



MINUTES
Town of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina
Town Council Meeting
DoubleTree Hilton
2717 West Fort Macon Road
Monday, March 20, 2023 – 8:30am



The special meeting of the Atlantic Beach Town Council was held Monday, March 20, 2023, at 8:30am at the DoubleTree Hilton, 2717 West Fort Macon Road, Atlantic Beach, North Carolina.

Members Present: Mayor A. B. Cooper, III; Mayor Pro Tem Austin Waters; Councilmembers: Renea Baker, Joey Dean, Danny Navey, Joseph Starling

Members Absent: None

Others Present: John O'Daniel, Town Manager; Katrina Tyer, Town Clerk

Council met at 8:30am for coffee and a light breakfast.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Cooper called the meeting to order at 8:43am.

INTRODUCTION AND APPROVAL OF AGENDA

REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLAN & KEY FOCUS AREAS

Mayor Cooper stated that we need to work on policies and appearance around town. Street sign poles need to be straightened and fixed. Staff needs to fix things when they see things that need to be done. Council is to set the tone, and the Manager and Staff run with it.

He reminded Council of the Five Key Focus Areas in the Strategic Plan: Great Government; Smart Growth/Redevelopment; Recreation and Entertainment; Placemaking; and Environmental Stewardship and Resiliency.

Councilmember Navey wants to make sure safety is considered in these focus areas.

Council is considering incentives to reward employees for taking initiative and being more proactive in maintaining public spaces and fixing things when they see something wrong.

O'Daniel was directed to provide budget options this year so Council can make the hard decision. In the past, they have always been presented with a balanced budget, meaning management and department heads were the ones making the hard decisions and cutting items.

Mayor Cooper stated that the Town has great department heads and employees; let's loosen the reigns and let them thrive. We need to ensure that Council's priorities are understood throughout our organization.

VISION STATEMENTS

Mayor Cooper read each Councilmember's vision statement out loud. Mayor Pro Tem Water's statement covered regional thinking and partnership with others; we work with the County, emphasis on that with our decisions and theirs. Councilmember Baker wants to see Atlantic Beach grow in a way to allow us to enjoy what we have and bring money to this side of the bridge and define the culture we want to see for Atlantic Beach. We need to update our policies on appearance for commercial and residential. Councilmember Dean wants to make sure the current projects, such as the Boardwalk, The Grove, and the Causeway are coordinated so they blend. He also wants to make sure all departments are more aware of environmental pollutants and prevention.

We need to keep safety a top priority. With the recent murder in the town, we need to ensure Morgan receives PIO training and is the main point of contact, so all items are reported in a consistent way.

With everyone's input, Mayor Cooper read the below-combined Vision Statement:

Atlantic Beach, NC, is a small-town-oriented community that offers a water-rich family-friendly environment. Our focus is to grow in a way that will enhance opportunities for the businesses and residents here to be proud to call Atlantic Beach home.

The Town of Atlantic Beach projects, maintains, and enhances our sense of a barrier island beach town, historical heritage, and seaside environment. We provide leadership and encourage citizen involvement.

Atlantic Beach has the appearance of natural vegetation with an abundance of single-family classic beach-style housing and less dense residential complexes. Atlantic Beach has a commercial district that incorporates 90% of all businesses and is appropriate for a classy small-town beach community (no tattoo, piercing, vape, etc.). Atlantic Beach has clean beaches, access, and a boardwalk area that is heavily policed and free of drunks and other nuisance visitors that can be easily distinguished from the classy people that are welcome across the bridge.

Atlantic Beach to continue to move in the direction of carefully planned actions that will enable the anticipated growth to benefit the existing citizens and their relatives and those who visit as well and provide the best possible economic return for all people willing to invest in this community. I would like to see the efforts to upgrade to the highest quality possible the curbside appeal and all the aesthetic elements of the Causeway area and Circle areas in particular. And finally, consistent with careful planning and maximizing curbside appeal, I would like safety and environmental stewardship to be a premium concern for this community.

The Town of Atlantic Beach shall maximize opportunities for social and economic development while retaining an attractive, sustainable, and secure environment for the enjoyment of residents and visitors. Through responsible and professional leadership and in partnership with others, Atlantic Beach will strive to improve the quality of life for all residents living and working, not only in Atlantic Beach but the surrounding communities within Carteret County.

