

# SUNSET BEACH TAXPAYERS ASSOCIATION

P. O. Box 6053  
Ocean Isle Beach, NC 28469

## NEWSLETTER

May 2025

*The mission of the SBTA is to foster growth within the Town of Sunset Beach while preserving its unique, unspoiled non-commercial character; to press for responsible, efficient government; to prevent the extravagant wasteful expenditure of public funds; and to provide absentee, nonvoting property owners a voice in community affairs affecting their interests.*

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### **SPRING SBTA MEMBERSHIP MEETING**

***The Spring Membership Meeting will be held at the  
Sunset Beach Community Center,  
200 Station Trail, Sunset Beach, N.C. 28468  
May 31, 2025***

***Social time 10:00. Meeting starts at 10:30 and ends no later than  
12:30pm.***

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Dear SBTA Members,

Greetings and welcome to the Spring 2025 SBTA newsletter! I want to thank you for your ongoing membership and support of the SBTA, and to let you know that we continue to strive to fulfill our Association's mission statement, as presented at the beginning of this newsletter.

In recent months, the SBTA Board has taken a number of actions to encourage responsible and efficient local government that works to preserve the special character of Sunset Beach, including:

- A communication to the Town Council and Administration advocating responsible budgeting and taxation policies, including the consideration of a rebate to taxpayers of a portion of the 57% single-year increase in property tax revenue that was instituted last year and remains in place on an ongoing basis.
- A meeting with the Town Administrator to understand and encourage opportunities for savings in the Town's upcoming budgeting process. (See our budget update later in this newsletter.)
- Communications to the Town Council and Administration urging a careful and measured

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implementation of the Parking Plan. (Our advice has not yet been adopted; see the parking update later in this newsletter.)

- A number of updates to SBTA membership regarding these and other issues important to the Town.

The SBTA does not take a specific position on every issue facing the Town, but we do encourage responsible and effective government decision making and execution in general. In addition, through our regular updates and semi-annual newsletters, we endeavor to keep our members up to date with the most important news and issues for Sunset Beach.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize the recent passing of Ray Puknys, who served for many years as President of the SBTA. Ray was active in engaging in many of the issues which define our Town today, and he showed great dedication and commitment to helping set a positive direction for the development of Sunset Beach. Ray led an eventful and colorful life; his obituary can be viewed at this link: [Ray Puknys Obituary](#)

Our condolences go out to his family and friends.

Thanks again for your support of the SBTA. We hope you find the updates in this edition of the newsletter useful. Have a great summer of '25!

— Ken Sekley

### **Minutes from the Labor Day Weekend Saturday Membership Meeting**

#### **Opening**

The Labor Day weekend Saturday membership meeting of Sunset Beach Taxpayers Association was called to order at 10:30 am on August 31, 2024 at the Sunset Beach Community Center, 200 Station Trail, Sunset Beach.

#### **Attendance**

Board members present: Mark Cramer, Tom Barker, Bruce Hovermale, John Wells, Mac Nelson  
Absent: Ken Sekley, Nina Marable

Attendance: 20

#### **Presentations & Discussion**

1. Mark Cramer opened the meeting with a welcome, introduction of board members, and members present introduced themselves.
2. The members present voted to approve minutes of the March 30, 2024 Easter Saturday membership meeting.

