

Nags Head Septic Health Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

January 27, 2025

Location: Conference Room, Town Hall

Attending: Commissioner Megan Lambert, Bob Muller, Robert Crawford, Wayne Varilek

Staff: Kelly Wyatt, Joe Costello, Conner Twiddy

Staff welcomed the committee and provided a mid-year update on Septic Health Initiative participation numbers. Conner Twiddy reported that to date the program has completed 92 inspections, issued 42 credits, and processed five septic repair loans, noting that the program is currently ahead of pace compared to the same point last year. Staff attributed increased participation to outreach efforts including CRS letters, Town newsletters, and visibility at Dowdy Park, and noted that several inspections were initiated by property owners who had not previously participated in the program.

Staff provided an update on water quality monitoring efforts, including new and proposed logger locations at South Colony Drive (north end), Old Cove Road (canal end), Bonnett Street Bathhouse, and Dowdy Park near Wrightsville Avenue. The committee discussed whether a neutral control site should be identified for baseline comparison. Staff noted that no other towns are currently conducting comparable monitoring, though the Town of Duck has expressed interest in learning more about our program.

The committee discussed the number of active sampling locations, including both loggers and hand-sampled sites, and the desire for broader baseline data for comparison. Are other locations, localities doing something similar?

Discussion shifted to program participation incentives and outreach strategies. Committee members noted that while 42 credits issued to date may appear low, many properties remain within the three-year eligibility window. Several members expressed concern that fear of inspections may be discouraging participation, particularly concerns about triggering costly system upgrades or advanced treatment requirements. Staff noted one example involving a property owner hesitant to participate due to concerns about system type, yard impacts/mounding, and expense.

The committee discussed the potential benefit of redirecting or supplementing funds toward marketing and outreach, rather than solely increasing credit amounts. Suggestions included hiring a professional marketing firm, developing testimonial-based outreach highlighting successful inspections and repairs, and conducting a survey to better

understand barriers to participation (e.g., lack of awareness, fear, or cost concerns). Members emphasized the importance of messaging that helps normalize septic maintenance, noting that unlike daily issues such as trash, septic systems are often “out of sight, out of mind.”

Additional outreach ideas discussed included:

- Partnering with Dare County Environmental Health Department to include septic program information with repair permits in Nags Head
- Expanding or revisiting messaging through water bills, particularly given recent success identifying leaks through new meters.
- Engaging home inspectors as a potential outreach channel.
- Explore chatting with cleaning companies or other similar service providers who regularly interact with homeowners.

The committee also discussed whether to increase the septic credit amount as an added incentive, noting that pump-out costs are approaching \$460–\$500 for 1,000-gallon systems and up to \$700 for larger systems. A potential target of \$250 per credit was discussed as a balance between incentive and program sustainability.

Deputy Planning Director Joe Costello provided an update on ongoing efforts to create an API connection with the Hydromet Cloud to allow for real-time data integration, noting that this work is cumbersome and still in progress. Staff also referenced continued maintenance of county septic records as part of the broader data-management effort.

The meeting concluded with general discussion and direction for staff to continue exploring both enhanced marketing strategies and potential incentive adjustments to increase program participation.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at approximately 11:30 AM.