

MINUTES
TOWN OF EDISTO BEACH
TOWN COUNCIL GOAL-SETTING MEETING
JANUARY 18, 2023
10:00 a.m.

Town of Edisto Beach
Town Hall
2414 Murray Street
Edisto Beach, SC 29438

Present: Crawford Moore, Mayor; Jerome Kizer, Jay Watts, Joey Bagwell, Council Members.

Quorum of Council Present:

Absent: Robert Renner (excused)

Others Present: Town Administrator Iris Hill, Assistant Town Administrator Mark Aakhus, Town Attorney Maryann Blake, Fire Chief Denney Conley, Police Chief Daniel Seyle, Building Inspector Morgan Viars, Utilities Director Patrick Zemp, Municipal Clerk Dee Stalvey, Municipal Association of South Carolina Field Services Manager Ashley Kellahan (facilitator), EBPOA President Beverly Sandifer

Septic Tank Maintenance Program

Council discussed the septic tank maintenance program and the need to educate our residents about the importance of maintaining their septic tanks.

- Town Administrator Hill noted information is posted on the website regarding this.
- The real problem regarding this issue is the rentals and how to deal with those situations. Mayor said most beach communities have limits on how many people can stay in a rented home. Assistant Town Administrator Aakhus noted that at a DNR meeting a few months ago, a few other towns had septic programs and incentives. He is uncertain how successful these programs were, but it was a start for a few of the towns who attended the DNR meeting.
- Ms. Hill suggested the large rental houses need to have their septic tanks pumped more often than others. Discussion held on perhaps working on an ordinance for rental homes to clean septic systems every couple years; Iris said this should be in an ordinance if we want to do this.
- The Mayor noted he would rather work on raising awareness. The Town could forward information to residents and rental companies about getting pumps cleaned out before the summer begins. Another added measure would be to require a septic tank inspection prior to houses being sold.

GOAL: Develop a septic tank awareness and incentive program; potential development of new requirement for septic tank inspections prior to houses being sold.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Project and Beach Easements

Council discussed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Project and the beach easements which need to be acquired for this project.

- Ms. Hill noted the Town is awaiting the Partnership Project Agreement (PPA), which we should receive in February. We need to wait on approval of the PPA before we are able to start work on the easements.
- Ms. Hill noted we will need to update our prior list since some of the affected beachfront properties have changed hands. We need to have a plan on how to proceed with the approximately 190 easements. Mr. Kizer said a letter is the first step; then follow-up to those who do not respond in a timely manner.
- The Mayor noted public awareness is an important component of this project, and education is the first step. The Mayor noted it is important we communicate what happens if we do NOT do this project; if we don't, the beach is over, which is the critical reason why we need to do this project and obtain easements.
- Mr. Kizer noted we need to have meeting at Town Hall with USACE to answer questions.
- Mr. Kizer also asked if the Beachfront Management Committee (BFM) received updates, and Ms. Hill and Mr. Aakhus noted an information session with the Committee occurred on January 12th, and the Committee members present were very supportive of the project. The BFM Committee also noted a Town meeting for residents must be held.
- Mr. Watts asked about the marks on the beach access poles, is this a task which could be completed in 2-3 hours or could be remarked soon? Ms. Hill noted the re-marking of dune height markers needs to be completed, but the last time they were marked, it took about one week to ten days. The Mayor noted we need to get this item on the goals list. Iris noted on the goal update spreadsheet what has been done on beach nourishment.
- Mr. Bagwell also noted education is important, and homeowners need to be aware they are not paying for this project or the improvements, but they are getting benefits because their property will be protected. Dunes will be vegetated so beach visitors cannot be on the dunes since it is beach protection, and the USACE will vegetate it.
- Mr. Watts and Mr. Bagwell noted they are able to help with the awareness and education plan. Mr. Aakhus noted we can draft FAQs, draft informational materials, have Council and BFM review these materials and also share with Chrissa Waite of the USACE, and develop a timeframe as to when each action will trigger, and a presentation can then be made to the residents.