Mayor Cooper reviewed a recent US News Best North Carolina Beaches Ranking, and Atlantic Beach was ranked number nine, but that needs to change. We want people to be here and happy to cross the bridge.

REVIEW OF LAST YEAR'S RETREAT OBJECTIVES & ONGOING PROJECTS

Causeway and COR District Improvements: Redbird is still trying to get approval from the Utilities Commission for the wastewater facility. Yard & Company has proposed a bullet point list of proposed UDO Amendments that are a little too complex for what we were looking for. The committee has a follow-up meeting with Yard & Company next week. We are still planning on applying for State funding and working on potential donations. There needs to be a plan for fire hydrants and lines on both sides of the road to the bridge, whether through developers or the Town installing alongside Redbird's lines.

Boardwalk: The Town is applying for permits and will need a variance to build oceanward of the seawall. We are still working on the PARTF Grant requirements and have several informational meetings scheduled.

Break at 10:49am
Resume at 10:59am

Public Safety and Admin Complex: Councilmember Starling wanted to confirm that all the warranty items are addressed before the warranty expires. Things to follow up on are the fire department bay doors and the plan for screening the generator area. Sound panels and privacy curtains need to be considered for the EOC. The cracks in the interior steps have been there since town hall was constructed.

Technology Improvements & Staff Training: All of our computer systems are now cloud-based; all we have to move off of the island during a disaster are laptops. We have been researching companies for a new website. O'Daniel asked if Council wanted to continue using Zoom or explore YouTube. Mayor Cooper explained that we have state-of-the-art equipment in the boardroom and EOC, and staff needs to be trained to use it. He would like to continue using Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Planning Board Terms: Council agreed to change the Planning Board term expirations to align with the Board of Adjustment terms expiring in June. The idea of appointing a non-resident, but property owner Planning Board member is on hold.

Townwide Security Cameras: The project planning will be completed after addressing a pole location at the Circle, and we should be ready to order equipment for installation.

Aquaculture Leasing Program: We need this to stay on our radar. Follow up on when the moratorium expires and what can be done to protect our waters. Councilmember Starling does not want to see large floating structures and wants to know how to work with Marine Fisheries and other island managers on a joint effort.

Property Maintenance Issues: Our Ordinances need to be updated to have better maintenance rules. Staffing needs to be addressed so we have someone to do code enforcement. Councilmember Starling suggested hiring a part-time police officer or retired officer to enforce the rules. It was suggested that the on-duty officers could address violations as they ride around town, but there were concerns about distorting the reputation of officers.

Formalization of Community Design Committee: Mayor Cooper proposed the idea of this committee that could review major site plans and provide comments from a community perspective, not just check the boxes with our UDO.

ROW Encroachments: We still want to send letters to violators to remind people that these are the Town's rights-of-way. We need to make sure the violators know this is town property.

Golf Cart Parking at Beach Accesses: The plan with the Eagle Scout leading this project did not work out last year, so we need to identify the accesses with more area to park and mark three to four spaces and see how they are used. The golf cart program is working well.

Waterway Signs: Research determined that to put canal naming signage on the seawalls, we need the property owners' permission. We do not want to install them in the way of traffic in the canals but maybe can install them on the existing No-Wake sign poles. Mayor Cooper will send staff pictures and proposed locations.

New Branding Merchandise: Morgan has ordered tumblers, koozies, and PFG shirts that should be here by April. The retro rectangular license plates have sold well.

Reduce East Fort Macon Road Speed Limit: Council reduced the speed to 35 last year, and it has worked well.

Plan for a Crosswalk on Fort Macon Road and Charlotte Avenue: We are still working with NCDOT on the location of an acceptable location for the crosswalk due to the lack of a sidewalk.

**Break for group lunch in the hotel restaurant 12:03pm
Resume 1:07pm**

REVENUE ESTIMATES FOR FY 23-24

O'Daniel provided tax and revenue sheets for review. We are on target for the same tax collection as last year.

Councilmember Dean requested data on other towns' parking rates to determine if we are lower than others and could support an increase.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN REVIEW

O'Daniel provided a handout detailing the big-ticket items planned. Ways to handle future purchasing and financing were discussed.

