



Minutes
Town of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina
Public Forum
N.C. Aquarium, 1 Roosevelt Blvd., Pine Knoll Shores, NC
Thursday, May 16, 2013 – 6:00 p.m.



A regularly scheduled work session of the Atlantic Beach Town Council was held Thursday, May 16, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Meeting Room, 125 West Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

Members Present: Mayor A. B. Cooper, III; Mayor Pro Tem Harry Archer; Councilmembers: Ann Batt, Eddie Briley, Vada Palma and John Rivers

Members Absent: None

Others Present: David Walker, Town Manager; Katrina Tyer, Town Clerk; Sabrina Simpson, Administrative Services Director; Marc Schulze, Public Services Director; Allen Smith, Police Chief; Jeff Harvey, Deputy Police Chief; Adam Snyder, Fire Chief; Jessica Fiester, Planning Director; Donna Turner, Inspections Director; Kim Tynes, Permit Technician; June Harris, Accounts Payable Stephanie Ross, Special Events Coordinator and Charles Boney, Jr. LS3P Associates
Staff serving as directional guides: Laurie Hasulak, Tax Collector; Cheryl Hamilton, Water Billing Clerk

The regularly scheduled worksession was rescheduled from 2:00 p.m. at the Boardroom to 6:00 p.m. at the Aquarium to accommodate the potential space needs for a public forum.

Mayor Cooper called the Special Meeting of the Atlantic Beach Town Council to order at 6:00 p.m. Approximately 150 people were in attendance.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Pro Tem Archer made a motion *to approve* the agenda as prepared. Seconded by Councilmember Rivers. Vote was unanimous, 5-0. Motion carried.

REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED ATLANTIC BEACH TOWN CENTER PROJECT

Mayor Cooper began with an apology. He feels a lot of people are upset because of misinformation that has been going around and the feeling that the Council hasn't listened to them. For these things, he is sorry. The purpose of this meeting is to get the information out and to listen to the people. He stated appreciation for having everyone come out tonight.

Mayor Cooper explained that the year they took office, the budget in effect already contained funding for a space needs study. The need for renovated facilities is not a new need. The timing wasn't right for the space needs study 6 years ago because of funding and the economy. Since then, the budgets have been contained and the Town has built up their savings. The needs for more space and safety concerns are still very real and evident. Mayor Cooper reviewed some of the space and safety concerns that exist, lack of ADA facilities, primarily focused on the Police Department.

A couple years ago the timing and finances were right to begin a space needs study. The first set of architects found that the current Administrative, Police and Fire facilities contain 14,496 square feet and the recommended square footage was 32,438. There was a second space needs done by another architect for a second opinion to narrow those needs down. That study produced recommended needs of 20,361 square feet.

Mayor Cooper explained that with extensive research and review of our financials, we could afford about \$4 million worth of new debt without resulting in a tax increase, not that we would use that much money, but we know what we had to work with.

Mayor Cooper reviewed what our fund balance status is currently within statewide averages. He reviewed minimum requirements set by the Local Government Commission, the average for municipalities our size, values for our surrounding areas, and the available fund balance in Atlantic Beach.

Mayor Cooper began discussing the history of the town hall project. Architects reviewed the existing town hall site, the old Food Lion building and site, and the Circle Point location to see what it would cost to renovate, remodel or build new. Regarding the existing location, architect Charles Boney, Jr. with LS3P stated "I do not believe it is cost-effective to try to meet the Essential Facilities Code in this building. The required upgrades will exceed our current budget and the resultant building will be a compromise in quality and function." Regarding the old Food Lion building, Mayor Cooper stated the walls and roof trusses are in good shape, but the AC, plumbing, and electrical would all need replaced. The first quote for all new facilities came in at \$9 million at the old Food Lion site. The recommendation was made to renovate old Food Lion in stages with Administrative offices relocating first, then Police and Fire later. Another option was to leave Police and Fire where they are with enough renovations that fix the problems and space needs without overrunning the Facilities Code and then move the Administrative and Council spaces elsewhere. Those options were reviewed and cost estimates were received for the different

options explored. When plans were coming together for the old Food Lion building for Administrative, Council and Community space, a letter showed up in each of Council's boxes the day before the November worksession from Fred Bunn inviting discussions of building at the Circle where the Town already owns the land tract at the point, by the flag poles. In reviewing the needs, that tract wasn't big enough so that option wouldn't work. After looking at the most efficient, feasible, workable space and parking needs we knew how much more land would be needed. We came up with a proposal to see if we could get the additional land needed as a donation from Mr. Bunn. After much discussion and a written agreement, which still hasn't been signed, the land was to be donated to the Town for a specific use for nothing more in return than a tax write-off and easements. The proposed agreement is available for public inspection and has been posted on the face of the Town's website for public review. If the Town Center goes at the Circle Point, that would spur private development at the Circle. Sadly, it seems there are many members of the public that would rather see Fred Bunn fail than to see the Town prosper, just out of personal feelings for Mr. Bunn.