Goal: In conjunction with the Beachfront Management Committee, develop a strategic community awareness and education plan for the USACE project and easements

Goal: Re-mark dune height markers (under Beach Renourishment Plan)

Review of 2022-2023 Goals and Progress

Ms. Hill and Mr. Aakhus presented a spreadsheet of last year's goals and the progress made on the goals (*see attached spreadsheet*).

Fire Department Staffing

Discussion held on the public safety assistance received from Colleton County. Ms. Hill noted this always begins as good conversation but it then quickly becomes a budget issue, and every entity is short-staffed. Ms. Hill noted we receive money from Colleton County for the Fire Department, roads, garbage, etc. but not enough funds for police. The money given to us from Colleton County is from their ATAX money.

- Mr. Watts noted the Fire Department has been short-staffed for a while now. Should we attempt to offer incentives, etc. in order to help with this situation? Chief Conley noted our pay scale for firefighters is not producing viable candidates. Hourly wage is a problem, and the entire state has problems with getting enough firefighters. Chief has given them incentives for 24- or 48-hour shift to help get more employees. The MASC Compensation document notes the wages in different counties, etc., so this needs to be reviewed as well.
- Housing is also an issue, and do we need to talk further about providing housing options to employees? Ms. Hill noted the reality is people cannot afford to live here, but if we had some housing for staff, it would be a huge incentive. Ms. Hill mentioned Tract M and the possibility of using that property. Construction costs are very high right now, so that is another consideration.
- Mr. Kizer noted that perhaps the housing option is too expensive; are we able to provide a higher salary? Ms. Hill noted the budget is very tight and as it stands right now, she cannot see how we can take more from the current budget.
- Ms. Hill noted that even when we raised our salaries, it is still difficult here to get people – particularly police – because of the drive to Edisto Beach. Chief Seyle also noted stipend to be added toward housing might be an idea. Mr. Aakhus noted we will have information and data to show Council about cost of living, etc., for both public safety and regular employees.
- The Mayor noted we need to consider every element of this issue.

This will be a discussion item for the Budget Workshop to be held on February 22nd.

Notification letters regarding high bills affected by the winter freeze and leaks

Discussion held on the winter freeze which occurred over the Christmas holiday.

- Mr. Watts asked about forwarding letters to affected residents regarding the possibility of higher bills due to the water leaks.
- Mr. Kizer asked Mr. Zemp if we have a system which enables us to check the difference between the weekend of the winter freeze and the previous 2021 weekend. Mr. Zemp noted he is able to obtain consumption only since the last reading, but it will not be entirely accurate. Because the pipes froze, a great deal of water was not flowing out.
- Mr. Watts asked if we should send letters to just those residents who were greatly affected in an effort to mitigate the bad reactions. Mr. Zemp noted we could send letters to those 180 residents who we know had leaks; we can ask the residents if they'd like their meters read, and we can give the resident an approximate amount. Mr. Zemp emphasized we all need to be on the same page as to "Is my water bill going to be adjusted," etc., and we need to decide what the threshold is. Mr. Zemp noted we did not charge the \$75 fee for shutting off the water.

Further thought and discussion will be devoted to this item at a future time.

Automated Meter Readers

Regarding discussion on automated meter readers, Mr. Zemp noted these were removed from the SCIIP grant, but we placed this into the RIA grant.

- Mr. Zemp also noted that the cost for the automated meter readers last year was \$850,000.
- The Mayor noted the importance of the automated readers. Discussion held on possibly needing to pay for these meters from Town funds. If so, one suggestion is to charge the cost of the automated readers in installments on utilities bills. We could initially borrow money from our general fund, then we replace the funds as we receive the installments..
- The Mayor emphasized we need to exhaust all possible state, federal, etc. funds first before going the route of charging the cost to residents.

Goal: Secure funding for automatic meter reading

Coastal Flooding Resiliency and Mitigation

Mr. Watts asked if there is anything we should be looking at sooner rather than later to mitigate flooding, etc.

