



The Advance Morehead City project is a major update to the City’s current unified development ordinance (or “UDO”). The UDO includes the City’s rules for zoning and subdivision of land and is the primary tool for implementing the vision for future development as described in the newly-adopted *Morehead City Plan 2032*. Task 1 of the Advance Morehead City project includes a series of project stakeholder interviews to help the consulting team become familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of the City’s current UDO and development review process. This report is a summary of the input provided by these project stakeholders.

Project stakeholders are persons with knowledge and experience with the Town’s current UDO and development application review process. The following persons were identified by the City as project stakeholders, and were interviewed by the consulting team over the period from February 13 to February 19, 2024.

STAKEHOLDER		AFFILIATION
Ryan Davenport	Shore Protection Manager	Carteret County
Sam Hamad	Owner, Broker	Hamad Realty
Sarah West	Member	Morehead City Board of Adjustment
Saly Lumpkin	Chairperson	Morehead City Planning Board
Patrick Flanagan	Transportation Services Director	Carteret Area Transportation System
Ron Cullipher, PE	President	The Cullipher Group, PA Engineering & Surveying
John Odum, PLS	Owner	Prestige Land Surveying, PA
Blair Propst	Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, Policy, and Operations	Carteret County Public Schools

Stakeholder interviews were conducted without City staff present, and stakeholders were asked the following five basic questions:

1. *Tell us a little about your interest in the UDO process.*
2. *What types of concerns do you have regarding the existing UDO that you’d like to see changed, whether they be process changes or changes to the requirements, or both?*
3. *What are some things about the existing UDO that you think are working right now and that don’t need changing – what things are working well and/or have been recently updated?*
4. *What are some of the things that you’d like to see changed in the new UDO?*
5. *Are there any other concerns or questions that you have about the UDO, the development review process, or the Advance Morehead City project objectives?*

The following pages provide a summary of the input collected from the stakeholders listed in the table above. Individual responses have been summarized into six topic areas. Similar thoughts or ideas expressed by stakeholders are consolidated for the sake of brevity. These comments are summarized from the opinions of stakeholders and may or may not properly characterize current requirements.





1. STORMWATER AND /ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- Encourage more limits on the amount of impervious surface to help mitigate stormwater issues.
- Pine Knoll Shores has a tree ordinance which prevents developers from clear cutting lots.
- Would like to see landscaping standards require native plants.
- Builders are looking for ways to raise lots – this would be a great opportunity for stormwater plans to be able to have retaining walls greater than 2 feet.
- Make sure stormwater options will be accepted by State – reach out to the Coastal Federation.
- The City doesn't have a stormwater plan but problem areas have been identified.
- Allow for more stormwater options, not just the ponds.
- Needs options for raising existing streets.

- Concerns regarding stormwater and tidal flooding were cited by several stakeholders. The City does not have an adopted stormwater plan and regulations but it is an issue that continues to be a concern. If new, innovative stormwater BMPs are included in the new UDO, it is important to engage with NCDEQ since they are the permit authority. It was recommended that the City contact staff at the Coastal Federation to assist in bridging the gap between the State and any new proposed alternatives in the UDO.

2. TRANSPORTATION

- **HISTORIC ALLEYS IN DOWNTOWN**
 - There are problems with the interpretation of the use of the historic alleys. The public cannot use them to get to their driveway.
 - The alleys in the downtown need to be preserved.

- **SAFETY**
 - Eliminate one-way in, one-way out neighborhoods.
 - The number of commercial driveways should be limited.
 - Interconnections should be required between commercial sites to help with traffic on the public street.
 - Spacing distances between driveways and intersections should be increased.

- **SIDEWALKS/TRAILS/BIKE LANES**
 - New developments should provide pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure along new streets.
 - Shoot for multi-purpose trails in new developments.
 - Require interconnections for trails.
 - Ordinance should promote multi-modal transportation options.
 - Encourage sidewalk development, but configuration depends on style of roadway.
 - Mixed use trails (8 to 10') in lieu of sidewalks on both sides of the street would be preferable. Make sure that connections to adjacent properties are required.

- **WATER ACCESS**
 - The water access fee-in-lieu is almost a joke – would like to see the Town increase these fees.
 - Eliminate the “payment in lieu of” option as it provides an easy way out for developers. Currently, there is little incentive to provide water access.





3. COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

• LANDSCAPING

- Commercial parking requirements are too vast. It is disheartening to see vacant properties becoming commercial sites with little to no landscaping.
- Street trees are not safe as they can block visibility at driveways.
- The 2½-foot landscaping strip that is required along the parameter of parking lots is unnecessary. There seems to be a conflict. The perimeter requirement seems out of sync with the 10-foot street yard and internal landscape islands.
- Too much asphalt – better option in terms of handling runoff and also helping to keep the space appearing to be green.
- Like the look of the parking area (near 4th street) – allows for some grass – more green – it has somewhat of the feel of a park and not just a parking lot.
- Landscaping standards needs to include requirements to replace dead trees, shrubs, and plants.
- There needs to be stronger requirements for berms and buffers between land use types.
- Don't love the choices of trees being planted, seems as though the developer gets what is available or cheapest.

• OFF-STREET PARKING

- Would prefer that rules allow for being more flexible. For instance, having an allowance for shared parking would reduce the amount of impervious surface.
- Alternative parking standards could be part of conditional zoning.

