

December 2021

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Welcome to December

WELCOME to the **DECEMBER** edition of the ***THE CURRENT***.

It's December, and that means it's time to celebrate a very special birthday! That's right, it's been **one-year** since Oak Island set sail on ***The CURRENT***, the Town's informative, award-winning digital monthly newsletter! Ok, yes, in December our first birthday may be overshadowed a bit by a more well-known, "celestial" birthday. But if there's one good thing about this season, it's that there's plenty of good will and celebratory spirit to go around! Over the past year, the Town of Oak Island and the Communications Office (more on that later!) have worked hard to improve, increase, and implement better strategies for keeping residents informed on how your local government is working to serve you.

One of the biggest requests for improving the way we communicate was the relaunch of a Town newsletter, that could offer a "*monthly recap of all things previous, and guide to all things to come*" in Oak Island. After a couple months of development, the "inaugural edition" was published just after the Thanksgiving holiday in 2020. It was immediately met with an eager reception; and unlike many other publications in their first year, has retained a strong audience of between 3,000 - 4,000 readers monthly. Improving with each new edition, in March of 2021, *The CURRENT* was recognized state-wide by the **North Carolina City & County Communicators Association**, with a first place win in the **2021 Excellence in Communications Awards**.

However, instead of saying "happy birthday" it seems more appropriate to say "thank you" - to every reader, contributor, and even casual observer. Your interest in *The CURRENT*, and the Town information it aims to report, are what keeps that channel of communication open. Like the oceanographic feature for which it is named, ***The CURRENT*** is an ever-flowing stream of news and information, that helps keep us all moving in the same direction, together. Like a real life current

however, it only moves you along if you're in it! So enough self-celebration, grab your birthday hats, Frasier fir trees, nativity sets, menorahs, kinaras, and whatever you need to mark the occasion, as we celebrate our way into the DECEMBER 2021 (one year anniversary!) edition of **THE CURRENT.**



REVIEW: NOVEMBER 2021

REMINDER: Information on all news items can be found on the Town Website at: www.OakIslandNC.com/NEWS.

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Council Recap

The Town Council's regular meeting on **NOVEMBER 9** featured a fairly light agenda, with three (3) items of Old

Business, and two (2) items of New Business. The Town Council added one agenda item, the selection of a design firm for the Kevin Bell Skate Park, before approving the meeting's agenda.

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS: Town Manager David Kelly announced the Town had processed 24 building permits for the previous month. Additionally the newly installed lights on the pickleball and tennis courts were being programmed and should soon be operating at full capacity. Public Works Director, Scott Thornall announced that a new Storm Water Administrator had been hired, and should be in the office by early December. Human Resources Officer Debbie Lasek announced the Town was currently involved in active recruiting for open positions, including customer service, police officers, and a custom recruitment packet for the vacant Police Chief position. Town Attorney Brian Edes then informed the Council on the recently passed House Bill 854, which he noted was largely favorable, as it clarified when a town can have a more stringent development regulation than the state.

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS: The Council appointed Linda Zaccaro to the Oak Island Par 3 Golf Committee.

OLD BUSINESS: **(1)** Council voted to approve the renewal of the lease for the privately operated restaurant at the Oak Island Pier. Council approved an amended lease, adding the auto-renewal clause with a provision for canceling the auto-renewal. **(2)** Council approved amendments to engineering

contracts for the 2020 - 2021 post-Hurricane Matthew project and the 2021 - 2022 post-Hurricane Florence project (2020 - 2021 Beach Nourishment Project Contracts). **(3)**

Council awarded the bid and contract for dune planting for the 2021 - 2022 post-Hurricane Florence FEMA project to **Coastal Transplants.** **(4 - added)** The Council voted to award the design contract for the new Skate Park to **Pillar Design**, headquartered in Chandler, AZ.