- Mr. Aakhus noted the Town completed a study of flooding and resiliency flooding. We have also the lagoon study which Davis and Floyd will do this year. The Arc-Billow work will begin. The duck valve at Bay Creek Park has been cleared. Elevating the causeway is a long-term goal.
- Ms. Hill noted we do need to do a groundwater study so we know at what level the septic tanks will stop working.
- “Living shoreline,” which is vegetated, would raise the height so they would not be impacted by future flooding.
- Some funding is available from the South Carolina Department of Resiliency.
- Drainage in front of Yacht Club discussed. This is private property, not Town property, but if this area is fixed, it will drain the lagoon. This is critical to flooding at Ocean Ridge.

Goal: Identify next steps as it relates to drainage/sea level rise and ways to obtain funding

Notification to businesses of Ordinance No. 2023-02 regarding backflow prevention certification

Mr. Watts asked if we should have the Town contract to ensure this is done instead of having each individual do this?

- Patrick noted the regulations are by SCDHEC but they have placed it on the utility departments to ensure this certification is being completed.
- We are streamlining the process so that businesses are aware of these testing needs.
- For Edisto Beach, there are fewer than 20 businesses affected.
- Ms. Hill suggested for the Town to send a letter when business licenses are due and notify the business they need to show their certification. Ms. Viars noted Mr. Brown is working on such a letter.

Storm Debris

Mr. Kizer noted it appeared that an excessive amount of storm debris stayed on our streets for a while following Hurricane Ian. Should we look at outsourcing a firm to come in during those times we experienced with Ian?

- Ms. Hill noted we have emergency funds in case of a storm. However, when Republic said they wouldn't pick it up, we picked it up and put it on Tract M, and our Fire Department will burn it.
- Mr. Watts asked if a timeframe of two weeks cleanup time is doable. The Mayor noted we have a small staff, and sometimes these kinds of events necessitate outside help, and we will need to pay money for these services. Mr. Aakhus suggested we can beef up our emergency funds budget for these sorts of things, and we will give this a more concerted effort.

Projects for Colleton County Transportation

Paul Oakley is our representative on the Colleton County Transportation Committee, and he asked for our priorities. He will share these priorities with the Committee and lobby for the Town's needs.

- Regarding the causeway at the entrance to Edisto Beach, discussion held on whether the Council prefers a bridge at the causeway or raise elevation? Consensus was to raise the causeway and widen it, then bridge it.
- Mr. Aakhus noted we have leftover money from the Vine Street bike path project, so we have \$50,000 to use a section of Lybrand Street bike path, which is about one foot lower than the rest. Steed Paving can provide a price and share with Council. Council agreed with looking into Docksite/Lybrand Street bike/side path repaving.
- 400-500 Pompano Street is very bad so this stabilization of unpaved road should be on the list.
- The drainage improvement for Palmetto Road needs to be listed as a long-term goal.

Sharing costs of beachfront management with day-tripper guests

Discussion held on day-tripper guests to Edisto Beach and how we might be able to share costs with these guests.

- Ms. Hill noted the emergency access decals were also put into place if we decided to capture costs from day-trippers by charging parking fees, and residents would be exempt from the parking fees.
- This needs to be further discussed and a five-year plan needs to be implemented for a cost-share program.

Goal: Develop five-year plan to implement a cost share program with day-visitors for related public safety and public beach expenses

RECAP

Goals for 2023-2024

- Develop a septic tank awareness and incentive program; potential development of new requirement for septic tank inspections prior to houses being sold
- Re-mark dune height markers (under Beach Renourishment Plan)
- In conjunction with the Beachfront Management Committee, develop a strategic community awareness and education plan for the USACE project and easements
- Secure funding for automatic meter reading
- Identify next steps as it relates to drainage/sea level rise and ways to obtain funding

- Develop five-year plan to implement a cost share program with day-visitors for related public safety and public beach expenses

APPROVED BY TOWN COUNCIL


Dominica Stalvey, Municipal Clerk
February 9, 2023