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**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
OF THE EMERALD ISLE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2017
6:00 PM – TOWN BOARD MEETING ROOM**

1. Call to Order

The special meeting of the Emerald Isle Board of Commissioners was called to order by Mayor Barber at 6 pm.

2. Roll Call

Present for the meeting: Mayor Eddie Barber, Commissioners Candace Dooley, Steve Finch, Floyd Messer, Jim Normile and Maripat Wright.

Others present: Town Manager Frank Rush, and Town Clerk Rhonda Ferebee.

3. Opening Prayer

Mayor Barber offered the opening prayer.

4. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Barber led the Pledge of Allegiance.

5. Adoption of Agenda

Motion was made by Commissioner Messer to adopt the Agenda. The Board voted unanimously 5-0 in favor. Motion carried.

6. Presentation – Islander Drive Redevelopment: Possibilities, Parameters, and Public Input

Town Manager Frank Rush provided a PowerPoint presentation for the Board and public concerning the Islander Drive Redevelopment – Possibilities, Parameters, and Public Input. (A copy of the presentation is attached to the official minutes in its entirety).

7. Board Comments

Commissioner Messer commended Town Manager Rush for an excellent presentation and hoped it would put a stop to a lot of falsehoods and rumors circulating.

Commissioner Wright said it was indicative of everything Town Manager Rush talked about as she had a lot of ideas for amenities to put on the property that people wanted such as splash pad, and pickleball courts, and when she saw the drawings there they were. Commissioner

1 Wright said that is how everybody worked, taking each other's ideas and incorporating them.
2 She hoped everyone could work together to make this happen.

3
4 Commissioner Finch thanked everyone present for taking the time to attend, and commending
5 Town Manager Rush for an excellent job leading the way tonight. Commissioner Finch said
6 everyone had an opinion and he certainly wanted to take the time tonight to hear what the
7 public had to say. Commissioner Finch said his decision as a Board member would be based on
8 what the public felt was best and not what he thought was best. Commissioner Finch stated
9 what was more important at this time was that they all worked collectively to ultimately
10 provide a "field of dreams". Commissioner Finch recalled what Town Manager Rush mentioned
11 during his presentation that what made Emerald Isle was our beautiful beaches but it was also
12 each and every one here this evening. He asked they please remember that nice does matter
13 and that they continue on in a mannerism that would make everyone proud of their actions.

14
15 Commissioner Dooley echoed what had already been stated, also commending Town Manager
16 Rush on his presentation. Commissioner Dooley said she personally along with several of her
17 fellow Commissioners, the Town Manager and the Mayor had each taken time out of their
18 personal lives, and personal work schedules to listen to everyone, to meet on a hot afternoon
19 in the summer to listen to their concerns on a Saturday night. Commissioner Dooley asked
20 everyone to please take that into account, that they were listening, they were incorporating
21 those ideas, and they were there for them, echoing again that nice does matter as they make
22 their comments.

23
24 Commissioner Normile added to the other comments that they had until the year 2019 to
25 respond to the County Commissioners regarding the grant funding and ad valorem taxes that
26 may be generated from commercial project initiatives. Commissioner Normile said if they had
27 until 2019 to do that then he felt they didn't need to rush. Commissioner Normile referring to
28 all the projects that the Town Manager reminded everyone of during his presentation, noted
29 those decisions weren't made in one night and he didn't want to make a decision tonight on
30 what to do. Commissioner Normile said they had plenty of time and shouldn't rush the
31 process. He knew that everyone seated on the Board valued public input, and felt they needed
32 an additional forum or two to talk about this issue and what they would do but they had time
33 and shouldn't rush the process.

34
35 Mayor Barber thanked the Board for their comments and thanked Town Manager Rush for an
36 excellent presentation.

