

## **Joint Workshop of Nags Head Local Business Ad Hoc Committee & Planning Board**

**September 24, 2015 Minutes**

**Nags Head Town Hall; Board Room**

Committee & Board Members Present: Annette Ratzenberger, Anne Farmer, Bobbie Stager, Ralph Buxton, Gus Zinovis, Bob Sanders, Gayle Drummond, Jody Crosswhite, Garry Oliver, Mark Cornwell, Clyde Futrell, Ben Reilly, Pogie Worsley, Mike Siers, Commissioner Renée Cahoon, Deputy Town Manager Andy Garman, Deputy Planning Director Kelly Wyatt, Principal Planner Holly White, Dare County Extension Director Shannon Brooks.

Public Present: Philip Ruckle, Coastland Times.

Commissioner Renée Cahoon opened the meeting and welcomed the committee members, Planning Board members and Shannon Brooks of the Dare County Extension Office.

Planning Staff member Kelly Wyatt gave a brief summary of previous discussions of the local business committee and planning board relating to landscaping/buffering and the desire to make informed amendments to the recommended planting list. Kelly then opened the floor to Shannon Brooks for her presentation.

Ms. Brooks began her presentation by acknowledging the concern with promoting or encouraging invasive species within the Town. She noted that there is no one specific list of invasive species but rather several – there is a federal invasive plant species list, a state invasive plant species list and numerous special interest group lists (ex: Master Gardeners). What is listed on the federal list may not be on the state list and what is listed on a special interest groups list may not be on either federal or state lists. Ms. Brooks explained what non-native “alien” plants can represent to our ecosystem and the laws around preventing their introduction in effort to help control and minimize the economic and ecological harm. She encouraged being careful with terminology as some plant species are aggressive but not necessarily invasive. Some plant species are naturalized but not native. As an example, Southern Magnolia is not native to this area however, they were introduced and they do well. Therefore, they are a naturalized plant species.

Ms. Brooks noted that while it is important to be mindful of encouraging and recommending the use of native species they may not always be the best choice for the circumstance and this is something the boards and committees should keep in mind and discuss. Ms. Brooks noted that the USDA provides distinct definitions of terminology and lists four (4) sources for information including links to plant profiles. These profiles, though sometimes extensive, can be very beneficial and provide the necessary information for each plant type. Ms. Brooks suggested that, if the Town was interested, once our list was completed it might be useful to provide the profiles for each plant type into a separate notebook or packet for informational purposes. Ms. Brooks also noted that once our sources are agreed upon we need to stick with them for consistency.

Ms. Brooks noted that after reviewing our current tree list from the Town Code that there are no invasive plantings listed, all of the plants are either native or introduced. Determining whether all of these plants actually thrive within the Town is a different story as Nags Head has “micro-climates” of dune beach, high wind, hot sun and maritime forest (only one of two in the world). Any plant list should encompass all of this, including the three zones we have here: beach, between the highways and west side. Ms. Brooks noted that our list was good but was somewhat limited and in reviewing Kate Murray’s suggestions there were many opportunities to broaden our list. Ms. Brooks complimented the list provided by Ms. Murray and very much agreed that preservation of existing landscaping should be priority as some plant species (ex: dogwood) thrive due their relationship with the soil and surrounding plants to the extent that if you were to transplant it elsewhere it likely wouldn’t survive. She noted that while she understood the context of the term “significantly native” it was not recognized terminology politically or within the university system and in moving forward it would be helpful to use nationally recognized terminology. Ms. Brooks noted that undertaking the task of developing a more detailed plant list for this environment was complicated and commended all of those willing to work on it. She pointed out that as we move forward we may want to identify our goals – while a goal may be to incorporate native plantings into our landscape, if those plantings provide shelter for animals, or even attract animals, that may not be a planting we would encourage near a business setting or alongside a roadway for safety purposes. Ms. Brooks also noted that some flowering and fruit plants are pollinated by flies, another item to consider depending on location and business type.

Following up on this comment, Deputy Town Manager Andy Garman confirmed with Ms. Brooks that Kate Murray was approaching the recommended planting list from the aspect of conservation given that the goal of the Nature Conservancy is to reduce the introduction of non-native or aggressive species into conservation areas. Ms. Brooks agreed and noted that there are numerous species you would not want to introduce into or around the conservancy areas. Ms. Brooks noted that as an example you certainly would not want to introduce or encourage Russian Olives in or near a conservation area, it is not considered an invasive plant but is very aggressive and difficult to remove.