NEW BUSINESS: **(1)** Council voted to approve modifying the Beach Bonfire Permit application process on the Town Website to a fully automated form, and directed staff to adjust the autoreply accordingly. **(2)** Council approved an ordinance amendment that would prohibit electric bicycles on the beach from March 16 through October 15; the ordinance is valid for one year, and then Council will revisit the issue.

The Council then went into a closed session, afterwards they

resumed the meeting and approved a motion to retain the Town Manager for one year, before adjourning. To view the video, agenda, or minutes from any Town Council meeting, just visit the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/MEETINGS, or click the link below.

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And the Winner is ...

As anyone who drove through town the week of Thanksgiving can attest, bright new holiday lights are now adorning the utility poles along Oak Island Drive, Country Club Drive, and Long Beach Road. As regular readers of *The CURRENT* can attest, the designs chosen for these lights are a direct result of input provided by the public!

During the first two weeks of September, the Town Website hosted a public poll, in which ten (10) design choices were provided, with the top 5 most-voted designs being ordered as the new displays. Over 4,400 voters participated in the poll, resulting in a total of 43 new lights being ordered, consisting of Christmas Trees (11), Triple Star Sea Spray (11), Sea Turtles (7), Pelicans (7), and Sailboats (7). The number of lights

ordered directly reflect the number of utility poles within town that have outlets available to power the lights.

The new lights were purchased from **Mosca Designs** out of Raleigh, NC and feature new, energy efficient LED lighting. Unfortunately, due to the age and condition of the old lights, and the lack of available outlets on the utility poles, they were not able to be refurbished and used in addition to the new lights.

There are several ways municipalities dispose of old holiday lighting, including through donation, public auctions, or charity raffles. The Town has not yet determined how it will officially decommission the old lighting, however a public announcement will be made on the Town Website once a decision has been finalized. To follow the latest updates, just visit the **NEWS & NOTICES** section of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/NEWS or click the link below.

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Fresh Paint & A Facelift

In October, the parking lot beside the Recreation Center of SE 31st was closed down and roped off. Trucks, scaffolds, rigging, and all the equipment needed for a professional working crew were put in place. When looking on ground level however the key component of actual workers were nowhere to be seen.

That is, unless you were looking up!

For six weeks throughout October and November, the water tower behind the Recreation Center on SE 31st Street underwent a massive, and much needed facelift. At over 160 feet in the air, workers used harnesses, rigging, and suspended scaffolds to completely sand blast, repair, and repaint the entire tower, which required over **155 gallons of paint!**

Work was performed by Southern Corrosion out of Roanoke Rapids, NC, who regularly maintain the Town's water towers. Originally scheduled to only last four (4) weeks, the project saw a couple of delays due to unfavorable weather and a brief

pause to accommodate elections during the first week in November.

If you'd like to experience a first-person view of working at height, the project was documented with extensive aerial photos and video, provided courtesy of the Town's **UAS (drone) Division**. You can view media from the project on the UAS page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/UAS, or just click the link below.

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Beach Ambassadors Offer

Summertime Summary

The November edition of The CURRENT featured the summer season review from the [Oak Island Sea Turtle Protection Program](#). In addition to the Sea Turtle Protection Program, there are several non-profit programs which work together to ensure a clean, safe environment for all residents and visitors. Another recent summer season recap came from the **Beach Ambassador Program**.

Program Coordinator, Skip Cox presented the program's summer season review to the Town Council during their October regular meeting. 2021 actually marked the eighth (8th) season of the Beach Ambassador Program.

Due to ongoing COVID response, the program got off to a late start this year, beginning patrols during Memorial Day weekend. The 26 trained members (14 returning from the previous season) quickly made up for the late start, logging 346 individual patrols which totaled over 600 volunteer hours. This was up significantly from the 323 hours logged last year. Skip Cox noted that he was pleasantly surprised with the overall knowledge and adherence to beach rules seen in visitors. He reminded both visitors and specifically residents to be mindful of the leash ordinances, which require all dogs to be on-leash in public beach areas from March 16 - October 15. The Beach Ambassador's 2021 season officially concluded on Friday, September 10.