37
38 **8. Public Input**

39
40 Joy Brownlow, 7506 Sound Drive, said she was most grateful that everyone here had the
41 opportunity to share their own opinion. Ms. Brownlow said she didn't see any reason for the
42 Town to get involved with investors to build an event center. Ms. Brownlow said there were

1 many locations throughout the County that were set up to host events including one at the
2 Ocean Club in Indian Beach that was currently up for auction. Ms. Brownlow said there many
3 event sites within a 15-minute drive including the Islander and the Swansboro Civic Center. Ms.
4 Brownlow said the CAMA Land Use Plan stated that the community was careful to avoid over
5 commercialization in order to preserve our distinct family friendly water based lifestyle and
6 cultural heritage. Ms. Brownlow hoped that our local government would be responsive to the
7 people who lived, worked and paid taxes here. Ms. Brownlow said it was her opinion that it
8 was not the bricks, mortar and asphalt that gave Emerald Isle its charm but it was the beach,
9 sand, live oak trees, marsh grass, and enjoyable outside activities. Ms. Brownlow suggested the
10 idea of a public community pool that could operate similar to the Emerald Isle gym with daily,
11 weekly, monthly and annual passes available for purchase. Ms. Brownlow felt a pool could
12 provide a safe place to swim, learn, gather, and lessen the number of emergency rescue calls.
13 Ms. Brownlow felt the ocean was a very challenging place to learn to swim unless a flat day
14 with no currents which was very rare.

15

16 Toney Browder, 7515 Sound Drive, commented to Town Manager Rush that he had done a
17 great job and had answered most of his questions concerning the proposal. Mr. Browder said
18 he had been told that the Town was going to give the 4.4 acres over with the 1.8 acres to a
19 private developer in this scenario.

20

21 The Board indicated that was not correct.

22

23 Mr. Browder asked whether the Town would retain property ownership or whether they were
24 selling the property.

25

26 The Board indicated the 4.4 acres would not be sold but the 1.8 acres could be sold.

27

28 Mr. Browder loved the way that everyone's concerns next door to the property had been
29 incorporated. Mr. Browder said that his other concerns that they would create the center
30 upfront and have walking to the beach further away from the beach had been rectified with
31 these plans. Mr. Browder thought it was a little dangerous for public entities to get into
32 cahoots with private developers. Mr. Browder felt that other than that potential for issues all
33 of his questions had been answered.

34

35 Jerry Stockdale, 8521 Oceanview, stated that it had not been his intention for the letter he
36 wrote to the Board to be read at a Board meeting but somehow that happened. Mr. Stockdale
37 said he found that the Board had not received his email and he apologized that it didn't go
38 through. Mr. Stockdale said he had concerns with the concept of the meeting and events
39 center and in his letter had expressed his feelings. Mr. Stockdale said he wrote the letter to
40 give the Board some input and maybe some thoughts they hadn't had, he was not part of a
41 group opposed to development and he thought that area should be developed. Mr. Stockdale
42 said he had lived in Emerald Isle for 22 years and he had seen many great things happen and he

1 thought something great would happen in the Village West area. Mr. Stockdale said everything
2 he read seemed to be a steamroller toward the meeting and event center and he hoped that
3 steamroller was halted. Mr. Stockdale also said he was concerned with the private /
4 government partnership idea as he felt there were dangers with that particularly if there was a
5 situation where the developer was allowed to build the building and lease the land. Mr.
6 Stockdale said if it failed they then had a building that they may not be able to do anything
7 with, referring to a situation in Beaufort right now where that Town evidently had a lease
8 arrangement on the waterfront and they had run into big problems because of the private /
9 government partnership. He cautioned that they don't get into a situation where the Town was
10 left holding the bag or getting a piece of property back with a building on it. Mr. Stockdale
11 thanked Town Manager Frank Rush for the nice presentation and said he had great faith that
12 the Board would do the right thing and make the right decisions.
13

14 Commissioner Messer said the points in Mr. Stockdale's were well taken and his personal point
15 of view hearing the words partnership and lease was that he was not interested in a
16 partnership or a lease. Commissioner Messer said if someone wanted to buy the property and
17 build something at their own risk it was like buying a lot anywhere else, it might fail or might
18 not.
19

20 Debby Mallette, 8531 Oceanview, thanked the Board for the presentation as they had been
21 curious as to what this could mean. Ms. Mallette said she spoke on behalf of some others
22 whose comments she had seen on different Facebook pages, and other meetings that the
23 Commissioners had attended. Ms. Mallette said they didn't know what the definition was of a
24 meeting and event center. Ms. Mallette said they had all been to Myrtle Beach and other
25 places for classes and there was a hotel and a meeting and event center where they went for
26 classes and she wondered what the Board's concept was of what a meeting and event center
27 could mean.
28