• BUILDING DESIGN

- Would like to see standards for cohesive commercial buildings when it comes to types of materials and colors of materials; strive for nice standards, but not too complicated.
- Would like to see improvements in “curb appeal” of commercial sites.
- It is concerning that there are properties that sit vacant for years; however, it seems as though the City does a good job of making sure that property owners keep those places clean.
- Would prefer some architectural standards in lieu of plain, metal buildings. The new car wash and boat sales sites started as plain, metal buildings but they are now adding some of those architectural elements.
- The architectural standards do not need to be cost prohibitive.
- There is no specific Morehead City “look” for architectural standards.

• SIGNS

- The sign rules have been updated, so they are good.
- There seems to be a disparity in the signage rules or at least how sites are developed. There appears to be not much middle ground, signs are VERY large or too small.
- Like the sign requirements that were recently (last couple of years) revamped. They are clear and the appendix provides examples which is helpful.





• **INFILL DEVELOPMENT**

- There is a concerning number of abandoned buildings.
- Would like to see the UDO encourage infill development by making it easier to redevelop sites.
- There should be an allowance for fewer regulations when redevelopment is proposed within an existing building footprint.

• **BUILDING HEIGHT**

- Maintain height restrictions in the downtown area.
- Being surrounded by water, the City has little room for horizontal expansion. It may be prudent to relax height restrictions to allow for vertical growth.

4. HOUSING

- We have a terrible workforce housing issue. We see potential employees take a job but then call back to rescind their acceptance because they couldn't find attainable housing.
- Promote mixed use development. In the downtown there are older buildings that could provide housing on the second floor which could help with housing.
- Concern that the new townhomes on the waterfront will be detrimental to the area.
- Some developers will be open to providing attainable housing recognizing the community need versus only looking at the bottom line.
- Providing a density bonus is key to achieving more affordable housing.
- Need more income-based housing.
- If short-term rentals are the enemy, allowing for hotels in the downtown would provide spaces for visitors to stay.
- Restrictions on short-term rentals would be detrimental to property rights.

5. CODE-SPECIFIC CONCERNS

• **RESIDENTIAL**

- Develop standards to allow for ADUs to be permitted everywhere.
- In residential areas, stacked parking cannot count toward two spaces.
- There is no allowance for overhangs on roofs to encroach into setback areas.
- Cannot use more than 50% as usable – decks (covered or not) are considered as usable.
- The regulations regarding boat storage on residential lots seems to be too restrictive.
- There needs to be a limit of only one driveway for residential lots and the size should be no more than 16' in width.

• **BULKHEADS AND RETAINING WALLS**

- UDO should permit shared docks; currently, there is a 5-foot setback yet there is language that references shared docks.
- CAMA allows shared docks and requires a joint maintenance agreement. It is not required to be recorded.
- The Town only allows 2 slips per lot when shared; however, single dock yields to the CAMA allowance which is 6 slips per lot.





- The existing code requires boater registration numbers to prove that the vessel is owned by the property owner. Who enforces?
- Retaining wall are limited to 2 feet in height. This is not appropriate in all situations since it depends on the elevation of the lot.
- There definitions and rules for bulkheads and retaining walls need clarified in the code.
- There are conflicts between CAMA rules and Town rules.

6. REVIEW PROCESSES

● PREDICTABILITY

- Need specific thresholds for requirements for traffic impact studies. Being required after submittals are made wastes time; the developer could have ordered one to be completed prior to submittal if it was clear that it would have been required.
- There should be other options for holding community meetings (like emails or mailings). Ensure that there is a clear threshold for when community meetings are required.
- More predictability is desired so that we can avoid surprises. This would help applicants and staff.
- Need clearer standards that lead to predictable outcomes.
- The timetables for review turnaround needs to be clear.

● ALLOW MORE ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEWS

- Allow staff to make more administrative decisions on plan modifications after planned unit developments and special use permits have been approved by Town Council.
- Suggest that plat reviews be completed at the staff level. If a plat meets requirements, it would expedite the process for applicants and staff (no need to prepare staff reports).

● EFFICIENCY

- Streamlined processes help both applicants and staff. Anything that can help get a project plan from point A to point B quicker is key.
- The review of exempt plats can take 6 to 8 weeks.
- Would like to see the regulatory framework be more efficient.
- Concerned that the degree of detail required for concept/sketch plans could be simplified for basic approval. More detailed site plan would then be required to be approved prior to development.
- Would like to see less details required for sketch/concept plans.

● CLARITY IN REGULATIONS

- Avoid regulatory overlap and contradiction.
- Would like to see the UDO be clear on what constitutes a complete application.
- Hope to see easier to use forms and clear checkboxes for submittal requirements.
- Would like to see clear timeline for minor subdivisions as there are no timelines currently.
- When options are permitted, there needs to be clear thresholds. Avoid options if the staff could disagree on the option chosen.
- Make sure standards are clear to allow for predictability and saving time.
- Need more clarification on the definitions of multi-frontage lots (corner lots, three-sided lots and waterfront lots).





- The current UDO leaves so much to interpretation. Feel sorry for the staff when they have to make decisions because the UDO is too vague.

• GENERAL PROCESS COMMENTS

- Would not want to have a community meeting – Town should have the meeting – they can engage the presence of law enforcement where a private developer cannot.
- Encourage planned developments and conditional zoning – this process can provide a “win-win” and provides flexibility.
- Does the planned unit development allow the developer to do whatever they want versus what the UDO requires?
- There was Planning Committee – open to town neighbors – gave direction – this was helpful (almost like a pre-submittal or community meeting to gage how a proposal would be received).
- The zoning district descriptions are good.
- Processes have been fine.
- New construction standards are good.
- Open space text amendment – turned out well.

- Without exception, the interviewees were very complimentary on the professionalism of the planning staff. They feel like they do an excellent job for the City and its citizens. It was recognized that, too often, staff are put in a position to have to make discretionary decisions because of the vagueness in the current UDO.

