the past 12 months.

The Towns' Floodplain Administrator recently passed the test to become a Certified Floodplain Manager and we are fortunate to have a total of 3 on staff within Town.

PLAN REVIEWS

Planning Staff reviews all applicable permits for compliance with the Unified Development Ordinances. The Department reviewed 1,017 permit applications in the past 12 months.

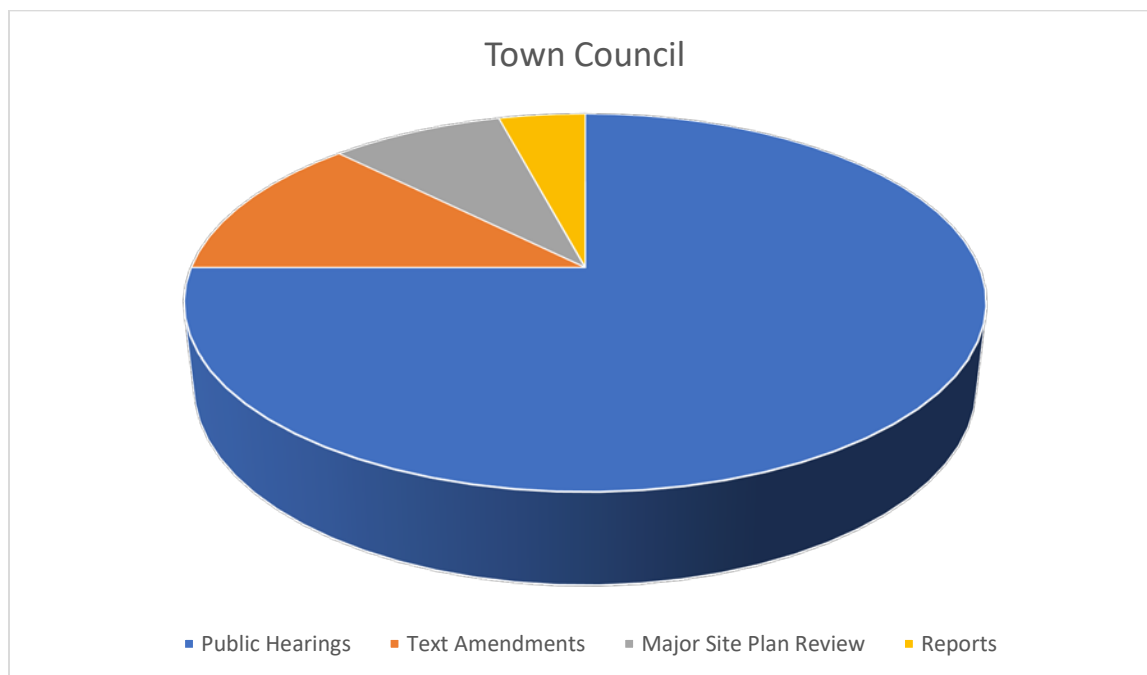
In addition to regular permit reviews, the Planning Department coordinates Major and Minor Site Plan and Subdivision Applications for the Town. These applications are reviewed by several Town Departments and State Agencies. Major Site Plans and Subdivisions also require a review at the Planning Board and final approval or denial by the Town Council. The Department coordinated on review of 10 minor projects and 2 major projects over the past 12 months. 10 of these projects were on the mainland portion of the Town's jurisdiction.

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BOARD STAFF

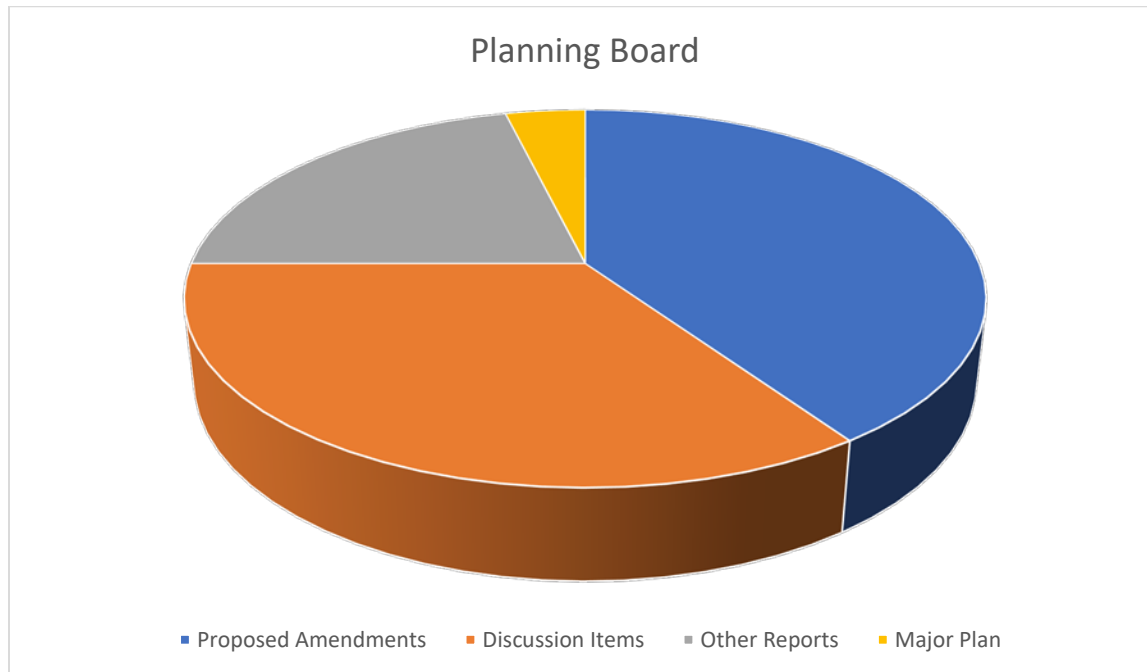
The Department also serves as Staff to the Town Council, Planning Board, and Board of Adjustment.