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3. Mark Cramer reviewed his newsletter article, Observations on the Town of Sunset Beach's FY 24-25 Budget. During the discussion following, John Corbett, a Town Council member and SBTA member, noted that Council had received no citizen input on the budget and also noted that the budget is basically established by March each year with the subsequent meetings for final reviews. He noted that walkway replacement costs, paving costs, and other items had greatly increased. The Council was adamant about not raising tax rate and had to make tough choices. He noted the competitive aspects of pay for Town employees. The junior employees are more likely to change jobs for a relatively small increase. The Council is currently reviewing the salary structure, pay ranges, etc. It was also noted that the Town provides fire support outside Town limits in the ETJ. Rates are set by the County. The Town does not normally provide police services outside Town limits except when requested under a mutual support agreement with the County Sheriff's Department.
4. John Wells reviewed the Palm Cove Dredging Application status. Palm Cove HOA is requesting a state grant to dredge a navigational channel adjacent to the western border of Palm Cove to Tubbs Inlet. As private entities cannot apply, the Town is supporting a grant application at PCHOA's cost. The project should qualify for State grant funding subject to permitting. Currently the engineering of the project is out for bid.
5. The Calabash Bridge replacement project is currently on schedule and looks good for early completion. There are financial incentives for the contractor to complete the work early.
6. Mac Nelson reviewed his article on problems that have been observed with increased golf cart usage on the island. The Board asked the members for input on the problems. John Corbett noted that when one sees a problem, report it immediately to the police. One can also take a photo and send it to Chief Klamar with a cc: to Lisa Anglin to get attention. He noted that the squeaky wheel gets the grease. John also noted that neither the cart rental companies nor accommodation rentals agencies provide information on the rules specific to golf cart use on public roads. This might be an area where SBTA could assist. He suggested partnering with Sunset Vision.
7. Tom Barker reviewed the Angel's Trace proposed development. The Town Council and developer have approved annexing the development into the Town limits. The final approval will need to come from the State Legislature. John Corbett noted that Jaguar's Lair long running dispute with the developer regarding completion of the infrastructure for that development has been settled and the bond cancelled.
8. John Wells reviewed the situation with algae growth in the Twin Lakes and some of the proposed solutions. It was noted that drought in the past few years has made the growth worse.

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9. Bruce Hovermale reviewed the several new other news items such as the three new Town staff, the Pedestrian/Cycling Path, the Town Park Parking Project, and the Majestic Oak Park plan. Bruce noted that since the newsletter was issued, the Town was notified that it will receive the \$500,000 NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Grant from the State that was applied for.
10. The Board thanked John Corbett for his attendance at the meeting and for providing insights into the issues raised.

Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 12 noon.

### **SBTA Website**

Just a reminder to check the SBTA website for the latest news (Note: this has changed):

<https://sunset25.wixsite.com/sbta>

### **Parking Update**

An issue that has received a lot of recent attention (and been the source of much frustration) has been the Town Council's development and implementation of a "Parking Plan" for the Island. This issue has a long and somewhat convoluted history. This update will attempt to provide a high-level summary of the current status of the plan and how we arrived at this point.

Parking on the Island has been recognized as an issue for many years. The rules were not always clear, and legal parking spaces were not delineated. In-season beach crowds aggravated the situation, which is worsening with the recent rapid population growth of the Town and nearby communities.

The Town Council has considered the parking issue for some time. A recently formed parking committee composed of Town Council members and citizen volunteers proposed a plan that the Town Council has modified somewhat and adopted.

The plan for Island parking has several components:

- On-street parking spaces are delineated (either by concrete curb stops or striping).
- A new public parking lot is proposed for the Island on currently vacant land on Sunset Boulevard. As of this article, the Town does not have a signed lease for the land and the timing of when the new parking lot is to be operational is not clear.
- Both the on-street and the new parking lot are to be paid parking and will be administered (including enforcement and collection of fines) by a private parking management business.

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Residents and property owners of the Town of Sunset Beach are eligible to purchase up to two annual parking passes for \$25 each.

When the Town began the process of delineating parking spaces, the NC Department of Transportation, which has jurisdiction over almost all of Main Street, informed the Town that the planned parking spots on Main Street did not meet state safety, liability, and layout standards. The Town is developing a plan for bringing the Main Street parking spaces up to the required standards. The initial step is to conduct a survey of the State's Right-of-Way along Main Street and that work is underway, although it is not clear when this work will be completed.

It was at this point that the SBTA sent a letter to the Town Council suggesting that the implementation of the parking plan be paused until various issues could be addressed. This advice was not taken, and the paid parking plan was started on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The parking plan has been met with significant frustration on several points:

- Since Main Street cannot currently be used for parking, the number of parking spaces on the Island has been significantly reduced, at least until those spaces can be brought up to the necessary standards, and upon approval by the State opened for use in the paid parking program. This has caused much frustration from prospective beachgoers.
- Under the new parking plan, the extreme west end of Main Street past 40<sup>th</sup> Street (essentially an oblong cul-de-sac), which is the one part of the street not under state jurisdiction, has had an increase in parking from approximately 5 to 14 spaces including 2 handicap spaces. This has raised fears of safety and congestion issues at that end of the street, both from drivers and area residents.
- The Police Department circulated a map showing where parking is not available on numbered streets and Northshore, which some have interpreted as taking away available parking, when in fact the number of available spots has not changed in these areas.
- Questions have come up about homeowners parking in the "right of way" associated with their own homes. Some homeowners appear to have been ticketed for parking where they have parked in the past without an issue. Parking enforcement appears to have increased aggressiveness.

