

Nags Head Septic Health Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

May 28, 2025

Location: Conference Room, Town Hall

Attending: Commissioner Megan Lambert, Bob Muller, Robert Crawford, Basil Belsches, Bob Edwards

Staff: Amy Miller, Kelly Wyatt, Joe Costello, Conner Twiddy

Staff welcomed the committee and noted that the purpose of the meeting was to continue discussion from the prior SHAC meeting regarding the scope and targeting approach for the proposed DWI no-interest septic loan program. Staff shared that a brief update had been provided to the Board of Commissioners outlining progress to date and the general path being pursued to identify higher-risk properties, and that no concerns were expressed by the Board regarding the approach.

Deputy Planning Director Joe Costello walked the committee through the methodology staff has been developing to better define and prioritize “high-risk” properties for potential eligibility under the DWI loan program. Staff explained that mapping efforts initially focused on improved properties that are soundfront, canal-front, adjacent to stormwater ditches, or bordering marsh areas west of South Old Oregon Inlet Road. From that dataset, staff excluded properties that:

1. have had a septic repair within the last five years based on Dare County Health Department (DCHD) records;
2. do not have conventional septic systems; and
3. have previously participated in the Town’s Septic Health Initiative loan program for repair or replacement.

Staff further refined the dataset by applying elevation criteria, reviewing properties at or below three feet mean sea level, and then further narrowing the focus to those with on-site elevations of approximately two feet or less. Joe Costello presented elevation mapping illustrating these conditions, with concentrations noted in South Nags Head Cove, Soundside Road, Lakeside Street, Old Avenue, Pond Island, and Lone Cedar (noting that Lone Cedar properties are generally newer and more elevated).

It was noted that septic repairs typically involve replacement of the drainfield and that costs increase when fill is required to meet DCHD requirements. The committee discussed that DCHD generally requires a system to be failing or malfunctioning in order to mandate elevation or more substantial repair, with indicators such as surfacing effluent or ponding in yards.

The committee discussed prioritizing outreach to the approximately 280 properties identified through this process as potentially “higher risk”. Committee members

emphasized that the proposed loan program would be open to both primary and secondary residences and is not restricted based on occupancy type. Staff noted that while the DWI grant language references malfunctioning or failing systems, staff is working to clearly define what constitutes a “compromised” system within the scope of the program.

Committee members discussed outreach strategies to encourage participation, including the idea of hosting a targeted community meeting (with virtual participation options) for property owners who meet the identified criteria. The intent would be to explain the program, outline eligibility, and encourage voluntary participation, recognizing that property owners are often the most familiar with the condition of their own systems. Members noted that discussion among neighbors could also help build awareness and comfort with the program.

Staff and the committee discussed grant timing and utilization requirements, noting that the DWI funds must be used within a four-year period. Committee members discussed the possibility of initially focusing on targeted outreach for a defined period and then reassessing broader eligibility if participation levels do not meet expectations. Staff noted that final program implementation remains subject to approval by the Local Government Commission (LGC), including public notice and a public hearing, and that the grant timeline would begin upon contract execution.

Deputy Town Manager/Finance Director Amy Miller provided input on grant requirements, including principal forgiveness considerations, Davis-Bacon and American Iron and Steel provisions, and repayment structure. Staff noted that loan repayment is anticipated to follow the same process as existing septic loans, with repayment added to utility billing, and that repayment would not begin until after the four-year grant period.

The meeting wrapped up with Mr. Muller noting that the water-quality logger at Old Cove Road would benefit from additional signage to improve visibility and public understanding.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:40 AM.