29 Town Manager Rush said that ultimately it would be determined by the Board of
30 Commissioners when they evaluated any proposals received. Mr. Rush said to put into context,
31 at least the nature of the conversations up to this point, if you had been to the Grand Dunes,
32 the Marriott in Myrtle Beach that was not at all what was envisioned. Mr. Rush said what was
33 envisioned was something on a very small scale and the meeting and event center terminology
34 was intended to connote something on a small scale.
35

36 Ms. Mallette asked whether there would be a hotel in the meeting area. Mr. Rush responded
37 there could potentially be, noting he thought the contents put forth tonight as provided in the
38 handouts really could be any combination of meeting space on the ground floor with hotel or
39 condos on the top floor, it could all be condos, or could all be hotel, or some other commercial
40 use. Mr. Rush said the ultimate goal to focus on was that they were trying to create something
41 nice in that area that would benefit the entire community. Mr. Rush said the intent up to this
42 point had never been anything like Grand Dunes used for example.

1
2 Ms. Mallette said they had been conjecturing when they heard phrases about the land
3 purchase so the question many had was that the Islander hotel that had done a great job and
4 had an event center why have an event center right next door to an event center. Ms. Mallette
5 also thanked Commissioner Normile for saying they should just wait a minute. Ms. Mallette
6 said they would like time to absorb the presentation package so they could have some good
7 points to make and get the folks who were out of town to study it as well so they could be
8 responsible for the questions they asked and be sure they were on the same page. Ms.
9 Mallette said she and her husband chose to come to Emerald Isle because they wanted to just
10 relax and enjoy the beauty God had given us all. Ms. Mallette thought if the Board gave them a
11 little time to absorb this, and give some good suggestions, that there was no rush to make any
12 decisions tonight.

13
14 Town Manager Rush encouraged anyone to contact him at any time by phone or email to set up
15 a time to talk and learn more with him, the Mayor or Commissioners. Mr. Rush said they were
16 still early in the process and there was still a lot of time going forward.

17
18 John Flick, Boardwalk RV Park, asked about the public amenities listed in the handout –
19 splashpad, pickleball, and whether anything else had been considered.

20
21 Commissioner Wright said a lot of other things could be configured in there, the amenities
22 included were just what the engineers used when drawing up the plans. Commissioner Wright
23 said there could be covered picnic areas, places to buy food. Commissioner Finch thought they
24 could certainly have another restaurant.

25
26 Mr. Flick commented that with the Publix and the other hotel being built where the Lighthouse
27 Golf was located that would generate extra traffic. Mr. Flick said in the off season it was not an
28 issue but during the season if you were going to add another 200-250 spaces for cars how
29 would they handle the traffic.

30
31 Commissioner Messer said they would have to live with the two lanes that they had now.

32
33 Mr. Flick said that was his concern since he had to cross that bridge many times and on Friday
34 and Saturday, it was a horrible endeavor. Mr. Flick said he liked the fact they were cleaning up
35 the eyesores and wondered about the eyesore on the other side of the street, the granite
36 place.

37
38 Commissioner Messer said in his mind he would like to see that cleaned up next.

39
40 Mr. Flick said the minute the Town bought the land and started talking about any development
41 he could guarantee they would be hit up by a lot of businesses. Mr. Flick wondered what other
42 businesses had expressed interest other than a meeting and event center.

1
2 Town Manager Rush said up to this point there had been a lot of brain storming type
3 conversations with different commercial interests but there was no agreement with anyone,
4 nothing set in stone at all. Mr. Rush said essentially what he was looking for from the Board
5 tonight was some direction going forward, and that direction may be to wait but ultimately
6 they were not at that point yet. Mr. Rush said they had talked very informally with folks at the
7 Islander, but certainly all of that would be vetted publicly at the appropriate time if it
8 happened.