Due to the number of significant unresolved issues, in early April the SBTA once again appealed to the Town Council to pause the implementation of the parking plan until the outstanding issues could be addressed.

— Ken Sekley

**Proposed Sunset Beach Town Budget for FY25-26**

The Sunset Beach Town Council has been considering the proposed budget for the Town for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2025, and extending to June 30, 2026. Some bottom lines from the proposed budget:

- The real property tax RATE will remain at \$0.16 per \$100 of assessed value (per the values established in the most revaluation)
- Total budgeted General Fund REVENUES are projected to INCREASE by \$1.56M (14.6%) to \$12.23M.
- The largest revenue increases are from (with only the increases shown):
  - ✓ Property tax - \$119K
  - ✓ Local Option Sales tax - \$120K
  - ✓ Utility Sales Tax (electric) - \$135K
  - ✓ County Fire District Fees - \$100K
  - ✓ Parking Program - \$97K
  - ✓ Special Assessments - \$875K (dredging project)

Over this proposed budget and the last four budgets, General Fund REVENUES will have increased from \$9.08M to \$12.23M, an increase of \$3.15M or just under 35%.

- Total budget General Fund EXPENSES also are projected to INCREASE by \$1.56M to \$12.23M.
- The expense increases are from (with only the increases shown):
  - ✓ Personnel - \$764K (salary, FICA, Unemployment, Retirement, etc.)
  - ✓ Operating - \$248K
  - ✓ Capital - \$516K (equipment, vehicles, and infrastructure)
- Over this proposed budget and the last four budgets, General Fund EXPENSES will have increased from \$8.74M to \$12.23M, an increase of \$3.49M or just under 40%.
- Personnel expenses have increased over this proposed budget and the last four budgets

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from \$4.89M to \$7.53M, an increase of \$2.64M or just under 53%.

Of note, the \$875K of projected special assessment income (the first year of what should be roughly similar amounts for two more years) is basically paying back the Town for money from the Town's Fund Balance that was used to pay for costs of the dredging project not paid for by NC grants. You may recall that your SBTA Board raised the question with the Town Council whether this special assessment income should be refunded to the Town's taxpayers (or the tax rate reduced) since the Town is already receiving \$1.5M more annually in taxes because of the recent revaluation without a tax rate decrease. As you can see, however, the \$875K in assessment payments is just being allocated as income and spent.

There are a few more steps in the budgeting process, including a public hearing, so the final budget figures may vary slightly. We will keep you informed of any significant developments in that regard.

— *Mark Cramer*

### **Dredging Update**

Although the recent major dredging project in Sunset Beach is now complete, significant issues have arisen regarding the assessments that the Town has made to property owners who were supposed to have benefited from the dredging.

The Town recently notified 321 property owners that they would be responsible for \$7700 each for their share of the cost of the dredging project. Many of those property owners, particularly those whose properties are located on canals, believe they received little, if any, benefit from the dredging project.

Debate has included the scope and specifications of the dredging plan, and whether the execution of that plan delivered on the benefits that were expected.

Many frustrated property owners believe that the dredging that was done was far too limited to provide them with any benefit. At least some of these property owners are apparently mounting a legal action against the Town to contest the dredging assessments.

— *Ken Sekley*

### **Palm Cove Dredging Application Update**

Since our last newsletter, the Town received a grant from the Shallow Draft Navigation Channel Dredging Fund from the NC Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) on Palm Cove's behalf, since private entities cannot apply.

The grant for the "Eastern Jinks Creek Channel Realignment Project" pays 75% of the dredging

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costs to establish a channel from the end of the Town's dredging project adjacent to the western border of Palm Cove to Tubbs Inlet. The Palm Cove Homeowners Association (PCHOA) has committed to paying the other 25% of the expenses, in addition to the Town's expenses for the Town's legal and administrative efforts.