Mayor Cooper showed the proposed floorplans of the Circle Point Town Center and explained some of the potential uses of the common area on the second floor. The second story would not just be for Council meetings. The primary use is for Community Space – for wedding receptions, bingo games, dances, reunions, and more. The ideas are endless and you would have the ocean view in the space similar to the auditorium at the NC Aquarium, which would be fee based. Plans include to put a museum hall on the first floor for the public to enjoy.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilmember Briley explained that the reason for tonight's presentation was to show all the information that the Town has been reviewing over the past two years. They have looked at the best way to conserve public and town money. He voted to proceed with the Circle plan thinking it saved \$4 million for the Town. He has had the stance from the beginning, and continues to feel, that he would like to see a portion of the old Food Lion property sold if the Town Center is built at the Circle. He feels this is the best financial plan.

Councilmember Palma is excited about this prospect because this is the last piece of land available in the prime location of Town that shows what this beach used to be. It is the last piece of land at the Circle we will ever own and would love to see our footprint there. We would be able to show many memorabilia items on the ground floor in the Town Center that could be shared. She demonstrated old signs for concerts held at the Pavilion. She wants something visually attractive for the citizens and visitors that could preserve the past.

Councilmember Batt echoed Councilmember Briley and Councilmember Palma. She reminded the audience this isn't for ten (10) employees, it is for everyone here and for the public to use for their meetings, events, reunions, and weddings. We need something that looks neat and clean.

Mayor Pro Tem Archer is proud to be dubbed The Peoples Voice. He listens to what the people want. The Council is charged with being fiduciary responsible with the Town's monies and they are charged with setting the Town's policies. He is proud of his vote and proud of the privilege to be able to cast a vote. He is not and was not opposed to a Town Hall. He is opposed though for a Town Hall during these economic conditions seen in the country today. He said the people here are our most important asset that we have. Our people are what make us beautiful. The people on this Board want to listen to the people and make the best decision. Again, he is not opposed to a Town Hall; he is just opposed to a Town Hall at this time.

Councilmember Rivers' position all along is that we proceed with the new facilities and he is in favor of building a new Town Hall and renovate the Police and Fire. He doesn't have a preference on whether it is at the old Food Lion site or at the Circle, whatever the people want. He invites the public to go to our current facilities and see our existing spaces. He just wants to see the Town move forward. He feels the current Council has done a lot in six (6) years and doesn't want to stop now.

PUBLIC FORUM

Mayor Cooper opened the discussion to public comments and questions at 7:06p.m.

What is the cost? The building would be approximately \$3 million dollars. The motion in March 2013 was for it not to exceed \$3.5 million. This does not include the cost to renovate Police and Fire facilities – that cost would be another \$750,000.

Some members of the public said they don't like this style – it doesn't look like NC, it sort of looks like a church. Mayor Cooper clarified this was not the final design.

Parking spaces are limited at 27 spaces. How is that adequate for the banquets and such that have been mentioned could be held at the Circle location?

Everything that is being considered at the Circle right now looks residential. At what point will there be something for people to do? What about parking?

Mayor Cooper explained the parking spaces that would be proposed. He said we would have more spaces at the Circle than we currently have, and those would be for 10 employees other than the current 50+ employees. Those spaces on the weekends and evenings, whether at the Town Center or along East and West Drives will be public spaces. Mr. Bunn's plan, long-term, is to add a parking deck above the plant which would add more spaces. He will not be able to build the things he wants to build without a commitment to more spaces.

Comment from the audience that we have no more memorabilia left in Atlantic Beach. The rides are gone, the fishing tournament has hit bottom. We need to have things for people to do.

Pace Winstead first wanted to thank Council for all they do. She is against building at the Circle because it will bring in zero tax revenue to the Town. She doesn't see coming over the bridge and seeing a pretty building is what will appeal to people. Coming over the bridge and seeing a ferris wheel will. She thinks that is a valuable piece of property that should be used for a revenue generating item – whether paid parking or an amusement park.

Craig Griffin, who lives at the Circle near Crabs Claw, has seen the impact of the past Councils over the past many years. He has seen first-hand the changes at the Circle and those that the others are spouting out skewed. What he has seen isn't what people are saying they remember. The ferris wheel was in mid-repair and wasn't safe to ride on. The go-cart track probably had as many drugs sold there as rides. The type of people that used to come aren't coming anymore. The people coming now are families, the beach is lit up, and the image has cleaned up. The Council is responsible for that. If kids are looking for something to do, then they should go to the park. The park may be a future site for amusements, but not the Circle. He feels this is a great Community heading in the right direction. He feels we need to give this Council some trust, they are good stewards to what we want.

Linda commented she didn't want this at the middle of the beach. She feels Mr. Bunn should keep the tract and pay taxes on it. She feels the playground at the Park is backyard quality.

A former master planner spoke. He was involved in 8 ½ Marina and Tar Landing. He thinks we need to focus on getting back to nature. Mentioned putting a soccer field on the Circle tract.

