

**Town of Nags Head
Planning Board
May 19, 2026**

The Planning Board of the Town of Nags Head met on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, in the Board Room at the Nags Head Municipal Complex.

Planning Chair Meade Gwinn called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. as a quorum was present.

Members Present

Meade Gwinn, David Elder, David Thompson, Beverly Head, Basil Belsches, Valerie Netsch, Brad Carey

Members Absent

None

Others Present

Kelly Wyatt, Joe Costello, Lily Nieberding

Approval of Agenda

Chair Gwinn called for approval of the agenda. David Elder moved to approve the agenda as presented. David Thompson seconded, and the motion passed by unanimous vote.

Public Comment/Audience Response

None

Approval of Minutes

Chair Gwinn asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the April 21st, 2026, meeting. David Elder moved to approve the minutes as presented; Basil Belsches seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Action Items

Consideration of a Vested Right/Special Use Permit/Site Plan Review submitted by Michael Robinson, P.E. on behalf of Tar Heel Motel of OBX, to construct a two-story, 26-guest room, hotel. The property is zoned C-2, General Commercial and is included within the Hotel Overlay District and is located at 7001 S. Croatan Highway, Nags Head.

Planning Director Kelly Wyatt presented the staff report for the Vested Right/Special Use Permit/Site Plan Review submitted by Michael Robinson, P.E., on behalf of Tar Heel Motel of OBX. She noted that the Planning Board had previously reviewed this project as a sketch plan in December 2025.

The proposal calls for the construction of a new two-story, 26-unit hotel building with associated site improvements as an expansion to the existing Tarheel Motel located at 7010 South Virginia Dare Trail. The new expansion is located at 7001 South Croatan Highway, a currently vacant parcel directly across from the existing motel. The property is zoned C-2, General Commercial, and falls within the Hotel Overlay District.

Ms. Wyatt reviewed the proposed site plan as well as Dare County GIS aerial imagery for the Board, noting that access would be via an existing entrance off Virginia Dare Trail and a new proposed entrance off of Glidden Street. The building is configured in an L-shape, with amenities including a pool, patio, and dog run. The existing pool from the motel property is proposed to be relocated, and a portion of the site is designated for an on-site engineered septic system.

Ms. Wyatt then reviewed Staff's findings:

The property is within an X flood zone but is subject to the town's local regulatory flood protection elevation of 9 feet. The proposed slab is shown at approximately 6.8 feet with parking on grade below, placing the first occupied floor above the required elevation of 9 feet.

Hotel use is classified as a Special Use within the C-2 district. Staff confirmed compliance with applicable supplemental regulations under Section 7.12 of the UDO. Ms. Wyatt noted that both the existing and proposed properties consist of multiple underlying non-conforming lots, and that a recombination of those lots will be required prior to the issuance of any development permits.

The Hotel Overlay District allows up to 65% lot coverage, compared to the standard C-2 cap of 55%. Combined lot coverage for the existing and proposed development was calculated at approximately 56.1%, remaining compliant. The proposed two-story structure reaches 42.8 feet in height, well within the overlay's 60-foot maximum.

Ms. Wyatt noted the proposal's strong compliance with the Town's commercial design standards, citing varied roof forms, a coastal watchtower element, shake and board-and-batten siding, residential-style windows, covered porches, shutters, decorative trim, and gable brackets.

The existing motel has 34 guest rooms; the expansion adds 18 two-bedroom suites with kitchenettes and 8 standard guest rooms. Under the town's current parking standards, which now include employee parking requirements, the development is required to provide 83 spaces. The site plan proposes 84 spaces, including provision for 6 employees on the largest shift. The ordinance also requires a minimum of 20% permeable surface material within new parking and drive aisle areas; the proposal achieves approximately 21%.

Staff found compliance with all buffering, landscaping, and vegetation preservation requirements. The proposal includes compliant parking lot buffers along US 158 and Glidden Street, a commercial transition protective yard along the property line adjacent to a neighboring non-conforming cottage court, and interior parking lot vegetation throughout. Although the site has virtually no existing vegetation, the applicant is planting over 18% of the lot area, exceeding the required 15%.

Town Engineer David Ryan generally found compliance with stormwater management, traffic circulation, and erosion and sedimentation control, with the applicant having already addressed minor comments. Public Services did not have concerns regarding water or sanitation. The fire department has requested additional engineering documentation related to fire flow and suppression infrastructure which will need be addressed prior to the building permit issuance. The on-site engineered wastewater system will require state approval prior to development review.

Ms. Wyatt noted that based on their findings Staff would recommend approval of the Special Use Permit/Site Plan as presented. She stated that she as well as applicant Mike Robinson were available to answer any questions for the Board.