The Oak Island Beach Ambassador Program is a great opportunity for citizens to assist in promoting clean, safe, and protected beach areas for all users. The program is organized by the **Beach Preservation Society, Inc.**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation dedicated to education and community engagement to enhance the Oak Island beach experience. To learn more about the program and how you can volunteer or assist, just visit their website at www.beachoki.org/beach-ambassadors or click the link below.

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Top Turnout for "Trucks & Tunes"

Speaking of non-profit organizations who work together to promote the Town, the ***Oak Island Friends of Parks Foundation*** recently held their first ever ***Trucks & Tunes*** event on Saturday, November 20.

The Foundation's "FUNdraiser" hosted seven (7) craft vendors and four (4) food trucks at Middleton Park, and featured live music by the **Brunswick County Big Band**, photo ops with ***The Grinch***, and a silent auction. In addition, trophies were presented to the winners of the "OKI Olympics" — which included a Softball Home Run contest, Basketball 3-point and Foul Shot games, Pickle Ball Serving Challenge and Cornhole Competition.

Though the day started windy and cold, supporters still came out in force for the Friends of Parks Foundation. In all, the event raised more than \$1000 dollars, which the Foundation will use in their goal of making the beautiful parks of Oak Island even better!

The Oak Island Friends of Parks Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which works to provide financial support for specific, tangible additions to improve and enhance the Town's parks. They accomplish this goal by requesting donations, applying for grants, promoting fund-raising events and organizing volunteers. To learn more about the Foundation and how you can help their efforts, just visit their website at www.okifriendsofparks.org, or click the link below.

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NEWS & NOTICES: DECEMBER

Council & Board Meetings

REMINDER: All televised public meetings listed below will be broadcast live on OKI-TV (Spectrum Cable channel 8), as well as livestreamed on the Town Website. Meeting agendas, minutes, and any livestream or on-demand video available can be found on the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/MEETINGS.

TOWN COUNCIL (televised) will hold a Special Meeting on **Wednesday, December 8, 2021**, at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers, located on the second floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive. **NOTE:** The purpose of the meeting is to accept \$20M in beach nourishment funding from the State of North Carolina and to approve a Budget Ordinance Amendment for employee Christmas bonuses (to be paid for from the Town's General Fund).

TOWN COUNCIL (televised) will hold a regular meeting on **Tuesday, December 14, 2021** at 6:00 PM in the Council Chambers, located on the second floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive. **NOTE:** This meeting will also host the swearing in of newly elected Councilmembers and Mayor.

Seating may be limited due to larger than average attendance. **PLANNING BOARD** (televised) will hold a regular meeting on **Wednesday, December 15, 2021 at 10:30 AM** in the Council Chambers, located on the second floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive. **NOTE:** This is a one-time variation from their usual meeting day of Thursday, to accommodate other Council Chamber uses.

ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE (non-televised) will hold a regular meeting on **Thursday, December 16, 2021 at 8:30 AM** in the main conference room, located on the first floor of Town Hall at 4601 E Oak Island Drive.

CLOSURES & HOLIDAYS

HALF DAY: Administrative Offices, Public Services Offices, the Recreation Department and Oak Island Par 3 Golf will **CLOSE** at **NOON** for the remainder of the day on **Friday December 10, 2021**, to accommodate a holiday gathering and time for staff recognition in the afternoon.

CHRISTMAS: Administrative Offices for the Town of Oak Island will be **CLOSED** on **Thursday & Friday, December 23 & 24**, in observance of **Christmas**.

NEW YEAR'S DAY: Administrative Offices for the Town of Oak Island will be **CLOSED** on **Friday, December 31**, in celebration of **New Year's Day**.

As always for any holiday closure, Police, Fire, and other emergency services will not be affected, and will be available by **calling 9-1-1**. The **Oak Island Pier** will be open during these events at their current Winter operation hours of **8:00**

AM – 5:00 PM. All currently available parks and public Beach & Water Access locations and facilities will be open as usual.