David Jones, the regional vice president of Festiva, hopes this turnout is a trend. Locally, his company runs Peppertree. They have 130 employees, the largest payroll in AB, the largest tax base in AB, the largest contiguous property in AB. He is also a resident here. He has seen that the Town hasn't put back into its infrastructure or its parks. He sees Atlantic Beach is in a spiral and we need to turn this around. The businesses are leaving to cross the bridge. When the businesses leave, the people leave. When the people leave, the tourists leave. We need to start investing in this town. This may be the answer. The best sight in the world to him is crossing the bridge back to Atlantic Beach. Sadly, right now you see dirt. The tourists are also seeing the dirt first and last. Our town is dying because of this. He thinks what we are seeing tonight is a change in the right direction to turn this town around and keep the tourists here. He doesn't want to see waiting until next year and passing the buck.

Delores Sawyer, property owners in Atlantic Beach since 1961. She feels in this tough economic times we need to hold on to our money. She is worried that if we have a hurricane we will need the money that we have. She also thinks we will need the parking. She has heard a lot of rumors about parking and hopes to get some accurate information on that tonight. She doesn't know why someone allowed Mr. Bunn to put that mound of dirt right in the middle of the Circle with a concrete wall around it. She doesn't want the Town Hall at the Circle. If we need one, it should go at the existing location or at the old Food Lion site.

Mayor Cooper stated there is no commitment to give Mr. Bunn spaces or build spaces for him. The infiltration basins at the Circle were approved prior to him coming to office. That was approved when Harry was in office in the 2003 era and people can ask him that directly after the meeting.

Llewellyn Ramsey spoke. She said she has seen a lot of growing over the years, including many, many bars. She was one of the initial women in the fire service. At one time there were 18 bars from the Causeway to the Circle. We have come a long way over the years, especially with this board and Mayor. She would like to see maybe a mini-MacDaddy's at the old Food Lion site with maybe a long-term lease, possibly even some bowling or an arcade. She explained that Mr. Bunn had major plans at the Circle, but sadly got stopped because of the economy. She thinks it is encouraging that Mr. Bunn is starting his plans back again. She is confident that the sewer system can be camouflaged and doesn't see that an issue.

Joann Cannon was at the original meeting in 2003 when Mr. Bunn presented his plan. She doesn't understand why he can't donate his land to build a pier.

Darrell Morgan reminded Council that he walked the streets to get them elected. He said this meeting was a dog and pony show. The people here tonight do not want the building at the Circle. Why is this Council not listening to what the public wants? He asks the Council to reconsider this building. The people do not want it and they will not tolerate it. That isn't a threat, but they won't tolerate it. Six years ago you all agreed to be a spokesman for the people. Currently, you aren't being a spokesman for the people.

Rick Poillon said he appreciates the service that this group does. He has no qualms about Mr. Bunn. He said it still hasn't been proven that a new Town Hall is needed. He still isn't convinced that a second story cannot be added to the existing site. The reason the people are here tonight is because they aren't agreeing with the current decision about Town Hall that has been made. The reason people haven't showed up in the past is because they were happy with the way the Town has been running. He asks that the Council table this, put it off until the next election, and let the people speak.

Councilmember Briley made a motion to rescind a previous motion that was voted on at the last workshop on March 21, 2013, that we not spend the money for facilities at the Circle. Second by Mayor Pro Tem Archer. 4-1, with Councilmember Palma opposed. Motion carried.

Mayor Pro Tem Archer made a motion to propose that the Town Council pay an outside professional consulting firm to take a survey in the Town of Atlantic Beach of all taxpayers, as well as property owners. By doing this, this will give you the opportunity to voice your opinion in the survey. The survey should be done where the questions are done by an educational institution trained in this manner or professional organization trained in this manner. The results of this survey will be kept confidential by the surveyors and no comment would be released to anyone in this town, the mayor, the council, or the manager. The Council would then call for a public hearing where the head of the professional organization would present the findings of the survey. Also, in order to have an unbiased opinion, I offer two individuals who have served in the capacity and having been voted by the people of Atlantic Beach, that they would have the opportunity to review the questions that the organization has drawn up. This would be an unbiased survey taken by an unbiased organization.

Councilmember Palma questioned how much it would cost? Mayor Cooper feels cost will be minimal if done by an educational institution.

Mayor Cooper restated that a professional organization would do a survey and the content would be reviewed prior to it being sent out to all taxpayers in Atlantic Beach and all registered voters. Councilmember Briley seconded the motion. Councilmember Briley would like to discuss the survey details before it is done. All in favor of a survey was 5-0. Motion passes unanimously.

The purpose of the survey ultimately is to find out whether or not to move forward with a Town Hall at all, and if so, where to put it.

There being no further action taken or business before the Town Council, Councilmember Briley made a motion *to adjourn* the meeting. Seconded by Councilmember Batt. Vote was unanimous, 5-0. Time was 8:03p.m.

These minutes were approved at the June 24, 2013 meeting of the Atlantic Beach Town Council.

TOWN OF ATLANTIC BEACH

(SEAL)

ATTEST:

A. B. Cooper, III – Mayor

Katrina Tyer – Town Clerk