9
10 Commissioner Normile added that the Town had not solicited for any commercial development.
11 Mr. Flick said the minute the land was available and the Town said they were going to build
12 something he guaranteed the businesses would be approaching the Town.

13
14 Joan Pate, 9100 Reed Drive, commented she enjoyed the nice presentation and the pictures.
15 Ms. Pate asked about the comment from Commissioner Messer that said no partnership, and
16 were they telling someone who buys the land that they couldn't build what they wanted
17 because the Town Manager said if someone said you couldn't build on your own land what you
18 wanted that wasn't fair. Ms. Pate asked if someone bought the land could the pictures
19 presented change as it would then be the private investors right to build what they wanted.

20
21 Commissioner Messer said he took partnership to mean involvement as in if he had a lot and he
22 sold it to someone he was not going into partnership with them. He took partnership as being
23 involved in what they were doing, taking a risk in what they were doing, and that he was not
24 interested in.

25
26 Town Manager Rush said that if the Board's direction was to put the land on the market and
27 sell it, whoever bought it would be able to do what was allowed under the current zoning
28 regulations, and it is zoned Village West. Mr. Rush said because the Board owned the property
29 they could also choose to put additional restrictions on what someone could do, that would be
30 up to them to make that determination and you would have to have a buyer willing to accept
31 those conditions. Mr. Rush said if the Board didn't put any special conditions on the land then
32 the person would be able to do what was allowed under the zoning ordinance just like
33 everyone else. Mr. Rush noted that if someone else had bought the property then they would
34 be able to do exactly what was allowed under the zoning.

35
36 Ms. Pate said if the Sheraton for example came in and bought the land could they build
37 oceanfront.

38
39 Commissioner Wright said the 4.4 acres was not for sale and the 1.8 acres was not oceanfront
40 land.

41
42 Ms. Pate asked why in all of the drawings it was not just the 1.8 acres.

1
2 Town Manager Rush said that was certainly an option and was one of the 3 concepts presented.
3 Mr. Rush said if Sheraton or Marriott bought the land they would be able to build something
4 under our zoning ordinance, for example, up to 40 feet tall with the potential to go 50 feet tall,
5 but if the Board established a parameter and said it had to be 40 feet then that is what they
6 would be held to which was the whole reason for the parameters to give everyone more
7 comfort that what was being considered would protect their interests and they would be
8 pleased with it.

9
10 Ms. Pate said a lot of information came directly from televised County Commissioners meetings
11 that said it would be an oceanfront event center. Ms. Pate said the information that she had
12 used on different sites was going from what the County Commissioners had said and from
13 Mayor Barber's letter to the County Commissioners talking about a low profile parking deck and
14 different things that would be on the 6.2 acres not the 1.8 acres.

15
16 Commissioner Dooley said that just showed how things had evolved and how the Board had
17 listened.

18
19 Charles Pake, 8901 Dune Ridge Ct., said the only thing he was looking at was that they bought a
20 parking lot but the only thing that made it attractive to anyone else was that they were selling
21 part of what they already had at the oceanfront access.

22
23 Town Manager Rush pointed to a slide of the property and noted where the buildings were
24 shown was currently located on the 4.4 acres that was the Western Ocean Regional Access in
25 the rear portion. Mr. Pake said that was what made it attractive to a buyer. Mr. Pake said the
26 Town would have to sell part of the Western Ocean Regional Access that the Town already
27 owned to make it attractive for a buyer to build a business there so he felt the Town would be
28 losing something in the long run. Mr. Rush said potentially that could happen but that was
29 what they were trying to figure out and all of the 3 concepts presented showed nothing being
30 constructed seaward of the line noted on the conceptual plans. Mr. Rush said ultimately this
31 was up to the Board of Commissioners and he thought some folks were probably saying don't
32 put anything there. Mr. Pake said if the Town sold the property for a business coming in they
33 were selling part of the oceanfront access.

34
35 Commissioner Messer said not as long as he sat on the Board. Commissioner Dooley followed
36 up by saying that if the Town sold the property it was just going to be the property they just
37 most recently purchased and would not be any of the existing property that the Town owned
38 that would always be the Western Ocean Regional Access.