Ms. Wyatt confirmed for Chair Gwinn that there is not a pedestrian walkway/multi-use path between the bypass and the proposed landscaping buffer so pedestrian access would not be impacted.

Mr. Belsches noted that the proposal was consistent with what had they had reviewed at the sketch plan stage, and that staff's thorough review indicated readiness to proceed to a vote. Mr. Belsches also complimented staff's use of the Dare County GIS aerial imagery in presenting the site.

Mr. Elder agreed noting that items previously discussed, including pedestrian walkway considerations, had been adequately addressed.

Based on their discussion, Basil Belsches moved to recommend approval of the Vested Right/Site Plan/Special Use Permit as presented. David Thompson seconded, the motion carried unanimously

Report on Board of Commissioners Actions – May 6th, 2026

Ms. Wyatt briefly reviewed the actions from the May 6th Board of Commissioners meeting, including: Prior to reconvening at the Board Room, the Board had convened at Dowdy Park to mark the installation of a new ADA-accessible We-Go swing, funded through a grant from Trillium Health Resources. Ms. Wyatt described the new swing as a notable improvement over the previous Liberty Swing, noting that it no longer requires a key to operate and is therefore more accessible to the public. A public hearing was held and the SUP, submitted by Withers Ravenel (on behalf of the Outer Banks Hospital Cancer Center) for additional HVAC infrastructure to reduce building humidity, was approved as submitted. The Board unanimously approved a text amendment establishing the new uses of wine bar and tap room. The Board denied a text amendment to establish the new accessory use of restaurant waiting facility. Director Wyatt noted that under town rules, the same or substantially similar amendment cannot be resubmitted for approximately one year, and that staff had not heard from the applicants since the BOC meeting. Last but not least, Planning Board Member David Elder was reappointed to the Planning Board for a three-year term, which was acknowledged by the Chair and Ms. Wyatt.

Town Updates

None

Discussion Items

Planning & Development Director's Report – May 6th, 2026

Ms. Wyatt reviewed her Director's Report which included:

An update on the Septic Health Advisory Committee: The committee met on April 27th. A revised informational flyer about the town's septic health program has been distributed to all properties within town limits, generating approximately 35 to 40 additional inspection requests. The Division of Water Infrastructure loan of \$500,000 has been approved and is accessible. The next step is targeted outreach to high-risk properties. Staff identified approximately 280 properties as the primary target group. The loan is zero interest and provides up to \$20,000, compared to the town's existing \$12,000 low-interest loan. Ms. Wyatt credited Deputy Town Manager, Amy Miller, Deputy Planning Director, Joe Costello, and Environmental Planner Conner Twiddy with substantial work in securing the loan.

An update on the Estuarine Shoreline Management. Deputy Planning Director Costello noted that an SAV (submerged aquatic vegetation) survey is expected in early June to inform design proposals.

The sand relocation program concluded at the beginning of May in accordance with turtle moratorium protocols. The dune management cost-share program, with an allocation of \$400,000 was maxed out due to a high volume of participants on the three-year cycle.

Ms. Wyatt also gave an update on Dowdy Park noting that the park is fully prepared for the summer season. Event Coordinator Paige Griffin has a seasonal part-time staff member to assist through the summer months. A \$2,000 grant through the Safe Monarch Habitat Grant Program was received to restore pollinators in the park's pollinator garden, with the aquarium assisting in growing the plants for a planned Fall installation.

Ms. Netsch noted that she had recently attended the Artrageous event at Dowdy and her only concern was a lack of trash receptacles. Ms. Wyatt clarified that Artrageous is not a town-sponsored event; it operates under the crowd-gathering permit process but committed to noting the trash receptacle concern in the file for the following year's application. Ms. Netsch added that litter near the basketball and pickleball courts at Dowdy Park is also an ongoing issue due to a lack of waste receptacles in that area and suggested adding a permanent receptacle there. Mr. Elder raised a similar concern at Satterfield Landing Park, noting that parking overflow during events has been accompanied by trash accumulating in adjacent wooded areas.

Update on Strategic Plan from February 2026 Board of Commissioners Retreat.

Ms. Costello presented an overview of the Town's strategic plan, which was updated at the February 2026 Board of Commissioners retreat and formally adopted in April 2026. He explained the plan's structure, noting that goals represent broad desired outcomes, objectives define what success looks like within each goal, and action items are the concrete steps staff will take to achieve those objectives. He described the strategic plan as functioning effectively as the planning department's two-year work plan.

The plan is organized around four broad goals: Environment, Development, Economy, and Community Services.