REMINDER: the full *Holiday Calendar* can be found on the Town Website at: www.OakIslandNC.com/HOLIDAY.

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Shorter Hours, Virtual Access

Fans of winter may love its holiday memories, and the ... well, we're not really sure what else there is to love about winter! One thing even the most ardent fans of the season can agree on is that there is simply less daylight to go around.

To accommodate the ever-waning light, the Oak Island Pier has again adjusted its hours of operation. Now fully running on their winter schedule, the Pier is open daily from 8:00 AM

on their winter schedule, the Pier is open daily from 8:00 AM - 5:00 PM.

However, dedicated fans and hardcore anglers alike now have some serious consolation if going through Pier withdrawals. In November, the Town completed a project to **install a new webcam!** That's right, 24 hours a day, seven (7) days a week, you can now view the action on the Pier ... right from the comfort and warmth of your own home! Made possible through a partnership with [Vista Webcams](#), the new webcam is embedded on the Pier's page of the Town Website, and offers a first-hand view of Pier crowd levels, as well as current weather and water conditions.

For more details on the Pier itself, or to view the new webcam, simply visit the Pier's page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/PIER, or click the link below.

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Holiday Convenience

Whether it's a *desired* destination like the Pier, or a *required* destination like the **Garbage & Recycling Convenience Site**,

schedule changes are simply a matter of fact during this time of year.

The Convenience Site, located at 4110 Airport Road, will be **CLOSED** on Friday, December 24. The site will re-open regular hours the following week. However, due to both holidays taking place on a Saturday, there should be no disruption to the Garbage & Recycling Collection schedules. For those needing alternative disposal options, the Brunswick County Landfill and Convenience Sites will all be closed on **Saturday, December 25**, with the Landfill also closed on **Friday, December 4**. Additionally, all facilities will be closed for New Year's Day on **Saturday, January 1, 2022** as well. For full information on Garbage & Recycling in Oak Island, and to view the upcoming **2022 Collection Schedules**, visit www.OakIslandNC.com/COLLECTION or click the link below.

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"Hey, We're Walking Over Here!"

As the Town of Oak Island grows in both population and development, it is important to consider and accommodate ***all*** methods of travel through Town. One area of concern that is getting some much needed attention is pedestrian safety. Currently, the Town is working to address pedestrian concerns through a two-fold approach which includes sidewalks and crosswalks.

SIDEWALKS: Presently, Town staff are working to establish a sidewalk along the northern side of East Oak Island Drive. The new sidewalks will run from NE 58th Street to NE 50th Street and offer additional pedestrian access to businesses in the commercial district without having to cross Oak Island Drive.

CROSSWALKS: Because Oak Island Drive is a state maintained road, the Town has been in discussion with NCDOT requesting the installation of pedestrian crossings for the two (2) stoplights at 51st Street (Publix) and 58th Street (Beach Life). While a final timeline on when these crosswalks could be installed has not been given, NCDOT has presented

no objections to the request and has indicated it could be early in 2022.

Updates on both the sidewalk and crosswalk projects will be posted on the **PROJECTS** page of the Town Website. You can follow along with these updates by visiting www.OakIslandNC.com/PROJECTS, or clicking the link below.

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COMING EVENTS & PROGRAMS

REMINDER: Information on all special events, recreation programs, and educational activities can be found on the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/EVENTS.

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Tacky Holiday Sweater Contest

WHEN: December 13 • 6:00 PM

WHERE: Oak Island Recreation Center • 3003 E Oak Island Drive

WHO: Youth Category (5-14 years) Adult Category (15 years & older)

COST: FREE

ABOUT: Play Holiday BINGO (*see below*) in your tackiest holiday sweater (all holidays are welcome) for a chance to win seasonal prizes during December's Holiday BINGO at the Recreation Center. Offering prizes for both youth & adults, this year's Tacky Holiday Sweater Contest is FREE to enter and will be held at 6:00 PM at the Oak Island Recreation Center.

