

Nags Head Local Business Ad Hoc Committee Meeting

March 26th, 2015 Minutes

Nags Had Town Hall; Conference Room

Committee Members Present: Gayle Drummond, Jody Crosswhite, Bobbie Stager, Annette Ratzenberger, Bob Sanders, Garry Oliver, Deputy Town Manager Andy Garman, Deputy Planning Director Kelly Wyatt and Principal Planner, Holly White.

Public Present: No members of the public present.

Deputy Town Manager, Andy Garman opened the meeting, welcomed members and noted that Commissioner Cahoon was unavailable to attend today's meeting and was apologetic.

Adoption of Minutes: March 12th, 2015. Jody Crosswhite made a motion to adopt the minutes as presented, Gayle Drummond seconded the motion. The minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

Planning staff gave a brief update on the status of the signage factsheet as previously discussed noting that the intent is to have this information compiled and ready as soon as possible to distribute to all businesses prior to the summer season. Planning Staff asked that the committee revisit discussions on nonconforming signage and provided information that often times the bulk of the price of a sign, when considering the 25% or 50% repair threshold is located in the foundation. Several committee members elaborated on their own knowledge and experience and felt as though damage to the foundation would be rare and was comfortable moving forward with ordinance language increasing the percentage used to determine nonconforming sign compliance from 25% to 50% in the case of accidental damage, not simply age and allowing a sign structure to fall into disrepair. In situations where a sign has fallen into disrepair due to lack of attention and maintenance the 25% threshold would remain.

Deputy Town Manager, Andy Garman presented information to the committee on a project in the Town of Duck whereby an amortization was placed upon nonconforming signs and sign owners were given a specific date by which the sign must be brought into compliance. Andy noted that this was a complicated process and often times affected subdivision signs.

Jody Crosswhite suggested the question to answer may be: do we have a problem with, do we find these nonconforming signs to be bothersome? The committee felt as though the Town is different and diverse and the variety of signage both nonconforming and compliant does not seem to present a problem.

Bob Sanders stated that signage is very important to any business but especially here given that we are tourist driven and for a select number of months it is "feast or famine", anything to help business during this short period of time is welcome. Mr. Sanders also stated that his concern lies predominately with shopping center signage.

Planning staff noted that other jurisdictions have temporary/seasonal allowances for increased signage, specifically, Currituck County. They also have Town sponsored “way-finding” signs designating generally shopping/dining ahead. Gayle Drummond noted that Corolla and the surrounding areas are different from Nags Head.

The committee discussed the importance of social media, phone apps, and getting the business community together as a common voice. Garry Oliver informed the committee about a civic association that he was a member of in the 70’s which was instrumental in the discussion and development of many of ordinances and initiatives.

Annette Ratzenberger noted that much of what we are discussing, especially phone apps feeds into the idea of “branding” the Town. Garry Oliver stated that the slogan for the Town used to be, “A Secret Worth Keeping”. The Committee asked that Planning staff research and consider a presentation on “branding” in the future.

Deputy Town Manager, Andy Garman presented information on Landscaping/Buffering including the language from the Town of Duck and the Currituck County Ordinance. Andy requested that the committee review these documents and offer suggestions and share ideas at the next meeting. Much of the language in these handouts involved allowance of more natural landscaping keeping mind that buffering may be more linear and standard along district boundaries. Andy also introduced a proposed ordinance change to our codes which would prohibit the removal of any tree over 6-inches in caliper on a vacant lot where a building permit has not yet been issued. This would prevent people from clear-cutting lots when no plan for development has been submitted or approved. The committee thought this was a good amendment and wanted to ensure that it would not prohibit the removal of underbrush and vines, staff confirmed that it would not.

The committee inquired about the vegetation requirements applied to South Beach Plaza (Dunkin Donuts, Sweet Frogs, etc.). Staff updated the committee on the status of conversations with the current owner on the need to submit a compliant landscape plan.

Planning staff inquired of the committee, did they feel like in general landscaping was positive? The committee all felt as though it was attractive and did add value to the overall appearance of the business when tastefully done. The committee again asserted that a natural planting is more desirable, it is more aesthetically pleasing but allows for visibility at the same time.

The committee, with staff, felt as though it would be beneficial to re-evaluate our plant lists and identify plant species that truly do well in this environment. Also, providing planting options when trees/shrubs are to be located in proximity to septic areas.

Committee members discussed a variety of options from berms, terraced landscape areas and attractive perennials to be planted and maintained each year. Staff felt as though each option should be considered.

The committee expressed that they felt the discussions, suggestions and ideas were all going in a good and positive direction and would like staff to continue pursuing these revisions.

Deputy Town Manager, Andy Garman provided each committee member a graph and update on recent sales tax legislation that has the potential to dramatically and very negatively affect Dare County.

To wrap up the meeting Annette Ratzenberger shared a brochure she had brought back from Charleston, SC related to their free public trolley system. The committee felt that while it was a wonderful idea, it was also a very big idea and should be researched much more. Principal Planner Holly White stated that she would provide information on studies conducted on a possible trolley system in Corolla.

Staff thanked all the committee members for their participation; the next meeting was scheduled for April 9th, 2015 at 2:30 pm.

The meeting adjourned at 4:13 pm.