

Minutes of the Saturday, March 5, 2022, retreat of the Kill Devil Hills Board of Commissioners (BOC) held at 10:00 o'clock a.m. in the Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 102 Town Hall Drive, Kill Devil Hills.

Members Participating: Mayor Ben Sproul; Commissioners Terry Gray, Ivy Ingram, Bernard "B.J." McAvoy, and John Windley

Members Not Participating:

Others Participating: Debora P. Díaz, Town Manager and James Michael O'Dell, Interim Town Clerk

Call to Order

At 10:00 a.m., Mayor Ben Sproul opened this retreat and thanked the members in attendance.

Mayor Sproul shared his expectation that this retreat would be organic in nature and that the goal would be to provide Staff direction; the landscape for the Town is different than a year ago and different from when COVID first appeared. He lauded the Town for its conservative approach towards the budget in response to the unknown potential for the pandemic. Mayor Sproul stated that many non-essential projects and operations were put "on hold" and then later placed back as the budget permitted. Community stakeholders and the public will be reviewing what steps the Town takes as it returns to a more normal budgetary year, including the addition of federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding.

He noted that the Town's fund balance is robust, but storm events must be factored in the BOC's vision. A question to be asked is whether the Town is providing the level of service and infrastructure needed for its citizens. Members expressed strong support for the Town Manager and Staff in the Town's operations: Staff has stayed strong throughout the pandemic era and daily gives 110%, as services were consistent throughout the pandemic. Ms. Díaz stated that it began with the BOC and its leadership.

Commissioner Ingram stated that the Dare County Visitors Bureau is developing long-range 2050 planning, with a focus on developing a community. Mayor Sproul shared that members should ask what the smartest decisions the BOC can make for the citizens of the Town. Commissioner Ingram stated that it was a balance between how quickly this community is developing against maintaining infrastructure, medical care, services, and a sense of community; balancing the interests.

Mayor Sproul stated all the facets come together, including events like farmers markets, recreational facilities, with macro-level developments, including larger scale investment in other areas, such as along US 158. He also encouraged partnering with other organizations to offset the costs but also expand options.

Recreational Facilities

Hayman Park Ms. Diáz shared that the Hayman Park playground equipment had been delivered but it must be installed by a qualified installer. It should be installed in the first week of April 2022.

Meekins Field Ms. Diáz reported that Town has secured a contractor for the Meekins Field project. She noted that the project has been taking time and construction costs have been astronomical due to the current economic situation. The tennis shelter project is moving forward, but the splash pad will not likely be ready for the summer. However, parts of the park will be opened as completed. A new automated teller machine (ATM) will be installed to replace the old unit.

Commissioner Gray supported updating the Town's Recreation and Shoreline Plans as the plans are so important. Ms. Diáz shared that members will see plan update costs in the coming budget. The Town is starting to rebuild the recreational reserves and making major upgrades to the beach accesses. She noted that there appears to be a social media trend to supporting destruction of public property.

Members discussed general security of recreational areas, including lighting timers, policing, and camera usage.

Commissioner McAvoy shared his concern with the state of recreational facilities, especially the ongoing work at Meekins Field, including the pavilion and splash pad. He shared that the Town has no recreational areas, and noted that the baseball and softball supporter are upset about the loss of the field. He stated that with the development of the EMS/Fire Department, Meekins Field is not a good location for a park. He supported the development of an Olympic-sized pool. Commissioner Ingram shared that the splash pad development will be a great addition and that people are very excited.

Members then discussed various recreational facilities development across the Town, highlighting the work of the Westside Recreation Group (WRG), and the inclusion of input from community stakeholders. It was also noted that recreational development depended upon the availability suitable land for any expansion. Members supported the completion of the Recreational Facilities Plan as a blueprint for development.

US 158 Beautification Mayor Sproul shared he recently met with Public Services Director Steve Albright and some contractors about beautifying the areas surrounding US 158, including increased mowing and edging, fertilizing/herbicides, street sweeping, and adding fill to some areas. He stated that the six miles along US 158 was seen by nearly 100% of the visitors and/or residents daily. He suggested public/private partnerships to expand seeding and beautification efforts. The members discussed approaching such a project with vendors versus in-house Staff, including costs, flexibility, and overall timelines, noting this would be a regular maintenance project that would be required in the budget. Mayor Sproul suggested that in the signalized intersection with foot traffic, how much it would cost for some US 158 intersections to undergo additional beautification with possible flowers or shrubbery.

Beach accesses Mayor Sproul stated that Staff wonderfully maintains the beach accesses with low costs. Every time an access is updated, it is done wonderfully. He stated that although a lot of people enjoy the rustic charm, we could possibly upgrade the shower facilities. He suggested updating the lighting at the accesses, for instance, with red LED lighting that is turtle-friendly. The Coastal Studies Institute and similar schools could be used as resources to best determine lighting. The group discussed possible options for increased vegetation at the accesses, possibly setting aside funding for access beautification. Plants that would be included must need to survive in the environment and not be disruptive. The group considered people who are interested in planting vegetation, including the Master Gardeners program, possibly pursuing Coastal Resiliency grants.