The Department Staff assisted the Town Council with a total of 24 items in the past 12 months including 18 public hearings, 3 text amendments, 2 major site plan reviews, and 1 report. These agenda items require Staff to prepare reports, supporting materials, presentations, and in many cases recommendations based on the Town's adopted plans.



Staff provides similar support to the Planning Board. The Planning Board held 21 meetings and staff assisted with 50 agenda items during those meetings. In addition, Staff assisted with the audit of the Unified Development Ordinances conducted by the Cape Fear Council of Governments which was presented to Town Council along with recommendations for prioritizing potential items. At these meetings Staff assisted with 50 agenda items including 21 proposed text or zoning map amendments, 18 discussion items, 2 major site plan reviews, and 9 other reports and agenda items.

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Finally, the Staff provides support to the Board of Adjustment. This Board hears variances and appeals from the Unified Development Ordinance and the UDO Administrator. This Board meets on an as needed basis and met 5 times in the past 12 months. At these meetings the Board heard 6 variance cases and 1 appeal of a Staff determination.

Each of these meetings for Town Council, Planning Board, and Board of Adjustment requires significant staff resources to research, produce reports, prepare the agendas, and present the items at the meetings,

LONG RANGE PLANNING

The Planning Staff also supports efforts for long-range planning for the Town of Oak Island.

First and foremost, through the administration of the Town's Comprehensive Land Use Plan. The current plan was adopted in 2017. As conditions change throughout the area and as required by the General Statutes, Staff requested funding to update the Comprehensive Plan so that the document can be kept current. With the support of the Town Administration and Council through the budget process, funds have been allocated to this crucial task. Staff is currently engaged in

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drafting a Request for Proposals to seek consulting assistance in completing this important update.

In addition to administering the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, staff engages in transportation planning through the Cape Fear Rural Planning Organization. The RPO provides transportation planning services for many jurisdictions in the region and assists the Town with traffic counts, grant funding opportunities, and navigating State funding regulations for planning and infrastructure improvements. Recently, the RPO collected traffic counts for the Town on Long Beach Rd and Middleton Blvd to provide a better picture of traffic volumes coming into and out of the jurisdiction and assisted the Town in submitting potential pedestrian infrastructure improvements for evaluation through the NCDOT Prioritization program.

Finally, the Staff uses Geographic Information Systems to provide analysis and data to other departments as well as elected and appointed officials. Through ESRI platforms, the Staff has created several maps and data analysis tools including a new platform for damage assessment after an event, mapping the Fire Department travel distances, and keeping our official zoning map up to date. The ESRI platforms have several advanced capabilities that can assist many Town departments in fulfilling their missions like creating surveys, visualizing data, and even creating a mapping hub for interested citizens to find the information they need.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Long Range Planning Efforts

The current Comprehensive Plan recommends conducting a corridor study of the commercial sections of the Island. Once the Comprehensive Plan update is completed, the Town can begin considering these small area plans to assist in implementing the Town's vision in specific locations. In addition, the Town can consider additional, more specific plans like updating the Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan or creating a plan specific to environmental issues like stormwater, flood hazards, or tree canopy preservation.

Further, significant resources may be necessary to implement the Town's vision over the long term. The Planning Department Staff are currently evaluating what needs there are for additional long-range planning support.

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Enhanced GIS Capabilities

ESRI platforms provide a wide range of powerful technologies that can assist many Town Departments and citizens. Planning Department Staff has reached out to other Departments to start to determine their needs and evaluate potential strategies for more effectively utilizing this tool that is at the Town's disposal. The potential for public facing mapping applications can help keep citizens informed of what is happening in the Town and where and potentially even allow for citizen reporting of issues within the jurisdiction.

Continue to Implement Recommendations of the UDO Audit

The Planning Staff has been working with the Planning Board to implement the recommendations of the audit of the UDO conducted by the Cape Fear COG. Many items of ordinance maintenance have been completed and with the assistance of the Board, significant progress has been made on modernizing the Table of Uses. Once completed, Staff will continue to work on the recommended changes from the audit to help create a UDO consistent with the needs of the Town.

Enhance Flood Hazard Prevention

The Planning Staff has begun to review the components of the Community Rating System to determine if there are additional ways that the Town can enhance our Flood Hazard Prevention program through public outreach and policy changes. This program rewards Towns that adopt enhanced strategies for Flood Damage Prevention by discounting the premium that citizens pay for flood insurance. The Town recently maintained a Grade 6 (Grade 1 being the best and Grade 10 being the least) in the program, despite the criteria for the Grade being more stringent. Each grade level reduces premiums by 5%.

DEPARTMENTAL GOALS

Goal 1: Complete the update of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan.

Goal 2: Evaluate needs for further long-range planning efforts and implementation support. Consider small area plans for commercial sections in conjunction with Economic Development Coordinator.

Goal 3: Enhance GIS capabilities to provide coordinated support and service to all Town Departments and provide a public facing map portal.

Goal 4: Have all Zoning Technicians and Planners gain their Certified Zoning Official Status.

Goal 5: Have Planning Staff gain Certified Floodplain Manager certification.

Goal 6: Implement additional recommendations from the UDO audit after completion of effort to modernize the Table of Uses.

Goal 7: Reach a Grade 5 rating on the next CRS rating evaluation.

The Following Personnel Assisted with the Annual Report:

Brady Golden, Planner I

Courtney Milliron, CAMA LPO/Floodplain Administrator

Dedra Horn, Zoning Technician I

Dave Emerson, Zoning Technician I