

# A TOWN WITHOUT LEADERS?

**An open letter to Tim Owens, our Town Manager, and Steve Harrell, our Planning Director.**

Gentlemen:

It should come as no surprise that many in our community are disappointed in the state of our town and the disarray of our planning process. **All one has to do is attend a Council or Planning and Zoning (P&Z) meeting to experience confusion, disorder, and misinformation.**

Quite frankly, both our town government and our planning process have become little more than a source of laughter, or perhaps anger, depending on one's vantage point.

During the last P&Z meeting, when a citizen stated that the Land Use Plan (LUP) was law, *not the ordinance*, you both sat quietly, opting not to address that assertion. When P&Z members tried to clarify that misrepresentation, instead of support from staff, all they received were blank expressions.

**As professionals, surely you know our ordinance is our legal ruling document!!** Yet you sat silent while citizens debated the issue. What prevented you from taking action? How could you not consider this worthy of comment?

When misstatements on matters of importance are advanced at public meetings, it is irresponsible for you not to provide clarification. Failure to correct misrepresentation of this nature only contributes to the advancement of more misinformation and confusion.

At the last Council meeting an applicant presented a project that just

## CITIZENS FOR CAROLINA BEACH

*Contributions Welcomed:*

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

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

last month had caused confusion and conflict among P&Z board members because Mr. Harrell failed to provide a clear LUP conformity statement. You had an entire month to fix that problem. Instead, Council members were left to deal with the same inadequate conformity statement previously presented to P&Z, again causing confusion regarding which LUP sections were applicable.

Your inaction ultimately resulted in that project being sent back to P&Z for a second review, a process that could have been avoided had you provided an opinion on LUP conformity. All of this is a waste of the staff's time and taxpayer money, as well as, an unnecessary delay and unfair burden on the applicant.

**Mr. Owens, you are expected to manage the town. Mr. Harrell, you are expected to manage the planning department.** You are both expected to use your knowledge and training in doing so. If you were not both capable leaders, it is highly unlikely that either of you would hold critical positions in municipal government.

Yet, there is a problem emanating from an apparent reluctance to use your experience and training to provide opinion and advance accurate, meaningful, and consistent information on central issues important to the health of our town. That reluctance is a key factor in the current unraveling of our town government.

**Our planning process is in a mess and the two individuals hired to establish and maintain structure, you two gentlemen, appear to be content to sit by and watch as confusion prevails.**

The Town Council and P&Z are comprised of laypeople charged with representing the citizens. They themselves are citizens, not experts. They rely on your advice and expert opinion in order to make good decisions on behalf of the community.

Of course you are required to report to Council, and you have a direct responsibilities to them. But you also have direct responsibilities to the community. **Your duties and obligations are not limited in scope to the viewpoint of Council or any of its members.**

If you elect to withhold expert advice and opinion, it is the citizens that pay the price. If you advise Council of your expert opinion, and they ignore your advice, that is something they will have to account for. The new Council members ran their campaign on transparent government. Its time you tested that promise.

**You should halt the practice of only speaking out when you feel your comments will be favorable to Council's position.** After all, the makeup of the Council will change, but the needs of the community will remain constant. If you continue to appease Council rather than meeting our town's needs, the long-term health of the Town will suffer.

Meeting after meeting you gentlemen have sat by watching while inaction has become the status quo, only speaking out when you find it convenient. In the meantime our boards and citizens argue over LUP conformity, due process rights are violated, and our wetlands are destroyed.

**Enough is enough - its time to do what's right.** Leadership is required, and it must come from the professionals hired to provide that guidance and direction.

We are at a crossroads. Citizens are divided. Our planning process is an embarrassment. Our CBD is in need of revitalization. Developers are unwilling to bring new projects forward because rules are not applied fairly, or they keep changing. Due process in our CUP hearings is a joke, and avoidance of proper protocol seems to be the accepted standard. **Recommendations for a master plan get diluted to a height studies.** And even those height studies get ignored in favor of adopting arbitrary heights.

Citizens and applicants that stand before our boards should have the reasonable expectation of being treated fairly and within the law. Council may be the elected officials, but it is up to you gentlemen to provide them guidance and clarity on issues of law and protocol. It is your duty to steer the Council, and P&Z, to ensure they are doing what is right.

You should both take a long hard look at these problems and take decisive action to clean up this mess called our planning process. **The discord in our town is a direct result of you allowing Council to micromanage your job positions. This problem is unlikely to change unless you take charge and fulfill your obligations to the taxpayers.**

**It's time to do something. Our town is relying on you.**

*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*