After receiving the notice of grant award, the Town posted a request for bidder qualifications and request for quotation to provide all personnel, materials, and analysis needed to conduct a Pre-Dredge Analysis. This is required for navigation and placement of the potential beach compatible dredge material along the northern coastline of the Palm Cove development. The placement location of any dredge material in excess of that required by Palm Cove will need to be defined as well.

As reported during the April 16th, 2025 Environmental Review Commission (ERC) meeting, the Town received five responses to their request for quotations, which are in the review process. Interviews will be scheduled with contractors based on the results of the review. Once a selection is made, the Council will go into negotiations.

The first photo below was included in the design engineering request for quotation. Although design details will be developed by the contractor, the conceptual area to be dredged is bordered in green. The second presentation slide from a 2024 Town Council meeting shows a potential placement site, in yellow, on the northern shoreline. Both of these graphics are reprinted from our prior newsletter for convenience.





■ Design Template

- Berm - Variable width @ + 10 ft NAVD88
- Estimated length 1,000 ft
- Fill Required ~50,000 cy



Of course, Tubbs Inlet has continued to change significantly since these graphics were created. In addition to main channel movement to the west over the past year, the ingestion of sand continues, seemingly unabated. The actual design will be expected to take these factors into account. The Town's Environmental Resource Committee (ERC) has continued their efforts with local volunteers to drone photograph the Tubbs Inlet area during the extremely high and low tides. There have been consultations with environmental experts to monitor the situation as well. This information is being combined with Google Earth and land-based photos to provide visibility to the changes, even though identifying any potential action or solution remains very elusive.

The Town's project engineering design company is expected to provide:  
Permitting Services:

- Conduct a scoping meeting with all involved agencies to determine the feasibility of obtaining all necessary dredging permits.
- Submit CAMA Major Permit application(s)
- Submit permit application or request for exemption to other local agencies (NCDENR, Stormwater, Erosion Control, 401 Water Quality Certification, etc.)

Design Phase Services:

- Review Sunset Beach Environmental Resource Committee (SBERC) Jinks Creek/Tubbs Inlet Study (JCTIS) information.
- Design dredge drawings.
- Provide progress design meeting(s) with the Town.

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- Provide an estimate of probable cost for dredging.
- Provide technical specifications and sealed Construction Documents

We will continue to monitor the process as the Town moves forward with this project.

— *John Wells*

### **Calabash River Bridge Replacement Project**

Congratulations are due to the NCDOT and its contractor for completion of the Calabash River Bridge on April 24<sup>th</sup>, five days earlier than the May 1<sup>st</sup> early completion date target. The bridge is now open.

The Calabash River Bridge closed to traffic on September 6, 2023 with a target date for reopening of May 2025. This bridge needed to be replaced because of its age (48 yrs) and elevation. Recent storms had flooded the roadway, and even without the storms, the bridge needed frequent repairs.

— *Bruce Hovermale*

### **2025 Beach Season Updates**

Last year, you may recall the town board passed new rules regarding use of wind-driven devices such as shibumis and solbellos. There was also a rule prohibiting metal shovels on the strand. After a trial period on the wind driven devices, new rules have been published clarifying the following:

Wind-driven shading devices with two points of contact, anchored with tie-downs, can be placed anywhere on the beach strand, forward the emergency access, except between 3rd and 29th Streets. This rule applies to traditional beach umbrellas, shibumis and solbellos.

This rule does not apply to cabanas/canopies/tents, which have to remain in a single line between the trash can poles. Note, during the season, it is very easy to see where the line is, since the commercial cabana companies install their cabanas usually very early in the day. The rule regarding these types of shade devices is as follows:

No cabanas/canopies/tents or recreational items are allowed between 3rd through 29th Streets nor should be placed in the emergency vehicle access line from the trash can posts to the dune line or public beach walkways. Cabanas/canopies/ tents shall be erected in a single line in the back row, parallel to the ocean between the trashcan poles, and no larger than 12' x 12' in overall footprint.

Another concern to remember when visiting the beach strand with your family and friends is

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the town asks that you please fill in any holes (and don't dig really deep ones). The reason is for human as well as turtle safety—so they don't fall in the holes. Sunset Beach is a turtle sanctuary, and we have a very active group of folks and turtles.