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Holiday BINGO Night

WHEN: December 13 • 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM

WHERE: Oak Island Recreation Center • 3003 E Oak Island Drive

WHO: Youth Category (5-14 years) Adult Category (15 years & older)

COST: \$3 in advance / \$5 at the Door (if spaces available)

ABOUT: Celebrate your favorite holidays with friends, family, and your social circle while competing for seasonal goodies at the Recreation Center. Featuring prizes for both youth and

adult categories, it's the perfect way to make memories with your loved ones this holiday season. Spaces are limited, so secure seats in advance by visiting

www.OakIslandNC.com/REC. Dotters will not be provided. For questions simply reach out to the Oak Island Recreation Center Supervisor, Carrie Winkler at cwinkler@oakislandnc.com or Recreation Center Assistant, Hannah Ennis at hennis@oakislandnc.com.

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Flashlight Candy Cane Hunt

WHEN: Saturday, December 11, 2021 • 6:00 PM

WHERE: Bill Smith Park (4446 Fish Factory Road SE, Southport, NC)

COST: FREE!

ABOUT: Get out and move while hunting for holiday treats with family and members of your social circle. Find candy canes and green & red eggs on the softball field at Bill Smith Park (4446 Fish Factory Rd. SE, Southport, NC) while enjoying hot chocolate and visit with Santa. Great photo opportunities

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Adult Holiday Crafts & Coffee

WHEN: Wednesday, December 16 • 10:00 AM - Noon

WHERE: Oak Island Recreation Center • 3003 E Oak Island Drive

COST: \$18 for Town residents/ \$22 for non-residents

ABOUT: Give the gift of creativity this holiday season as coastal residents and guests spend time making season crafts that can be enjoyed for years to come! Perfect for spending time with friends and connecting with your social circle, as this community opportunity creates seasonal delights including snowman globes that are filled with waterscapes

and holiday scenes. Sip on coffee, and enjoy a breakfast pastry or two while making holiday memories that are sure to last a lifetime.

PLEASE NOTE: There are **MANY** fun, educational, and exciting events and programs planned for the month ahead (way too many to list here)! For a complete list of upcoming activities, contact the Recreation Department at **910-278-5518**, or visit the **EVENTS** page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/EVENTS, or just click the link below.

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DEPARTMENT FEATURE: COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

"Good Communication is the bridge between confusion and clarity." -Nat Turner

Government, and really any institution which serves the public interest, is often made of many components. Even on the local level, at any given moment there are hundreds of individuals working in dozens of groups to perform thousands of different daily tasks. All with the same purpose of ensuring

different daily tasks. All with the same purpose of ensuring the residents and visitors in their charge are provided the best in safety, recreation, and public services they can provide. With so many parts needing to move at one time, it can be difficult to keep track of what your local government is doing to make the best of your tax dollars. If only there were some position, an **office** perhaps, that could **communicate** this information? Well, as self-evidenced by the name, that's exactly why the **Communications Office** exists!

As part of the Administrative Department for Oak Island Government, the Communications Office is primarily tasked with providing the public with clear, simple access to Town departments, services, and emergency information. That simple mission statement breaks down into a wide array of communication efforts which span broadcast, print, and online mediums. The office consists of one employee, the Communications Manager, who develops and distributes content to members of the media, civic groups and municipal partners, as well as individual residents and visitors. The Office utilizes near equal amounts of effort in the fields of public information, crisis communication, marketing and promotion.

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PROFILE: *Communications Manager:* Mike Emory has been working in the "hot seat" most all his life. Even as a child, he spent many nights asleep in the booths of radio and recording studios, alongside his DJ / studio musician father. At the age of 19, Emory landed his first job in television news as a part-time production assistant. Absorbing anything established veterans were willing to teach, within a year he had worked to the position of floor director, and eventually director. Growing in work experience alongside communication classes in college, within two (2) years, he had made the jump from production to news, working initially as a photojournalist, and later as a writer for online articles.