Mr. Costello focused his presentation on action items within the planning department's primary areas of responsibility:

Goal 1 – Environment:

- Action Item 1.2 – Estuarine Shoreline Management Plan: Progressing multiple living shoreline projects with natural materials to reduce erosion/flooding, backed by grants and partnerships. Advisory services for property owners are being considered.
- Action Item 1.5 – Decentralized Wastewater Management Plan: Guided by the Septic Health Advisory Committee, staff are preparing a zero-interest repair loan program, as detailed by Director Wyatt.
- Action Item 1.6 – Septic Health Initiative Outreach: Expanding public awareness through events, media, and targeted outreach alongside the loan program rollout.

Goal 2 – Development – Mr. Costello highlighted this goal area as central to Planning Board tasks.

- Action Item 2.1 – Land Use Compatibility and UDO Consistency: Identifying mismatches in zoning and development patterns and exploring CORD district flexibility. Senate Bill 382 is mentioned for its limits on regulatory options.
- Action Item 2.2 – Character Area Implementation: Initial implementation at Whalebone Junction and CORD district areas involving shoreline restoration, boardwalk, parks, and connectivity projects like Jennette's Pier.
- Action Item 2.3 – Accessory Dwelling Unit Ordinance: Developing an ADU ordinance with strong community support for long-term rental/attached units.
- Action Item 2.4 – Dark Skies/Residential Lighting: Initiatives include mapping, outreach, turtle-friendly lighting stocking, and collaboration on lighting upgrades.
- Action Item 2.5 – Grant Opportunities: Staff, mainly led by Amy Miller, continue pursuing grants for vital infrastructure projects.
- Action Item 2.6 – US 158 Corridor Advocacy: Advocating for an NCDOT study. Top ARPO priorities are three path projects along US 158 which, despite funding challenges, are hopeful for progress.
- Action Item 2.7 – Parks and Recreation Plan Update: A top plan priority involves updating the 2012 Parks and Rec plan, now outdated due to developments like Dowdy Park and the sound-side boardwalk. A consultant team with coastal expertise and community input will guide this effort, essential for additional PARTF grant points.
- Action Item 2.8 – CORD Activation Strategies: The Town is assessing a boardwalk and CORD activation strategies, considering budget impacts and ongoing strategic planning.

Chair Gwinn asked about the prioritization of the three path segments. Mr. Costello confirmed the Jockey's Ridge connection is ranked first, followed by the area between the outlet mall and The Village, and then the causeway segment.

Ms. Netsch raised a specific safety concern regarding pedestrian conditions near Jockey's Ridge, describing visitors parking at the adjacent church and then walking against traffic along the highway to reach Jockey's Ridge events, with sand spilling into the roadway compounding the hazard. She noted that pedestrians waiting at the crosswalk to return to the formal Jockey's Ridge parking lot are also spilling into the roadway.

Mr. Belsches agreed noting that pedestrians on their return trip are walking with traffic, making conditions even more difficult.

Mr. Costello acknowledged the concerns and indicated that, to his understanding, Town Engineer David Ryan is already working through a design for that segment using separate grant funding.

Mr. Elder raised the possibility of revisiting off-highway pedestrian routing through interior neighborhood streets, particularly the corridor running adjacent to Nags Head Woods from approximately Barnes Street southward. Mr. Costello acknowledged the idea and committed to reviewing the pedestrian plan for that area but noted the challenges of securing state transportation dollars.

Goal 3 – Economy

- Action Item 3.2 – Beach Commercialization Prohibition: Staff are reviewing and proposing code amendments to reinforce the long-standing policy keeping ocean and estuarine beaches free, non-commercial, and family-friendly. An internal review of rules governing rentals and concierge services has been completed, with proposed amendments to follow.

Goal 4 – Community Services

- Action Item 4.9 – Arts and Culture Program: Noted as a planning-related item to enhance programs celebrating Nags Head's heritage and community identity.

Mr. Belsches asked about due dates and ownership of action items. Mr. Costello explained that the plan does not carry hard due dates given the variability of community processes, budgets, etc. Ms. Wyatt confirmed that progress is reported to Town Manager Andy Garman, who in turn provides updates to the Commissioners.

Planning Board Members' Agenda

Ms. Netsch proposed a Junior Lifeguard Program for the Town of Nags Head. She supported the idea based on her experience as a former town lifeguard and what she had seen in a similar program in Australia.

Mr. Elder agreed noting that Kill Devil Hills has an existing program from which a significant portion of its local lifeguard staff has been drawn. He also raised a related public safety concern regarding bystander rescues, noting that surfers rescue more individuals on the Outer Banks than lifeguards do, and that rescuers themselves can become victims without adequate training and flotation. Chair Gwinn and Mr. Belsches suggested that Ms. Netsch consider bringing the same presentation directly to the Board of Commissioners as a citizen advocate.

Planning Board Chairman's Agenda

None

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by David Elder. The time was 10:15 AM.

Respectfully submitted,
Lily Campos Nieberding