Ms. Brooks handed out a document compiled by NC State University titled “Coastal Plant Information: An Introduction to Landscape Plants for Coastal Dare County”. She noted that this is one of the most commonly requested and used resources in this area and that it was compiled by Ms. Susan Ruiz-Evans. This document denotes where you should locate plants, their resistance to wind burn and salt, vigor of growth, whether best as a hedge, etc. This document also addresses micro-climates and how to determine what plantings will thrive in your location. Ms. Brooks handed out copies in hopes that it would help the Local Business Committee and Planning Board in their decision making process.

Planning Board Chairman, Mark Cornwell thanked Ms. Brooks for the great resources and inquired if there would be a problem dispersing or using this document, were there any copyright concerns in using the information. Ms. Brooks noted that it was a resource compiled by NC State University and while she could use it and disperse it as necessary she wasn’t entirely certain about the Town distributing it. She felt that if it was used in our decision making process as long as it was properly referenced and cited, credit being given to the appropriate agency, then it should not be problematic. She also noted that most if not all of the information contained in the document came from a book titled “Seacoast Plants of

the Carolinas: for Conservation and Beautification.” Staff commented that we have several copies within the Planning Department for reference.

Commissioner Cahoon inquired of Ms. Brooks if she felt it would be helpful to categorize our preferred plantings into zones as she had mentioned previously: beach, highway and west side. Ms. Brooks said she thought that would be helpful and the charts included had already addressed some of that.

Deputy Town Manager Andy Garman noted that when creating the list of tree species it should also be considered how available or accessible these trees truly are to local contractors and landscapers in the area. He noted that on very few properties do you see trees growing to any significant height on the east side of the beach road and that a consideration may be given to whether we need to even be requiring tree species on the east side, given the susceptibility to high winds and salt spray. Part of the process could be providing more detailed information (such as plant profiles) so that contractors and landscapers can make more informed choices and decisions in designing their site.

Ms. Brooks agreed that due to high winds, salt, etc. tree species rarely grow well on the oceanfront and that where they do it is likely a result of a structure creating a buffer of sorts. She also noted that once we define our goal(s) it is likely we could achieve a very diverse landscape by incorporating shrubs and grasses in these areas and often times trees may not be the best choice for the site. In terms of tree and shrub availability, Ms. Brooks stated that they do not tell people where to go but that if we created a comprehensive list it could be quite likely, given the fact that Nags Head represents many consumers, that the local nursery’s would begin carrying the types of plants we recommended. She did note that some native plant species do not seed well and therefore nursery’s may tend to not carry them, in which case, we can really promote preserving as much of the existing vegetation as possible.

Andy Garman inquired about maintenance of the tree species noting that several locations within the Town have had to replant due to plants not surviving and is there anything that takes root and grows well with little care or maintenance. Ms. Brooks noted that for the first three (3) years almost every plant needs attention and unfortunately, those that don’t need care fall on the invasive list.

Anne Farmer asked about the ease of transplanting trees, for instance, if there were a significant tree on a construction site but it was located in an area where it needed to be removed, could it be transplanted elsewhere. Ms. Brooks stated that this is typical information that would be contained in the plant profile discussed earlier. However, many trees, once matured, have created a relationship with the surroundings and is not likely to thrive if transplanted. Before pursuing a transplant or relocation it is important to read and understand the plant profile for the tree or plant species.

Annette Ratzenberger and Commissioner Cahoon inquired about laws surrounding invasive species. Ms. Brooks noted that some states do have laws about what species can be introduced into their state. She noted that there is a current problem with nematodes invading Japanese Black Pines, the nematodes are being transported to the trees via beetles. When the trees begin to decline and are taken down often times the woodchips remaining will contain the nematodes so, when wood chips are not heated it allows the nematodes to spread to other areas, making it a rampant issue here on the Outer Banks.

Commissioner Cahoon asked Ms. Brooks if Japanese Black Pines had a lifespan as many of the trees within the Village at Nags Head were planted at the same time and appear to be declining at the same time. Ms. Brooks stated that they do have a shelf-life but if they are declining due to the nematode there was no proven way to eradicate them aside from removal of the tree and disposal of the wood. Clyde Futrell stated that he had heard you could gas the soil around the tree. Ms. Brooks noted that may be a means of treatment for a single tree but it likely would not eradicate the nematode from the area generally. Ms. Brooks noted again that you could access the list of invasive species by going to the website for the USDA ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)), locate the national database and then narrow it down by state, accessing the list of North Carolina specifically.

