



Message from the Mayor

Dear Fellow Property Owners and Residents,

As we look back on the year 2022 for Topsail Beach; it was a good year. We had no major storms, our financial condition is excellent, and we welcomed a new Town Manager, Doug Shipley. We setup and tested our new off-island Emergency Operation Center (EOC). Our EOC can house our staff and equipment we need, if required to evacuate Topsail Beach. We continue to focus on the future and protect our resources.

Our Future – our Town will face a variety of legal obligations and requirements over the next 10 years. We have held several workshops looking at these requirements with a focus on providing the expected services that we enjoy. Some requirements are mandatory, and others are just needed to meet operational needs. We need to start the process of replacing our buildings – our youngest building is at 50 years. Protecting our environment is also a daily concern. Single-use plastics, glass and micro plastics continue to be a concern as we educate and work to reduce the impact to our community. Please see below some of the issues we are working on:

- ❖ EPA Water System Audit – failure to meet is a \$63,000 daily fine – our report is due this month
- ❖ Lead/Copper Water System Audit – New Federal Law - needs to be completed in one year
- ❖ Storm Water Management – reducing water on the roads
- ❖ Complete Setup of our off-island EOC – we now have a place for Staff and equipment in case of evacuation
- ❖ Replacement of our fire hydrant water connections
- ❖ Long-Term Water needs – upgrades and improvements to our 50-year-old system
- ❖ Building a facility to handle Police and Fire Department needs
- ❖ Parking – Determine how paid parking can benefit our community
- ❖ Operational updates required by changes in legislative laws for finance, police, and HR policies
- ❖ Purchase of Equipment that is aging out – front-end loader
- ❖ Replace aging fire trucks – a ladder truck and a pumper – cost for a ladder truck is about \$2 million
- ❖ Upgrades for Computers & other electronics – security and communication requirements
- ❖ Longer-term management of septic and have a plan in place for sewer – new septic rules start in 2024
- ❖ Investigate Regional Partnerships for infrastructure systems -possible way to reduce cost
- ❖ Promote the need for high speed fiber optics – more people working from home, communication needs
- ❖ Eradication of Vitex in our dune system. This is an invasive species and does not strengthen our dunes
- ❖ Complete updates for 30 Year Beach Management Plan – will be required by State
- ❖ Plan for our next Beach Nourishment Project – funding, permitting, communication, timing
- ❖ Training needs for our Staff – legal certification and new knowledge needs
- ❖ Fill open positions in police, fire and public works departments
- ❖ Retirement and Staffing needs for the next 10 years – how to prepare for changes in Staff

Preparing for Future Needs - We will look at strategies to finance these projects and will consider hiring a Financial Consultant to work with the Town. We have a few options, but the State of North Carolina does limit our options. The Mayor & Town Staff working with our State legislators secured grants from the State for about \$3 million dollars during the past 4 years to help with some of our projects. Our tax base is not expected to change a lot in the coming years. Taxation is not the only solution to funding our Town needs. We will continue to seek State & Federal Grants, and will consider business plans using our Marina and Paid Parking as funding options. We will need help from many sources to seek out other funding options.

Police Department – staffing continues to be a challenge. We have openings for 3 officers, one position has been open for more than one year. The recruiting pool for police candidates has reduced. We are at a disadvantage in recruiting Officers due to housing, location, and working atmosphere (no major crimes and a tourist community). We do have competitive salary but are one of many police departments looking for talent.

Paid Parking – we will have a workshop to determine if this is the right direction for Topsail Beach. The income from paid parking would be welcomed. However, there are issues we must consider:

- ❖ Establish if Right-of-Way Parking will be used
- ❖ Determine Cost to setup – signs and adjustments to define spaces
- ❖ Determine impact on our businesses, Town Hall, the Park, marina, and several homes as they rely on Right-of-Way Parking for their parking needs
- ❖ Establish accountability for enforcement and ensure fines prevent continued violations
- ❖ Determine how homes that use Right-of-Way or Ocean/Sound Access parking will be affected
- ❖ Determine if addition restrictions are required for Noise and Activity in parking areas
- ❖ Determine any legal restrictions on use of Paid Parking revenue

Fire Department – staffing issues continue and we will need to replace our fire trucks. Once the primary fire truck reaches the age of 20 years, it must be refurbished or replaced. Fire Trucks cost at a minimum \$1.5 million. We will need to determine if we need a ladder truck. Failure to meet this requirement will remove discounts we receive on home insurance policies. Currently only 2 of our Fire Department volunteers live on the island. We will be seeking grants and other opportunities to fund our fire department needs.

Topsail Beach Special License Plate – we have received about 180 applications for our Topsail Beach Special Plate. We need 300 applications by February 1, 2023, to meet the legislative date requirement for our Topsail Beach Special Plate, otherwise we will continue and hopefully have 300 applications by Feb. 1, 2024. All North Carolina citizens with a vehicle registered in North Carolina can apply for a Topsail Beach Special License Plate. For more details, please check the Topsail Beach website (<https://topsailbeachnc.gov/>) or call Topsail Beach Town Hall (910-328-5841).

Managing our Future - The daily activities of managing a beach community are many. The recent request for possible development of the south-end is an example. The Town will follow state and local ordinances for development and our property owners will have time to express their concerns. We are also aware of another residential development being planned. Both projects will be required to meet state and local ordinances, if they move forward.

Topsail Beach was named as the Best Beach Town in North Carolina in 2022. We hope you are proud of our Town and Staff. We are honored and privileged to serve you. Our Mayor, Commissioners, and Staff work every day to meet your needs and provide you information in a professional manner. We are limited at times by North Carolina state laws and other restrictions on what we can do. We welcome and thank you for your feedback, both positive and constructive.

As we move into the 2023 year, let's have the patience and the respect to listen and learn to deal with the facts and not with rumors or half-truths. We encourage all to have complete and factual information. We welcome your attendance at our meetings or viewing on the Granicus system. Let's work together to make 2023 a great year for all of Topsail Beach. Let's reel in all the good things in 2023.

Regards,

Steve Smith, Mayor
Town of Topsail Beach, NC