39
40 Peter Carey, Coquina Drive, asked why none of the concepts had the building on the far end
41 closest to the road and they all had the building closer to the ocean.

42

1 Town Manager Rush said the default back up plan concept was selling the land and having
2 something back there. Mr. Rush said what they were trying to illustrate was what was possible
3 for the Board to consider. Mr. Carey asked if it was possible to have the building closer to the
4 road. Mr. Rush replied that was absolutely possible. Mr. Carey wanted to be clear that there
5 was no reason the building couldn't be put back closer to the road.

6
7 Commissioner Normile added that when the illustrations were ordered the Board provided,
8 based on everyone's input, what the concerns were and he assumed the person on the other
9 end took those concerns and provided the artist's renderings to show that the Board had taken
10 and heard all of the public concerns. Mr. Rush said it went back to the key goals communicated
11 initially based on the public input – keep everything behind the ocean view line, don't block
12 anyone's view, and certainly they could refine the plans in any way they liked.

13
14 Jim Wolfe, 9100 Reed Drive, Unit 4301, thought it was a great presentation. Mr. Wolfe said
15 that the UDO had been modified and changed on more than one occasion in the last 6 months
16 he had been attending the meetings. Mr. Wolfe said there were variances that could be done
17 and had been done numerous times over the past 6 months. Mr. Wolfe said his question was
18 whether this was what the Town would do or was this what they would show them they were
19 going to do. Mr. Wolfe said he wanted to be able to say to the people he talked to that there
20 won't be an event center at the ocean, there won't be an event center in the middle of the
21 parking lot, they won't lose parking spaces. Mr. Wolfe said those are the things that the Board
22 went to the County Commissioners and Jimmy Farrington sat in their office at Queen's Court
23 and said this was going to happen, get used to it.

24
25 Commissioner Normile stated that he thought the front portion of the brief was very clear, that
26 there was no intent from the Board to remove the public access, to remove the public parking,
27 and that he didn't think any of them would actually know what exact building would be built
28 there until a commercial developer submitted plans through the commercial review process.

29
30 Mr. Wolfe said again why do this if the commercial property developer could potentially do
31 anything. Mr. Wolfe said there was nothing written in stone. Commissioner Normile said
32 except that they were not going to remove the parking lot, not going to remove the beach
33 access. Mr. Wolfe said so at no any point would they have a beach access event center or
34 hotel, at no point would any of those parking spots disappear. Commissioner Normile said they
35 would not remove the beach access and the parking lot was not going away, he did not say
36 there would not be a meeting and event center because no commercial developer had
37 submitted anything yet. Mr. Wolfe asked at the beach where the volleyball courts were would
38 the Town put an event center there. The Board stated no.

39
40 Mr. Wolfe asked if the 165 parking spaces where they were now would never move. The Board
41 indicated the parking spaces would remain there.

42

1 Commissioner Finch said the purpose of the meeting tonight was to get the public's input as to
2 what they wanted, it was just that simple.

3
4 Matt Matheson, Sound Drive, said he was still curious as to what triggered this process. Mr.
5 Matheson asked whose idea it was because he thought there was a mad rush to get the money
6 before the fiscal year ended and part of that rush caused the Town to dip into the beach
7 nourishment fund which they now had an obligation to pay back. Mr. Matheson said they were
8 paying interest in one pocket and putting it in the other and he wondered if they knew what
9 they were doing. Mr. Matheson said the limitations put on the property were subject to be
10 very difficult for anybody to legally make a profit. Mr. Matheson felt there wasn't enough room
11 to build a hotel high enough to have enough rooms to generate the income it would take. Mr.
12 Matheson spoke of his wife's experience and she said about six stories would be the minimum.
13 Mr. Matheson spoke of the project having legs because they asked questions and they moved,
14 and then moved again. Mr. Matheson said they now had three viable options but in any event
15 they were paying interest on the money tied up and they couldn't afford to sit there and wait
16 for something to happen, they should have had a plan available 6 months ago and they
17 wouldn't be here tonight. Mr. Matheson said they were trying to find out what changed this
18 week and what could they expect the next week.

