

Minutes
Town of Atlantic Beach, North Carolina
Town Council Retreat
Saturday, January 15, 2005

The Atlantic Beach Town Council held a retreat on Saturday, January 15, 2005 at 11:00 a.m. at Finz Restaurant in Morehead City for the purpose of developing goals and objectives for the Town of Atlantic Beach in preparation for the upcoming FY 2005/06 budget.

Members Present: Mayor Pro Tem Eddie Dawkins; Council Members Harry Archer, Doug Creech, Tom Doe and Christie Roberson

Members Absent: None

Others Present: Chuck Cooper, Town Manager; Leslie H. Eldredge, Town Clerk

CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins called the meeting to order at 11:13 a.m. All Council members were present.

Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins asked the Town Manager to generally review the agenda and how the retreat would be conducted for discussion purposes. Basically, the retreat would be a round table discussion during which each Council Member would have a turn to speak.

Expectation Setting – Roles, Responsibilities, Communications (Method and Frequency) and Approvals

A. Town Council Expectations of Manager

Councilman Creech – work sessions have become more like regular meetings. Work sessions should be controlled by the Town Manager. He brings topics to the Council for discussion so the Council can be ready to take action at its regular meetings. Work sessions are strictly for the Council and public comment should not be taken. Councilman Creech wants to move forward on sewer, sidewalks and the Circle.

Councilwoman Roberson – agreed with Councilman Creech regarding work sessions. Council needs to become more focused on goals. Circle redevelopment may be driving other goals such as sewer and should drive in conjunction with those goals, not separately. Council needs to determine goals. Sidewalks and the Boardwalk should be a focus, especially with regard to grants.

On the organizational chart, the Admin box should be directly below the Town Manager box and administer to the rest of the departments.

Councilman Doe – the organizational chart is “bloated” on the top end. Council and Manager set standards and the Manager sees that they are carried out. Important goals are sewer, sidewalk, the Circle and stormwater. The Council needs to set its own operating procedures and not continue to follow what was done in the past by previous Councils. The Police Department retirement grievance needs to be dealt with immediately.

He had met with the Town Manager briefly regarding (1) the Town Website (he’d like to be involved in its updating and operation); (2) the years of work with Town photographs and artifacts and how they’re taken care of; and (3) his work on the beach (keeping it pretty, keeping it safe).

Issues that are to be addressed from the management view include (1) how the Manager does what he does, not what he does; (2) prioritize spending and obtain justification for spending; (3) water billing (the billing range is 30 days \pm 10 days; his last bill was a 42-day cycle; either the meter readers need to be on a schedule or the billing program needs to be rewritten to solve this problem; for example, take into account the over/under time periods); (4) stop postponement of work that needs to be done (if a repair is needed, do it as soon as possible; if a sign or post is crooked, straighten it immediately; maintenance should be a constant activity); (5) polling the Council is a bad way of doing business; (6) some Council members are spending too much time in the Town Hall (meddling makes for a dysfunctional Council); and (6) communication with the Town Manager (Council members cannot expect the Town Manager to read their minds; likewise the Manager has to ensure that the Council knows what is going on in the Town; likes the idea of the Manager providing the Council with his schedule/calendar).

Councilman Archer – stressed cohesiveness among the Council members, cohesiveness of the Manager and staff, everyone should work together as a team with confidence and trust, and communication is most important to him. Everything should focus on improving the Town of Atlantic Beach. Just because something was done does not mean it was technically correct. Do not succumb to the concept of “It’s always been done that way.” Thinks cell phones would be a good method of communication.

Council members should have respect for each other’s ideas and views.

Communication comes from leadership. The Town Manager should lead, and lead with vigor. If he feels something is beneficial and cost-worthy, move forward with it or bring it to the Town Council.

Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins – the Council can change the rules for work sessions. Work sessions should be for the Council to work on topics, and then take action on those topics at regular meetings. Thinks the Town will be using fund balance again to avoid a tax increase.

Council should look closely at how it puts Town employees in harm's way (cited the Pine Knoll Shores fire and the mutual aid agreement between the two towns as an example). When answering mutual aid calls, is the Town of Atlantic Beach going to assist or take control? The Town Manager must analyze what is going on in the organization. The organization should be aligned to meet the product (public service is the product). The Circle is changing a lot, and the Town is changing a lot.

B. Town Manager Expectations

Mr. Cooper thinks the Council understands for the most part NCGS Section 160A-148, which outlines the duties and powers of the Town Manager. Asked the Council to speak as one voice, especially when it comes to decisions that will affect the taxpayers and the Town of Atlantic Beach. Stated he could have personal conversations with the Council members individually as friends, but the Council needs to act as one body. He is taking a leadership role, but asked the Council to let him know if it wants more input. Has already instituted staff meetings every two weeks. Addressed the combined Finance Officer/Town Manager position. The Town of Atlantic Beach needs a Finance Officer, but it is still an open question as to whether it should be him. He spends 50% to 60% of his time on finance matters, especially now while preparing the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR).

Councilman Does thinks he should find a way to manage financial matters with a financial clerk, not someone at a department head level. Manager needs to get labor and the chain of command under control. Councilwoman Roberson thinks the employee pay structure should be based on incentives. If someone is capable of doing more, let the person do so and compensate him/her accordingly. Councilman Doe felt there should be a total management overhaul.

Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins called for a break at 12:50 p.m. The retreat was reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

Strategic Projects/Goals – Town Council Members Key Goals, Priorities and Key Projects

Councilman Creech – important short-range project is sidewalks. Would like to know the time frame for them.

Long-range projects include (1) sewer (Council needs to get back to work on that project; Town Manager and Public Works Director need to give the Council updates); (2) stormwater (runs hand-in-hand with sewer); (3) the Circle (will be getting updates); (4) dredging (Public Works Director is working on dredging; will see progress within the next year); (5) restructuring the organizational chart (let the Town Manager handle); (6) deferral of work

by employees was mentioned earlier, but he has never seen it or heard it; (7); Town Website (Councilman Doe's input would be great); (8) another retreat is a good idea; (9) revaluation of property in the Town of Atlantic Beach (property value will increase 70% in 2007); (10) tax increase is a possibility; and (11) Fire Department responded to the fire in Pine Knoll Shores. Town of Atlantic Beach firefighters took over because they are the professionals. Prime opportunity to combine the Atlantic Beach and Pine Knoll Shores Fire Departments and have the Town of Atlantic Beach manage it. Bring to Pine Knoll Shores' attention that money would improve its Fire Department.

Councilwoman Roberson – is against raising taxes. Find innovative ways to charge for Town services. Monitor and charge the people for the services they receive. Stormwater, water quality and sewer are important. Talked about visible differences. “Green and clean” – the bench and palm tree programs made significant differences. The Town needs sidewalks within the Town limits. Connectivity of sidewalks is important. Include the Boardwalk with sidewalks. Would like the Boardwalk improved. Alleyways in the Town are neglected. Beach access is also important.

Councilman Doe – Town does well obtaining projects but fails miserably in maintaining them. Sewer, sidewalks, stormwater management, dredging, and the Circle are important. Separate canals – feeders to houses, and feeders to get into the Town. There is a strong proponent in the Town of Atlantic Beach for sewer; much is based on self-interest, but that is okay. Council takes a half-step toward sewer, then drops it for a while. Should not leave any sewer meeting without setting the next step. Maybe define sewer by need. In any case, Council needs to find the best project possible and set a time frame for completing it.

Mentioned the “bigger picture” of inter-town cooperation. Joint water with Pine Knoll Shores? Emergency medical services, water, fire and police – the Town of Atlantic Beach takes pride in paying for its employees. Mutual aid is important, but it needs to be mutual – the Town of Atlantic Beach needs to get something back.

Councilman Archer – sewer, stormwater and management are his priorities. Address growth management. What will the Town of Atlantic Beach do when the “explosion” takes place? Need orderly growth. Imperative to address stormwater management. Should immediately develop a time frame and a proposal on how to perceive stormwater management studies and how to address the issue. Sizeable grants are available to improve the Boardwalk. Beach accesses are important.

The press and exposure are a priority. Do not let the press force the Town Manager to expound on a topic that is best addressed by Council. Town Manager should monitor Atlantic Beach's exposure in the County and let the Council members know of functions he thinks they should attend.

Personnel issues – need legitimate job descriptions for every job in town. This would help with comp time.

Take advantage of *The Ocean Breeze*. Get more specific with articles. Would like to see in every issue an update on all Town projects.

Reserve funds – where does the Town stand with regard to its investments? Look at innovative ways to invest. The new budget is coming up soon. Town Manager needs to start reviewing personnel, equipment, etc.

He sees available property for sale. The Town should start buying property for stormwater and other projects. The Town can sell the property later if it is not used. When will the Town start receiving funds from the sale of the Circle? Coral Bay Shopping Center will soon be available for purchase and is contiguous to a wastewater treatment facility. The Town could offer the owner a tax shelter. The Town could perhaps enter into a joint venture with a hotel on the property at the corner.

Agrees with Councilman Doe that maintenance and upkeep of Town facilities needs to be done as soon as possible. Additionally, the Town needs a facility to house its equipment.

Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins – would like a list of exempt and non-exempt employees. Town Manager should come up with a formula for mutual aid in terms of combining services for the Towns of Atlantic Beach and Pine Knoll Shores.

Manager's Observations (Town Manager's Initial Observations and Town Council Feedback

Organizational chart – combined Finance with Administration because it provides support services for the entire Town.

Personnel policies – need to be redone. Will create a spreadsheet to compare the old and new and show the impact(s), probably in early February.

Budget process – staff is already working on the budget. He will bring it to the Council at a higher level that is more generalized and not as detailed. Mayor Pro Tem Dawkins asked that it be made revenue neutral and Councilman Doe stated that justification is important.

Capital outlay – has asked staff to provide their requests to him on his three-part form.

Accounting operations – staff did a remarkable job of managing when the Finance Director left. Auditors were pleased with how staff and the Town handled everything.

Technology and networking issues – talked to Time Warner Cable and will talk to Starfish. Town is vulnerable to attack and needs to protect its files.

Investment strategy – last two CDs were renewed at 180 days, with interest percentages of 2.76 and 2.8. Went up almost 1% and interest rate is also going up.

Capital infrastructure – Council needs to take a hard look at it. Councilman Doe suggested the Town Manager might provide the Council with a list of projects with dollar amounts and time frames; Council could prioritize the list and add to it.

Adjournment

The retreat was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.