

UNNECESSARY DELAYS?

Newly formed Land Use Plan ad hoc committee set to meet.

Last year our town completed an update of our 1997 Land Use Plan (old plan). That update is referred to as the 2005 Carolina Beach CAMA Land Use Plan (2005 LUP or new plan). Despite the long and costly process our town recently went through to complete the update, and the fact that the old plan is outdated and in serious need of replacement, the updated plan has yet to be adopted by the current administration. In the mean time, the implementation of numerous actions and policies identified in the new plan go unrealized.

Delay in adopting the new plan is due to an action taken by Councilman Alan Gilbert at Council's May 2006 meeting.

At that meeting Mr. Gilbert recommended the creation of an ad hoc committee to review the new plan and report back to Council with recommended changes. Exactly what the ad hoc committee's recommendations are to be based on or what procedures the committee is expected to follow when arriving at those recommendations has never been clearly identified.

A Land Use Plan (LUP) is intended to be a long-term plan that provides the community with a general vision for future use and development of land within the town limits. An online dictionary defines an LUP as, "A document compiled by a local government that includes goals and strategies for future development or preservation of land." One of our town's earlier LUP's describes a LUP as a plan that served "...as a means by which the town hoped to avoid the dangers of growth while simultaneously unlocking the potential of that growth." A very thoughtful and insightful statement.

Therefore, a good LUP must be flexible enough to allow growth, but visionary enough to control the negative aspects of such growth. Sounds simple enough, but in reality it is a relatively tall order for any committee to predict a seven year vision for

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a moving target that will be rigid enough to protect town resources, but adaptable enough to allow community growth and prosperity.

Therefore, periodic major updates are required to insure that policies and actions are consistent with community needs and CAMA requirements. **Most importantly, a LUP must not be used as an ordinance.** To do so defeats its purpose. A LUP is intended as a tool for determining how to best allow community evolution. Not as a device to deter growth.

Given the importance of a LUP, and the need for timely updates, many would like more information and explanation as to why Mr. Gilbert feels compelled to delay adoption of the 2005 LUP. This delay is of particular concern given the turmoil and confusion our town has experienced with the application and interpretation of outdated policies found in our old plan.

In fact, during the first eleven months of the new administration, it's fair to say that few things have caused more controversy than disputes over the intent and interpretation of the old plan and how best to apply its outdated visions and policies to our current real world situations. Ironically, many of the problems this administration continues to struggle with have already been addressed and revised in the new plan.

So, why the delay and where are we going from here?

This month the newly formed Land Use ad hoc committee will hold their first meeting. The committee will consist of the seven current P&Z commissioners and eight additional citizens. While the specific purpose of the committee has never been clearly defined or explained by Mr. Gilbert or town staff, one can only hope that actions taken by the committee will be more expeditious than Mr. Gilbert's attempts to kick-

start the process. It has been five months since Mr. Gilbert's recommendation, and we are just now seeing notice of the first meeting.

Most logical people would have no problem with Mr. Gilbert's concept of a steering committee to assist with the development of such an important document. **It is the timing and motive of Mr. Gilbert's action that remain questionable.** After all, we currently have a completed plan that was drafted by P&Z with the assistance of the Cape Fear Council of Governments (CFCOG).

Now Councilman Johnson was Chairman of P&Z during drafting of the new plan and took an active role in the entire process. During the year and approximately sixteen meetings it took P&Z to draft the new plan, every meeting was advertised and public participation was strongly promoted. That draft was eventually accepted by the previous Council and was due for adoption a year ago.

Therefore, not only has the very process that Mr. Gilbert advocates already been followed completely and in great detail, his fellow running mate and Councilman, Jerry Johnson, was an integral part of the new plan. Mr. Gilbert is aware that amendments to the plan are allowed should the town subsequently realize any substantial concerns, so why not adopt the new plan and take advantage of the positive aspect it endorses?

Instead, Mr. Gilbert has elected to stop the entire process dead in its tracks while a new committee picks and chooses which sections, statements, and words in the 162 pages of content need to be changed. Is this the type of piece meal governmental process that Mr. Gilbert feels is in the best interest of the community? Why is Mr. Gilbert so quick to dismiss the new plan and the efforts of the P&Z? Is it that the new plan does not align with his personal opinions?

While a few members of the ad hoc committee were originally on P&Z when the new plan was drafted, and apparently have a reasonable understanding of the process, the other ten members of the ad hoc committee have limited knowledge of the purpose, reasoning, or requirements involved in the update process. This is not to say the committee members are not competent. **It merely points out the fact that the previous Planning Commission had substantial professional assistance when they drafted the plan and it was still an arduous and complicated process that involved a considerable learning curve.** Such assistance was critical in drafting a plan that not only met the requirements of the Coastal Area Management ACT (CAMA), but also the needs of the town and concerns of the citizens.

In short, drafting a LUP is not any easy or necessarily intuitive process. So, without any direction from CFCOG, and with a majority of new committee members unfamiliar with the process, how does Mr. Gilbert think this is all going to work? Who is supposed to lead the committee through this process? Why did Mr. Gilbert not also recommend that this committee seek the assistance of CFCOG? What criteria will be used to guide the committee?

Most importantly, what are Mr. Gilbert's expectations? Does he not understand that the LUP update is a complicated process and that making changes out of context will result in a LUP that is inconsistent and just as inadequate as our old plan, which itself is the result of the same type of piecemeal changes?

Only time will tell how this will evolve, but **time is not on our side.** It's been almost a year since the new plan has been ready for adoption, and five months since the new committee was conceived. **How much more time, taxpayer dollars, and community discord will we be subject to as a result of this action.**

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