The town has a list of beach rules on its website--the link is copied here for those who want the complete list: [Town Beach Rules](#)

— *Tom Barker*

### **Multi-modal Path from Town Park to Calabash River Bridge**

At its August 5, 2024 meeting, Town Council agreed for Town Administrator Anglin to proceed with applying for a GSATS grant to construct a multi-modal (bike/pedestrian/sidewalk) path from the Town Park to the Calabash River Bridge. The path would be asphalt, approximately 8-10 feet wide. It is early days for this project. While SBTA is not taking a position on the project at this time, we believe that a detailed cost/benefit analysis should be performed before any financial commitment is undertaken. That study should include:

- Consultation with the towns of Calabash and Carolina Shores, NC Department of Transportation, and any other government entities that might have input regarding design and construction.
- A professional estimate of the total cost of planning, construction, and expected future maintenance.
- A professional analysis of who is expected to use the path and for what purpose.
- How prohibitions against use by any motorized vehicles will be communicated and enforced.

— *Mac Nelson*

### **Town Park Parking Project**



The Town has now completed a project to add and improve the parking and traffic flow at the Town Park. Previously the Town created 13 temporary parking spaces in the center of the roadway of Sunset Boulevard North as a trial. When combined with the 27 spaces in the Town Park lot, there were 40 parking spaces available. As the trial was deemed a success, and these temporary spaces were not to NC DOT standards, this new project placed 32 spaces in the roadway center on a permanent basis and meeting NCDOT requirements with proper curbing and pervious pavers. This will yield a total of 59 spaces for the Town Park and provides

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safer access to the boat ramp and parking area. The work is complete.

— *Bruce Hovermale*

### **Majestic Oaks Park**

The Town was awarded a grant for construction of Majestic Oaks Park on the island from the NC Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) grant in the amount of \$500,000 and a second grant from the NC Division of Coastal Management Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access grant in the amount of \$392,175.

The project is now in the detailed design stage. Below is a link to the overall site plan.

[Majestic Oaks Grant Plan](#)

— *Bruce Hovermale*

### **Twin Lakes Update**

The current Environmental Resource Committee (ERC) was established by the Town Council in 2019 to provide advice on environmental matters important to the Town. Chairman John Farrell, who has successfully led the local environmental focus of the committee for the past 4-1/2 years, stepped down last month for personal health reasons.

Each of the seven members serves a two-year term. In addition to working with Town Staff on planning and coordinating community events like Earth Day/Arbor Day, Green Wave, Tree City USA and other projects, the ERC has been researching issues such as the best practices, grants for maintenance of Twin Lakes, and monitoring the many changes occurring in Tubbs Inlet and Jinks Creek. As a result of their volunteer efforts and capabilities, the ERC has become a reliable and accepted technical resource for the Town.

The eastern lake is shallow and primarily fresh water, and the western lake is deeper, with brackish water that has an overflow/exchange with the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) under the right conditions. Since the ICW is a federal body of water that has been labeled “impaired”, discharges from western lake are regulated. Also, any treatments must be approved by the NC Department of Water Resources (NCDWR) and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USCAE).

South Carolina-based Stillwater Lake and Pond Management has continued to treat the ponds and lakes while monitoring using water sample analysis and identification of weeds.

- East Lake – treated for weeds and algae with very good results
- West Lake – treated starting last summer with slowly improving results

In addition to Twin Lakes, the Town has contracted with Stillwater to help maintain other bodies of water within the Town. The ERC has added these other Town-owned lakes and ponds to its oversight role.

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Treatment options that have been implemented:

- Herbicides and algaecides – applications started in summer 2024
- Bubbler aerators – installed on the east lake and being evaluated for the west lake

Other Tasks Being Done

- Town applied to the NC DWR for Aquatic Weed Control Program Grant.
- NC DWR is continuing to assess the Twin Lakes.
- Algae is being monitored periodically to protect public health.

As stated in the last newsletter, our community needs to come together, including the golf courses, to limit nutrients reaching the lakes and ponds in the Town.

- Limit fertilizer and animal waste flowing into the bodies of water.
- Maintain vegetative buffers (not mowing to edge of lake).
- Implement rain gardens in stormwater runoff businesses and communities .
- Add filter strips where possible.



East Twin Lake 10-18-2023



East Twin Lake 01-18-2025



West Twin Lake 05-27-2024



West Twin Lake 01-18-2025

— John Wells