After seven (7) years in news, Mike Emory made the jump to local government, becoming a Public Information Specialist for Pitt County in 2010. In 2016 he was hired as Director of Public Information for Pitt County. He continued training at every opportunity, eventually graduating from the prestigious Master Public Information Officer (MPIO) course offered by

the Department of Homeland Security / FEMA in Emmitsburg, MD. Upon completing MPIO in 2019, he was one of only 64 graduates nationwide.

In late 2020, Emory along with his wife and two young daughters, traded their Pitt County farmland for Oak Island sand, as they moved so that he could accept the position of Communications Manager for the Town of Oak Island. In a quote "**best move ever.**"

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The resident A/V nerd. When working as a one-person operation, there's a wide range of skillsets that need to be employed. One day could be spent formulating a comprehensive public awareness campaign, while the next could be designing and building complicated broadcast equipment. To do this job, one has to be almost equally versed in *wiring* as they do *writing*.

"It keeps things moving," says Emory *"each day you're in the same place, but rarely ever doing the same thing."*

Work time each day is almost evenly divided between the office and the equipment control room. This is where the "magic happens" so to speak. It is a small, cold room behind the Council Chambers in Town Hall, that is filled with cameras, servers, computers, and all other equipment needed to make up a small television studio. Essentially that's what it is. During any given Council or Board meeting, this room controls the five (5) cameras,, three (3) recording outputs, television channel server, and online livestream broadcast equipment.

Although it's an "office of one" the Communications Office is highly unique, in that it interacts with almost every other department and division in the Town's government. From updating infrastructure projects for the Public Works Department, to creating recruitment materials for the Police Department, to developing online Beach Bonfire Permits for the Fire Department, the office works to help present information from nearly every aspect of the organization as a whole.



While the need to stay sharp in working through multiple mediums is important, there is one skillset that although (hopefully) little used, needs to always stay the sharpest. The need for clear, concise communication during times of emergency or disaster is critical. Not only for preventing property damage, but for saving lives as well. Emergency & Crisis Communication are key elements to any successful communications office. To communicate successfully in times of disaster, good communicators have to know three things: their listeners, their location, and their limitations. Effectively utilizing the resources available to reach the **right people**, at

the **right time**, with the **right information**, is critical to enabling people to make the **right decisions** for their own personal safety. In times of disaster or emergency, the Communications Office will make seamlessly integrated use of the Town's Website, social media accounts, and television channel, OKI-TV (Spectrum Cable Channel 8 / 122).

However, just because a hurricane isn't knocking on the front door, doesn't mean there isn't a crisis to someone, somewhere. Those moments when a contractor needs to know the specific ordinance on build to make schedule, or a family needs to know about beach bonfire permits so they can make one more memory with their aging mother; while these scenarios may seem insignificant to those not directly affected, a good communications office understands that, to these people in their moment the right information can mean a world of difference. That's why whether it's for a hurricane

or a summer concert series, information must be presented consistently and professionally. This allows anyone to easily recognize how to get the information they need, regardless what information they need.

While all information is treated with the same respect in how it is distributed, it's certainly reasonable to say that some projects are more enjoyable to work on. Certainly one of the most enjoyable projects for the Oak Island Communications Office (**i.e.** *Mike Emory*; **i.e.** *the person writing this now*), is this very digital monthly newsletter. As someone who has been fortunate to work on a multiple award-winning projects throughout the state and across the nation, the one thing that makes *The CURRENT* so uniquely enjoyable is **the response**. Such a strong and actively engaged readership among subscribers really shows a heartfelt attachment and dedication to this Town. As with the old saying "*like begets like*" that level of dedication inspires an equal return. *To be so deeply invested in the structure of your Town, only serves to inspire **this** Communications Manager to be equally determined to provide the information on that structure.*

To learn more about the Communications Office or how to connect with the Town of various media outlets, just visit the Office's page of the Town Website at www.OakIslandNC.com/PIO or click the link below.

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PHOTO REVIEW: NOVEMBER 2021





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