COUNCIL/MANAGER COMMUNICATION

Council wants to continue with the weekly reports; they are very informative. Mayor Cooper reminded everyone that all group text messages are considered open meetings and follow the open meetings laws. A policy for group text message retention should be researched. O'Daniel has concerns over group texts turning into debates and conversations, not just information.

Council should always utilize the chain of command and contact the town manager directly for information. If they contact a department head directly, the town manager must be copied also.

EMPLOYEE RETENTION, BENEFITS AND COLA

Council would like to see the Police Department more active and visible in town-sponsored events and community events such as Coffee with a Cop and Citizen Academies.

Councilmember Navey has proposed to the Police Department to learn a law enforcement line dance for performing at the Beach Music Festival and National Night Out.

O'Daniel was directed to investigate incentives that could be offered to staff, such as after-school or daycare in conjunction with other towns. He was also directed to survey staff about benefits they would use and appreciate. He is curious about what staff would like to see that is not financial since we are considering a 6.5% COLA. He would like to question staff's perception of the longevity bonus, such as a better time to give it than before Christmas. Council suggested a staff social event before or after the Beach Music Festival. O'Daniel suggested raffles at the Christmas Breakfast for excitement and attendance rather than a party favor.

SOUNDSIDE PIER/LAUNCH AT BRIDGE ABUTMENT

Staff was directed to follow up on the development of this area with a kayak launch, a short pier for fishing, or perhaps a walking pier under the bridge. Follow up on the status of the NCDOT Agreement extension to utilize this area.

POTENTIAL ATLANTIC STATION REDEVELOPMENT

Council discussed the potential redevelopment of the Atlantic Station property and what they would like to see the property develop into. The consensus was for it to remain Commercial Periphery Zone (CPY). The developer can present a text amendment for Council to consider conditional zoning.

SOCIAL DISTRICT DISCUSSION

Council was asked if they would like to consider Social Districts and where those should be; the Circle, the Causeway Shopping Center, or Atlantic Station if it is redeveloped. The rules for these districts are precise, with defined boundaries, set hours, posted signs at the edge of the district, designated cups required, no outside alcohol allowed, and registration with NC ABC. Business owners need to be involved and asked about their interest, perhaps sending a letter to get their feedback.

PARK/PLAYGROUND IMPROVEMENTS

The existing equipment is rusted beyond repair. O'Daniel needs direction from Council to spend money on trying to make it work or simply remove it. Also, if Council would like to add a bounce house or other items this summer. Councilmember Baker wants to see if repairs are possible or feasible. Councilmember Starling wants to see it torn down. O'Daniel will provide the cost for inflatables and any insurance issues and repair costs.

Morgan has reached out to the NC State Natural Learning Institute to provide an estimate of costs to design a new play area.

Break 3:26pm
Resume 3:35pm

LIGHTENING ROUND

Vending Carts on the Beach: Council is not interested in allowing vending at this time. They still want to promote and support the brick-and-mortar year-round businesses.

East End Wastewater Cooperation: A Place at the Beach has to rebuild its wastewater plant. When Mayor Cooper started making plans to build a treatment facility for the Oceanana redevelopment, he was told to contact APATB and work together. A goal for the future, as the aging plants need rebuilding, is to get complexes on one plant so they can sell excess space to outside firms and save the homeowners associations.

Boat Lift Covers & Enclosures: No changes at this time.

Retention Wall at New Bern Beach Access & Septic Field: The adjoining property owner cleared their lot and pushed over some vegetation onto our drain field, leaving a dirt wall several feet tall. The concern is the dirt wall caving into the town's drain field. Staff will obtain estimates for the construction of a wall.

Mayor Cooper wants to review the Comprehensive Bicycle Plan Rivers and Associates provided years ago regarding a plan for a multi-use path on the north side of NC58.

CLOSING COMMENTS

Mayor Pro Tem would like to see the boats and vans parked along the right of way on the Causeway cleaned up and rules enforced.

Councilmember Starling wants to ensure that banners and signs used throughout town are consistent with our brand.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further action taken or business before Council the meeting stood adjourned. The time was 4:11pm.

These minutes were approved at the April 24, 2023 meeting of the Atlantic Beach Town Council.


TOWN OF ATLANTIC BEACH

ATTEST:

(seal)


Katrina Tyer - Town Clerk




A. B. Cooper, III - Mayor