



Town of Southern Shores

5375 N. Virginia Dare Trail, Southern Shores, NC 27949

Phone 252-261-2394 / Fax 252-255-0876

info@southernshores-nc.gov

www.southernshores-nc.gov

Town of Southern Shores — Council Special Meeting Minutes

Phase One Presentation — Entry Corridor Enhancement Plan

Date: January 27, 2026

Time: 5:30 P.M.

Location: Pitts Center, 5377 N Virginia Dare Trail, Southern Shores NC

The Town Council of Southern Shores convened a special joint meeting with the Planning Board and the Entry Corridor Enhancement Committee to receive and discuss the Phase One Report of the Entry Corridor Enhancement Plan. The presentation outlined the committee's mission, goals, policy alignment with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and findings from extensive public engagement, including stakeholder interviews, a community survey, and a public open house.

Key themes included strong community support for improved aesthetics, landscaping, and pedestrian/bicycle safety; a desire for unified architectural and signage standards; interest in creating gathering spaces and a stronger corridor identity; and mixed, often cautious views regarding housing diversity and mixed-use development. The committee emphasized that Phase One focused on listening, documentation, and alignment with existing policy, while Phase Two will address specific recommendations, implementation strategies, and metrics. No formal actions or votes were taken.

Call to Order & Opening Remarks

The meeting opened by giving thanks to attendees for showing up to hear the Phase One update and to engage alongside the Entry Corridor Committee, Planning Board and Council. The purpose was to share Phase One findings—focused on listening,

documenting current conditions, and understanding community sentiment—while previewing that Phase Two will develop specific recommendations.

Introductions & Attendance

Council members present: Mayor Morey, Mayor pro tem Neal, Council Member Neilson

- Mayor Elizabeth Morey participated and offered remarks during the presentation and discussions.

Planning Board members present: Chairperson Andy Ward, Vice Chair Jan Collins, Michael Zehner

Entry Corridor Committee & Staff:

- Mayor pro tem Neal (Council member, committee member & presenter); Michael Zehner (Planning Board member, committee member & presenter); Jim Gould (committee member & presenter); Matt Price (committee member); Wes Haskett (Deputy Town Manager/Planning Director); Town Manager Cliff Ogburn. Early contributor Linda Lobby was acknowledged.

Agenda Overview

Entry Corridor Enhancement Committee – Phase One Presentation

Overview of the Committee and Scope

- The Entry Corridor Enhancement Committee was established by the Town Council on **October 1, 2024**.
- The study area focuses on the Town’s primary entry along **U.S. Highway 158** and portions of **NC Highway 12**, emphasizing the commercial corridor as the community’s “gateway.”
- Phase One is a **listening and assessment phase**, intended to document existing conditions, community sentiment, and policy alignment rather than propose binding regulations.

Mission and Goals

The Committee presented its mission to revitalize and unify the entry corridor through cohesive design, landscaping, and thoughtful development aligned with community values. Seven adopted goals were reviewed:

1. Establish unified architectural standards and district aesthetics.
2. Promote biodiverse landscaping and green spaces.

3. Support diverse housing incentives (scale-appropriate)
4. Foster community engagement and collaboration
5. Advance economic development aligned with community values.
6. Enhance accessibility and connectivity.
7. Implement ongoing review and adaptation.

These goals were explicitly linked to policies within the Town's Comprehensive Land Use Plan, including Land Use Compatibility (LUC) and Mobility (MB) objectives.

Community Context

- Southern Shores was described as a low-density, coastal community with a strong preservation ethic rooted in its original planning vision.
- The corridor represents a small percentage of the Town's land area but carries outsized importance as both a transportation route and first impression for residents and visitors.
- Jurisdictional complexity was noted, including coordination needs with **Kitty Hawk, Dare County**, and **NCDOT**, particularly along U.S. 158.

Public Engagement Activities

The Committee summarized three primary engagement efforts:

- **Stakeholder Interviews:** Conducted with commercial property owners and business representatives to understand constraints, opportunities, and economic considerations.
- **Community Survey:** Open May–June 2025; received **542 responses**, the majority from long-term residents. Survey results showed strong support for improved landscaping, visual cohesion, and pedestrian/bicycle safety, with more divided views on mixed-use and housing diversity.
- **Public Open House:** Held **May 27, 2025**, featuring interactive stations on architecture, signage, landscaping/green space, mobility, and development patterns. Informal discussions highlighted enthusiasm for aesthetics and connectivity improvements.

Key Findings and Takeaways

- **Aesthetics & Design:** Broad support for unified design standards that reflect a coastal character while allowing flexibility for existing businesses.
- **Landscaping & Green Space:** Strong preference for native plantings, shaded areas, and pocket parks, balanced against business visibility needs.
- **Housing & Mixed Use:** Significant concern about density; cautious openness when scale, visuals, and infrastructure limits are clearly defined.

- **Economic Development:** Preference for small-scale, locally oriented businesses and a potential “heart” of the corridor for gathering, dining, and shopping.
- **Mobility & Safety:** Near-universal support for improved pedestrian and bicycle safety, crossings, and connectivity.
- **Implementation:** Emphasis on avoiding a “plan on the shelf” through clear metrics, phased actions, and continued public communication.

Public Comments and Questions

Members of the public provided comments, including:

- Reflections on historical changes to the corridor and skepticism based on prior planning efforts.
- Support for restoring a sense of community gathering and local-serving businesses.
- Concerns about traffic congestion, pedestrian safety, and coordination with neighboring jurisdictions.
- Questions regarding how existing developments and absentee property owners could be influenced under a future framework.

Committee members and staff responded by emphasizing collaboration, realistic expectations for existing development, and the importance of setting future standards rather than retroactive controls.

Planning Board and Town Council Comments

- Planning Board members expressed support for the effort and noted alignment with ongoing regulatory work related to design, signage, density, and preservation of character.
- Town Council members discussed regional coordination, including dialogue with neighboring municipalities, and expressed cautious optimism regarding intergovernmental cooperation.
- General consensus was expressed that Phase One provides a strong foundation for more detailed, actionable recommendations in Phase Two.

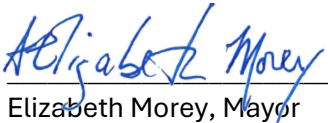
Actions Taken

- **No formal motions or votes** were taken at this meeting.
- Phase Two Program: Draft specific, illustrated recommendations (policies, potential zoning text amendments, streetscape/wayfinding concepts, example sections/elevations).

- Regional Coordination: Structure outreach with Kitty Hawk, NCDOT, and Dare County for branding/wayfinding, safe crossings/speeds, and multi-use path connectivity across the bridge approach.
- Mobility: Identify ped/bike improvements and off-highway connections that reduce short vehicle trips.
- Merchant Engagement: Explore a merchant association and cost-sharing for aesthetic enhancements (landscaping, banners, storefront/parking-lot activation).
- Corridor Design Standards: Prepare clear/flexible guidelines (architecture, signage, landscape palettes) with visual examples for “scale-appropriate” mixed-use.
- Public Space Concepts: Evaluate gathering space options (pocket parks/plazas) with willing property owners.
- Communications: Continue updates and meeting notices on the Town website. Next meeting date was not set during this session.

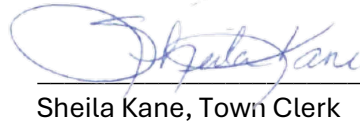
Adjournment- by consensus, the meeting adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

ATTEST:


Elizabeth Morey, Mayor



Respectfully submitted,


Sheila Kane, Town Clerk