

Nags Head Septic Health Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

October 13, 2025

Location: Conference Room, Town Hall

Attending: Comm Megan Lambert, Rob Crawford, Basil Belshes, Bob Edwards

Staff: Andy Garman, Conner Twiddy, Joe Costello, Kelly Wyatt

Staff welcomed the committee and noted that the meeting would include updates on septic health program numbers, status of groundwater and water quality monitoring efforts, and continued discussion regarding the scope and implementation of the Division of Water Infrastructure (DWI) zero-interest loan program. Staff also introduced Isabelle Pala, an intern from UNC–Chapel Hill participating through the Coastal Studies Institute (CSI) program. Isabelle has been brainstorming new educational marketing opportunities for the Septic Health Initiative, joining Environmental Planner Conner Twiddy on septic inspections, logging coordinates of septic tank infrastructure and coordinating with Dep. Planning Director Costello on learning GIS mapping.

Staff provided an update on groundwater and water-quality monitoring equipment. It was noted that recent challenges have been experienced with groundwater-level loggers related to potentially to humidity, and other technical issues. Staff discussed ongoing troubleshooting efforts with the ground water loggers and noted that functioning water-quality loggers continue to provide useful data. The committee discussed the importance of these loggers, their locations, continued maintenance, upkeep and willingness from OTT to provide support as needed.

Staff provided an update on recent Septic Health Initiative participation numbers, including 34 inspections completed since July, 2 loans processed, and 35 pump-out credits issued. Committee members discussed current pump-out costs, noting that a standard 1,000-gallon pump-out is approaching approximately \$450-\$500, reinforcing the importance of maintaining adequate incentives and outreach to encourage participation.

Staff also shared outreach experiences, including engagement at community events such as the Dowdy Park Farmers Market and other public venues, where program awareness continues to grow.

The committee continued discussion regarding the scope and implementation of the DWI zero-interest loan program. Staff reviewed outreach efforts to date, including the contractor workshop outlining Davis Bacon and American Iron and Steel requirements. It was noted that contractor interest in the program has been strong, with good workshop attendance,

good questions focused on materials, compliance requirements, and construction standards.

Discussion included materials typically used in septic repairs, such as plastic, metal, and concrete risers, and the benefits of plastic components in terms of durability and reduced maintenance. Staff emphasized the importance of helping with keeping and tracking compliance paperwork in hopes of making it clear and manageable so as not to discourage contractors or homeowner participation in the DWI program when rolled out.

The committee discussed outreach strategies to property owners identified as potentially higher risk based on environmental conditions. Concepts included more assertive but still supportive messaging. Members discussed framing messaging around environmental sensitivity and susceptibility based on location, particularly in South Nags Head and Cove areas. Ideas included the use of door hangers, QR codes to provide program information, and clearer explanations of what a pump-out or inspection entails. Committee members noted the importance of avoiding overly alarming language while still conveying the environmental and public-health purpose of the program.

Staff and the committee discussed continued outreach and education opportunities, including the use of short, engaging video content and social media “reels” to reach both homeowners and visitors. Messaging ideas included “Septic Stories” that explain what to expect during inspections, address common concerns (such as yard impacts and mounding), and normalize septic maintenance as part of responsible coastal living.

Staff noted coordination with PIO Roberta Thuman, to support video development and outreach messaging, and discussed tailoring content to different audiences, including homeowners, visitors, and real estate professionals. Intern Pala had a good insight and offered to look into creating Reels, or similar, for the program.

Staff shared that the Town has been invited to participate in additional outreach and educational opportunities, including podcasts and professional forums, to further promote the Septic Health Initiative and share lessons learned with other coastal communities, including an upcoming clean water and fisheries symposium in Beaufort, NC.

The meeting concluded with general discussion regarding next steps for logger equipment maintenance, outreach efforts, and continued refinement of the DWI loan program scope.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:00 AM.