Electric vehicles Mayor Sproul suggested the inclusion of electric vehicles in the Town fleet, noting that KDH needs to begin taking steps to move forward as a community. Ms. Díaz stated that Staff has spoken with other municipalities to determine how to integrate electric vehicles, and whether consultants should be involved to better gather the data on the potentials for integration. The group discussed the establishment of vehicle charging stations, increased LED lighting, and other eco-friendly options.

Solar Mayor Sproul suggested a few panels on two or three beach accesses, which would be more of a demonstration than an offset. Commissioner Ingram stated that the Ocean Drive bathhouse currently has a lot of sustainable features.

EMS/Fire Station Members discussed whether the new EMS / Fire Station could be a good demonstration point for geothermal heating and cooling.

Universal Multi-Use paths along US 158 Commissioner Windley inquired about the recent multi-use path investments recently made in Nags Head. He supported a sidewalk along US 158 in front of the Wright Brothers National Monument. Commissioner Gray supported the eventual transition of sidewalks to multi-use paths. Mayor Sproul shared that in KDH, sidewalk costs are much higher because there are more curb cuts. He suggested that a good place for a wide bike path are places where Wrightsville and Memorial do not cut through. Ms. Díaz stated everyone wants to see sidewalk development, and the Town's public/private partnership with the Dare Centre is a prime example of how it worked. Commissioner Windley suggested Staff conduct a feasibility study on multi-use paths. Ms. Díaz stated that there are two criteria: cost and what are the issues that have to be overcome.

Worker / affordable housing Members discussed the Town's history with similar housing, and debated the Town's potential role in current and future possibilities. Mayor Sproul shared that Dare County has taken up the issue with the ARPA funds. Although there is some Not In My Back Yard "NIMBYism" with regard to this type of housing, Kill Devil Hills has a higher range of citizens who could benefit. He advocated for land trust – buying properties and separating land from structure, and keeping the land in trust. He stated the goal was to incentivize to year

round housing. If deed restriction is the lane to increase year round housing, he inquired what the Town would have to give in exchange to create the property restrictions.

The members discussed property setback and accessory dwelling unit (ADU) options to possibly promote deed restrictions. The goal would be to prevent neighborhoods from becoming inundated with vacation rentals / short-term rentals.

Commissioner McAvoy stated that he did not support increased density, and noted that deed restriction has its issues. He would prefer Dare County to solve the problem, noting that Kill Devil Hills is the most-dense community in the area. His concern was the change in the nature of the Town. Mayor Sproul replied that economic forces are at play, and the market is not going to change until there is some intervention. Currently, the market determines values; the vast majority will be moved off the beach, and the percentage of available year-round housing is steadily decreasing. He stated that local businesses that want to survive are having to provide housing for their staffs. Commissioner Windley inquired whether there are enough eligible properties to really make this concept work. Commissioner Gray concurred, stating that affordable housing is a complex issue and there may be multiple options needed. Commissioner Ingram expressed interest in studying this issue, but stated that her children could be priced out of the market and could not live in the Outer Banks under the current conditions. She stated that it is great to think about increasing density, but also think about the huge impacts of increased density, with regard to health care, water, and internet, because the current infrastructure is not adequate for current population.

Mayor Sproul stated that when he looks 20 years into the future, there are going to be more people here, and the Town has limited tools as to address any of it. The Town is currently incentivizing 5-6 bedroom short-term rentals. He inquired what will happen in the future without a solution. He suggested a land trust developed through a non-profit organization as the Town cannot undertake that concept. He also supported the addition of ADUs, which could add a number of housing possibilities. Commissioner Gray inquired whether any additional areas could be reviewed and redefined / clarified, which could possibly identify areas ripe for increased development for housing. Commissioner Windley suggested researching if lots directly adjoining commercial zone could develop reduced setbacks so businesses could develop housing options for employees near the business sites. Ms. Díaz stated that Staff doesn't usually bring zoning recommendations to the BOC. Staff considers property staying at the highest and best use within the Land Use Plan.

Members discussed ADU growth versus large single family dwellings. They also discussed possible areas to strategically place high density populations within town, such as apartment buildings on lots adjoining the commercial lots. Focus groups including developers, property specialists, and other stakeholders could be a possibility. Members touched on dorm-style housing with deed restrictions for J-1 international students, which would eliminate required parking, since only bikes would be needed.

Waivers for temporary food service Mayor Sproul inquired about the trend for states of emergency, as it pertains to outdoor dining, etc., because he did not want local businesses to lose that business. Ms. Díaz stated that companies want to continue to use outdoor dining, but the

concern is businesses wanting to keep outdoor dining while also returning to regular operations inside.

American Rescue Plan Act Ms. Díaz stated that the BOC and Staff have discussed the ARPA funds from the U.S. Government. She recommended that the funding go towards infrastructure projects. The group concurred.

Adjournment

Mayor Sproul thanked the members for their attendance, noting that it was a highly productive session. He then adjourned the retreat.

The time was 2:18 p.m.

Submitted by:

James Michael O'Dell
Interim Town Clerk