

# WHO'S MINDING THE STORE?

## DOT Grants

One of the fundamental duties of our elected officials is to manage town funds and citizens' tax dollars. **Responsible management of our town assets is essential to all aspects of our community**, particularly as we grow and expand our infrastructure and service commitment.

To the credit of the previous town council, in the last two years of their administration they secured eight grants from the Department of Transportation (DOT), totaling \$627,745. Additionally, when they left office they were in the process of pursuing a second phase of grants that would have totaled an additional three to four million in state DOT funds available to our town for transportation related improvements.

The second phase of grants included a complete revitalization of Lake Park Blvd. in the area between Carl Winner and Fayetteville Ave. and would have widened the street, modified parking arrangements, increased sidewalk widths, provided bike lanes and a center median with trees and landscaping. In short, it would have created an attractive and vibrant entryway to our CBD and community, while solving many of our traffic and pedestrian concerns. At a time when revitalization for our CBD is so badly needed, these grants were the answer to many of our concerns.

DOT grant money is not free money; after all, it is derived from state tax dollars, to which we all contribute. But in terms of funding to our community from an outside source, it can essentially be seen as "free money". **After all, without these grants, few of our state tax dollars would find their way back to our town.**

Once grants are awarded, the town must participate by partially funding the improvements. A typical grant would require the town to pay for the entire costs of the improvements, and the DOT would then reimburse the town 80% of those costs. This arrangement can vary, but this is a

usual scenario. This is of course, a good thing for our community; provided we are able to fund the initial expense.

We were unable to obtain concise information from town hall regarding the status of these grants. To our surprise, no one seemed to have any solid knowledge regarding their exact status. We found this concerning, especially given this is public information and should be a matter of record available to all citizens. We eventually contacted DOT in Raleigh and obtained a complete list and status of the grants.

The information we received from DOT was discouraging. Of the eight grants mentioned, only two have been completed and a third is currently in progress. This leaves five additional grants uninitiated. **Even after the last of these three initiated grants have been completed, it will leave 74% of the available grant monies sitting idle**, apparently not being pursued by our current administration, or at least not with any notable effort.

Additionally, more grant money was available for second phase projects, but those funds would not have become available for issuance until first phase grants had been substantially completed. Now, as a result of the town's delay initiating the first phase grants, the money previously earmarked for the second phase grants may no longer be available in the state's budget. On any terms, the loss of several million dollars in DOT grants will be a monumental loss to our community.

We are nearing one year into the new administration. In that time, not only has our new council failed to initiate the remaining five grants, they have yet to pursue any *new grants*, something that will very likely have a negative affect our future transportation needs.

## CITIZENS FOR CAROLINA BEACH

### *Contributions Welcomed:*

PO Box 1912, Carolina Beach, NC 28428

[www.citizensforcarolinabeach.org](http://www.citizensforcarolinabeach.org)

For reference: [www.carolinabeach.org](http://www.carolinabeach.org) and <http://www.usace.army.mil/>

Mayor Pro-tem Gilbert is the Council member appointed to represent our town in DOT matters and to liaison with state and local individuals capable of ensuring present and future flow of DOT grants to our community. **So, where is the breakdown? Why have these grants been allowed to languish by this administration, and why has Gilbert not been more diligent in addressing his DOT responsibilities?**

### **The grants not yet initiated include:**

**\$25,000:** Completion of a town traffic study required to identify traffic problems and resolutions.

**\$100,000:** Widening of the intersection at Winner Avenue and Lake Park Blvd., needed to alleviate traffic congestion caused by traffic exiting the North End.

**\$50,000:** Striping of Lake Park Blvd. to bring our entry corridor into state requirements.

**\$264,400:** North End bike and pedestrian improvements.

**\$25,000:** Bike lanes to Carolina Sands

**Note:** *Items A, B, and C required initiation and substantiality completion before DOT would have made second phase grants funds available for improvements of the Lake Park Blvd. area of the CBD. The "untapped" grant funding already approved totals \$464,400.*

### **And There Is More!**

The Town of Kure Beach currently owes the town of Carolina Beach \$251,939 for sewer services. While this debt was for the 2003/2004 budget years, due to a complicated agreement with Kure Beach, we were required to conduct a lengthy service audit/engineering study to determine the amount owed by Kure Beach. The audit began at the end of the 2003/2004 budget year, and the engineer completed the

final calculations in the fall of 2004. Following some discussion with Kure Beach regarding payment, and resistance on their part to make payment, in the Spring of 2005 we issued Kure Beach a bill for payment in full for services rendered.

Subsequent to the Spring 2005 bill, and up until that Fall, dozens of meetings and negotiations took place between Kure Beach and our town representatives. Those efforts were obviously unsuccessful. As a result, it was determined that legal action would be required, and that given the upcoming elections, the issue was best held over to be dealt with by the post election administration.

— This is where the trail grows cold. It is now ten months since the new administration came on board and apparently there have been no meetings or efforts of any kind to reenergize this issue and resolve the billing situation (although when we recently inquired about this, Tim Owens, our Town Manager, advised us that a meeting with Kure Beach was forthcoming).

**The grants and the sewer bill alone account for \$716,339 in funding available to our town for transportation and infrastructure improvements.** Yet, instead of aggressively pursuing these funds, the new council seems content dealing with issues like dog waste at Freeman Park.

The money from Kure Beach alone could fund an upgrade to lift station #1, a topic often mentioned by Councilman Gilbert as a reason to question the impact of redevelopment projects. **Are our town leaders doing their job when they prefer to sit back and point to problems rather than actively pursue resolutions?**

*If you have interest in our organization, have any concerns you would like us to address, or would like to contribute to our effort to keep the community informed, please visit our web site or contact us at our mailing address. Thank you for your contributions to date... CFCB*