



County of Dare

P.O. Box 1000 | Manteo, NC 27954

Dare County Housing Task Force

Dare County Administration Building, Manteo, NC

April 22, 2024, 3:30 p.m.

Approved 4/30/24

Present: *Robert Outten, Malcolm Fearing, Mitchell Bateman, Carol Warnecki, Wally Overman, Donna Creef, Ron Payne, Jeff Schwartzberg, Steve Basnight, Craig Garriss, Melody Clopton, Monica Thibodeau, Matt Neal, Duke Geraghty, Melissa Dickerson, Sherry Whickstom, Bob Peele, Briggs McEwan, Steve Basnight, Senator Hanig (Virtual), Senator Sanderson (Virtual), Representative Goodwin (Virtual)*

Absent: *Robert Woodard, John Windley, Caroline Basnight, Ronnie Sloan, Drew Havens, Elizabeth Morey, Mike Siers, Andy Garman, Ryan Lang, Tess Judge*

Also Attending: *Dorothy Hester, Public Information Officer, Skyler Foley, Clerk, Trey Lewis, John Tayloe, Mary Helen Goodloe-Murphy, Todd Clissold, Dennis Zaenger, Bea Basnight, April Weeks, Mary Ellon Balance, Susan Bothwell, Michael Zehner, Katie Morgan, Martha Bron, Jeanine Emery, Cheryl House, Steve House, Mirian Rollin, Matt Walker, Debbie Jones, Craig Jones, Anne DeOrnellas, Jamie Wegener, Rosemarie Dosnier, Breyann Bailey, Kathryn Fagan, Michael Basnight*

Vice-Chairman Wally Overman called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Robert Outten provided an explanation about the Housing Task Force, which consists of a broad group of individuals brought together by the county to address housing issues. This group includes representatives from local governments, the business community, the Home Builder and Realtors Association, and citizens. Outten mentioned that the county was fortunate to receive grant funding for this initiative, but there were strict requirements attached to it, making it challenging to use in Dare County. It has become clear that constructing multifamily dense housing is not a viable solution, so the Task Force needs to explore alternative approaches. Outten emphasized that simply building more houses is not feasible due to limited land availability and the existing single-family community structure. Thus, the Task Force must brainstorm other strategies to tackle the housing problem. Outten then turned to the legislators for suggestions on how the Task Force can expand its toolkit beyond construction to address housing issues effectively.

Senator Hanig emphasized that not all solutions may be suitable for every town or community, making it challenging to propose statewide measures. However, he encouraged the Task Force to put forth suggestions for potential legislation that could be beneficial. Drawing from his personal experience of working in Duck and Corolla for thirty years, Senator Hanig shared that he resides on the mainland due to affordability and will continue to do so, even though it means a 45-minute commute to work. He referenced examples from other regions, such as Aspen, where employees live outside resort areas and

commute to work. He emphasized that he is not certain about the intentions of the Task Force, but he is willing to assist with any legislative measures. He then stated that finding solutions will require a collaborative effort from the community and that the municipalities must be prepared to be flexible.

Senator Sanderson concurred with Senator Hanig, noting that Dare County is just one of many communities facing the same challenges. While some areas have the advantage of nearby land for development, others are encountering similar obstacles as Dare County to progress. He acknowledged the difficulties of meeting grant requirements and emphasized the importance of collaboration among Task Force members. Senator Sanderson admitted that he does not have a specific plan tailored to Dare County's needs, suggesting that solutions must be collectively developed by the Task Force. He expressed willingness on offering guidance on what may be deemed acceptable by the state. Regarding the grant, he admitted his lack of prior experience in such matters, stressing that the resolution will ultimately be determined at a higher up level than his or Senator Hanig's.

Senator Hanig underlined the fact that the issue at hand is not limited to just Dare County, but extends to Currituck County as well, imposing a burden on residents there. He highlighted the importance of Town Commissioners being willing to make sacrifices in order to progress. It was made clear that individuals need to understand that this is essential/workforce housing, not Section eight or low-income housing. The shortage of teachers, EMS workers, and other professionals is exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing options. Senator Hanig stressed the need for solutions that are acceptable to both Commissioners and citizens, acknowledging the challenges in catering to the diverse needs of different communities.

Outten inquired on how to make a request to repurpose the grant money for some of the potential ideas that the Task Force comes up with. Senator Hanig responded that the General Assembly is not going to return any money, and if they do, they will not do it unless there is a concrete plan in place. He mentioned that this issue has been ongoing for four years and with even with a plan, it would still be a challenging endeavor.

Senator Sanderson agreed with Senator Hanig and stressed the importance of creating a plan and allowing the individuals responsible for the funds to reassess. He pointed out that there is a significant amount of accountability and money involved, and that the State of NC will also be held accountable by others. He expressed his belief that it was time to start brainstorming ideas and explore potential solutions to bring back to their leadership. Senator Sanderson acknowledged the urgency of the situation due to the tight timeline with the start of the short session, and highlighted the ongoing discussions statewide. He noted the unique challenge in Dare County due to limited available property, suggesting that a possible solution could involve introducing legislation to possibly extend buildable limits.

Senator Hanig and Senator Sanderson asked the Task Force if they had any ideas or possible solutions that they wanted to discuss that they could take to their leadership.

Malcolm Fearing expressed his gratitude for the Legislators' representation and the \$35 million-dollar grant. He went on to explain the composition of the Task Force and clarified that he believes that Dare County does not oppose housing in general, but rather the way in which this had been pushed forward. Fearing emphasized that large, multi-million-dollar construction projects would likely not be supported in many townships, as that is not the primary focus of development in the area. He also highlighted the importance of discussing Section 24.8A of the legislation, which exempts municipalities and the county from zoning regulations for certain developments. Fearing stressed that this issue is one of the things that brought the Task Force together and requested help from legislators in addressing this matter. He then suggested postponing the return of the \$35 million to allow the Task Force adequate

time to develop a comprehensive plan. Additionally, he mentioned a potential plan he has formulated for inland Dare County.