Mr. Cornwell noted that a lot of helpful information has been provided and asked Commissioner Cahoon and the Local Business Committee what the next step would be in terms of the Planning Board formulating the text. Commissioner Cahoon stated and the committee agreed that something simple, educational, and easy to read and understand would be best.

Jody Crosswhite requested that in putting this information together we all keep in mind that landscaping is often the last component of completing a site and often times the last thing they want to spend money on so keeping in mind the height, spacing and availability of plantings is important. Commissioner Cahoon noted that consideration could be given to allowing some flexibility in order to ensure that what is planted is something that will thrive and do well and not something that will have to be replaced due to incompatibility with the environment. Also, allowing clumping of vegetation will be helpful as opposed to a linear hedge-row.

The committee agreed that constructing a reference guide or book of plant profiles with pictures would be user friendly and helpful in letting people know that are purchasing and installing. Andy Garman noted that it could also be beneficial to come up with cross-sections or diagrams of the plantings that engineers or contractors can incorporate into their plans (i.e. cross section of tree & shrub clusters or shrub and grass clusters) depending on the environment/zone in which the site is located. Andy Garman noted that in many instances engineers are preparing the commercial site plans. If they had more detailed information regarding landscaping or acceptable cross-sections of plantings they may incorporate more diverse and hearty plantings into their designs. Commissioner Cahoon also noted that we should keep in mind growth rates and placement of plantings so to not impede sight lines and sight triangles.

Jody Crosswhite inquired about the need to continue to have both minimum and maximum heights at planting. Many felt as though having a minimum height was necessary but a maximum may not be as essential. It was noted that consideration could also be given to gallon-size or caliper of the tree. Ben Reilly stated that a minimum height at planting is important to ensure the intent of the ordinance is met, he also noted that variety of plantings (trees, shrubs, flowers, etc.) mixed into elevated dune areas like that at New York Pizza Pub is attractive.

Pogie Worsley noted that as we move forward there should be discussion and consideration on the planting times, Autumn and Spring. Mr. Worsley also mentioned the use of palm trees and the difficulty to maintain them through our harsh winter months.

Clyde Futrell noted that maintenance is key but it can also become very expensive, making many people inclined to only do the minimum required, especially on residential projects.

Ralph Buxton commented that there are likely some areas of the town where it is difficult to maintain vegetation, giving an example of the difficulty he faced at Jockey's Ridge Crossing with drifting sand covering and suffocating the plantings. He noted that providing something to essentially catch the sand could be helpful but difficult all the same. Gus Zinovis noted that he has blowing sand on his property sometimes but it's not overly intrusive.

Ms. Brooks noted that NC State University publishes several small brochures or pamphlets on the basics of tree plantings. These are accessible online or the Town may wish to print them for distribution. On the same hand, she is available for questions so anytime we receive questions from business owners, residents, etc. we should feel free to forward them to her. While she cannot design a concept for them she can and will offer guidance.

Ben Reilly thanked her and asked if, in considering the three (3) zones (beach, highway, west side) if she could denote on the chart provided in the Coastal Plant Information handout what zone each planting is most suited for. Ms. Brooks said she would do that and forward that information to staff.

Commissioner, Renée Cahoon and Planning Board Chairman Mark Cornwell commented that there is some significant work to do but refining the list and keeping it simple and understandable should be the next steps. It was determined that the Local Business Committee would begin discussion of this at their October 15<sup>th</sup> meeting and a framework would be provided to the Planning Board as soon as possible.

Ms. Brooks thanked everyone in attendance and expressed her excitement to help with the process and availability to answer questions as they arose.

Commissioner Cahoon thanked all the committee members and Planning Board members for their participation and the meeting adjourned at 4:00pm.

**\*\*Following the meeting Ms. Brooks sent an email to all members of the Local Business Committee and the Planning Board regarding Russian Olive as an invasive plant species. She had received questions about this and upon further research found that Russian Olive is on the National Invasive Plant Species list but it is not on the North Carolina State Invasive Plant Species list. She again noted that it is an aggressive plant and may not be suitable for our purposes and goals.\*\*\***