Senator Hanig discussed the issue surrounding Section 24.8A and shared that both he and Senator Sanderson were not aware of the budget until the morning of the vote. However, he has already prepared legislation to remove it as a provision in the budget through a technical correction. He mentioned that he does not anticipate any challenges in having it removed. Regarding the decision to pause the allocation of funds, Senator Hanig asked if Outten had consulted with the Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) and what progress had been made in that process. Outten stated that he has discussed with the OSBM and they have provided him with the procedure to return it the following day if necessary. He mentioned that he made them aware of this Housing Task Force Meeting and the Board of Commissioners Meeting on May 7th, during which the funds will be discussed. The OSBM stated that the county has the flexibility to hold onto the money until a decision is made on how to use it, unless mandated otherwise by the legislature.

Senator Hanig commented that he is more than willing to ask, but again, they cannot just ask for a pause because the Task Force wants time to plan because he will get the response of “they have been trying to do it for four years.”

Outten inquired about the possibility of requesting a specified end date in order to create a viable plan by that time. In theory, this would allow the Task Force to have a plan ready for the Senators return from the long session in February. At that point, the legislature would have the option to approve or reject the Tasks Force proposal.

Senator Hanig stated he is more than willing to try and ask, but has no idea what the reaction would be. He noted that it will be extremely difficult to get it into the '25 Session.

Fearing noted that is important to do this correctly and not quickly. He explained that although some time has passed, there has never been a situation where so many people have come together to address the housing issue within their communities. He emphasized the importance of advocating that to the General Assembly. Fearing expressed confidence that the Task Force could develop a plan that would be approved by both the communities and the General Assembly, if given the opportunity. Senator Hanig inquired if there was a reversion clause on the grant money, Outten responded that there is no time on the reversion. Hanig reiterated that he would have the conversation with leadership, but he believes that the Task Force needs to work on a timeline and having everyone in agreement is critical. Senator Sanderson indicated his agreement with Senator Hanig and pointed out that most grant money typically has a reversion clause, which makes it surprising that this particular grant does not. He suggested that the Task Force should consider developing a comprehensive plan, possibly even pinpointing specific land parcels, at the next meeting. Senator Sanderson emphasized that presenting a clear plan to leadership is crucial for making progress, as it would be challenging to move forward without a solid starting point. He also emphasized the importance of if a housing project were to go into a municipality, then whichever municipality would have to be willing to accept it.

Sherry Wickstrom noted that the Task Force has had two meetings and she believed that significant progress had already been achieved. She emphasized that the municipalities have the best understanding of their own communities and at the last meeting it was discussed that each entity go back to their respective municipalities to create a comprehensive plan tailored to the possibilities of each municipality. She expressed optimism that this approach could represent a positive advancement.

Senator Hanig stated that the plan makes sense, but there are several uncertainties that must be addressed. These include identifying who will oversee the plan, determining its appearance, deciding whether a public-private partnership will play a role, and outlining the distribution of the allocated \$35 million for Dare County among its towns. It is imperative that these types of questions be addressed. He inquired if any of those questions had been discussed, Outten responded that the Task Force had not discussed that yet, but it is contemplated in the legislation that those issues have to be resolved and so under a development agreement with whoever the builder was those issues would be sorted out. Outten then talked about the possibility of using the funds for purposes other than construction. There was also conversation about utilizing the funds for incentives that may need legislative adjustments.

Senator Hanig expressed his intention to make the issue more acceptable and mentioned that he plans to address it with the leadership. He believes that they may question if they are simply prolonging the inevitable. Outten replied that the Task Force must develop a plan to address these concerns. He then noted that the Task Force is relatively new and that they need time to come up with the plan and it is probably unreasonable to think it can be done in a month. He further expressed that there is an opportunity to create a plan because there is a consensus that there is a housing problem and it needs to be solved. Senator Hanig mentioned that Resolutions and agreements from the municipalities will be necessary.

Fearing inquired on the best way to communicate with the Senators since they are going into short session, Senator Hanig responded that he was more than happy to attend the Housing Task Force meetings when he can and the more involved he is the better.

Fearing then discussed the assistance that was provided by federal legislators in addressing issues in the past, such as teacher housing on Hatteras Island and land for a sewage treatment plant, he pointed out that two of these individuals attended this meeting. He concluded by stating that in order to effectively address this issue, it is important for all levels of government to be involved, including the General Assembly, the Governor's office, and our Federal Representatives.

The following members of the public spoke: Jeanine Emery, Michael Zinger, Rosemarie Doshier and Craig Jones. They inquired about House Bill 259, the pending legislation that references ADU's, the possibility of Dare County partnering with Tyrell and Hyde Counties, and where to go to make sure input from the citizen are heard.

Duke Geraghty made the recommendation for the Task Force to meet every two weeks in order to get everyone on the same page and possibly get a draft to the General Assembly within thirty days.

MOTION

Duke Geraghty made a motion to have scheduled meetings every two weeks.

Carol Warnecki seconded the motion.

VOTE: Ayes unanimous

Outten announced that he would review the calendar, select a meeting date, and the Task Force would be notified. He encouraged everyone to attend the meeting or send a representative on their behalf.

Fearing asked for the election of a Chairman and subcommittees to be discussed at the next meeting. Wickstrom added that the towns have a significant amount of work to do in a short amount of time.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 4:31p.m.