19
20 Mindy Dennis, had questions about the conceptual plan and the building encroaching on the
21 parking lot. Town Manager Rush said on the illustrative plan in question the building was on
22 the rear portion of the 4.4 acres. Ms. Dennis asked if the Board could not consider adding more
23 amenities for the families – a dog park, adding to the amenities closer to the oceanfront and
24 possibly sell off the back area and not the whole parking area. Mr. Rush said that was certainly
25 an option going forward. Ms. Dennis felt that people were worried that more of the parking lot
26 would be taken for an event center and when people came here on vacation they were not
27 using an event center but were thinking of things to do. Ms. Dennis suggested they use
28 property for something that would give the visitors more rather than a private investor with an
29 event center. Mr. Rush thought depending on the Board's decision that was certainly an option
30 going forward. Mr. Rush said there was clearly no intent to reduce parking and hopefully to
31 enhance it but that was a viable option for the Board to consider.

32
33 Toney Browder, 7515 Sound Drive, said Commissioner Messer had relieved most of his
34 concerns but yet he saw all 3 of the conceptual plans had buildings on the 4.4 acres. Mr.
35 Browder said he had heard tonight that they were not going to mess with the 4.4 acres but yet
36 there were buildings shown on the 4.4 acres on all 3 conceptual plans. Commissioner Messer
37 thought Commissioner Normile answered that question when he said the drawings were artist
38 renderings based on comments received prior to the meeting tonight. Town Manager Rush
39 said the intent was to take the input received so far and to seek this kind of input from the
40 public. Mr. Browder said his concern was the public interest and to not give up valuable
41 beachfront property to a developer. Commissioner Messer said his point was well taken.

42

1 Joan Pate, 9100 Reed Drive, noted that Emerald Isle NC was a Facebook page that had over
2 104,000 followers and the originator of that page promoted the Town, beautiful pictures of the
3 coast, meeting announcements, and was not someone who was up against the event center
4 until yesterday. Ms. Pate said that he posted the Town's official announcement that the Town
5 had up on their official site that the meeting was tonight and that post received 103 comments,
6 and with 103 comments you might have 10-20 replies on the comments and they didn't count.
7 Ms. Pate said there were also 46 shares and not one comment was for an event center. Ms.
8 Pate also read several comments posted on her Facebook page from individuals expressing
9 their opposition to an event center. Ms. Pate said this was not about Queen's Court and a view
10 they were talking about but about a small town family atmosphere, not adding to traffic, not
11 having an event center that would host 300-400 people in the most congested part of Emerald
12 Isle.

13
14 Jim Hackett, 6410 Ocean Drive, suggested 6-9 months ago the Town spent a lot of time coming
15 up with a 20 year plan and he thought when these kind of issues came up that somewhere in
16 the conversation they reflect on the 20 year plan. Mr. Hackett said that plan had a lot of input
17 from a lot of people as to what they wanted and he would like to hear that verbalized in each of
18 these kinds of issues – how it mapped to the 20 year plan. Mr. Hackett felt that gave a basis of
19 a solid footing to go forward because everyone had a chance to comment, and if the ideas they
20 came up with were consistent with that plan it gave a good footing to stand on. Mr. Hackett
21 said you could stack the deck at different times when people were very vocal but don't
22 necessarily reflect what everyone had a chance to reflect on a year and a half ago. Mr. Hackett
23 suggested to always include in comments how things were consistent with the 20 year plan.

24
25 Jamie Thomas, 116 Periwinkle, thanked the Board for the presentation and said she attended to
26 better understand what was going on. Ms. Thomas said from everything she had heard she
27 understood that there was 1.8 acres and 4.4 acres and from her personal opinion she thought
28 they were all in favor of developing the 1.8 acres in whatever best way possible. Ms. Thomas
29 said the Board had all been elected and she had full faith in them but what they were saying
30 was to leave the 4.4 acres alone. Ms. Thomas said when they saw conceptualizations that
31 showed infringement on the 4.4 acres she knew from what she was hearing that was where the
32 concerns and questions were coming from.

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34 **9. Additional Board Discussion / Board Direction**

35

36 Mayor Barber thanked everyone for their comments.

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38 Commissioner Normile commented they should not rush and should collect more public
39 comments.

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10. Adjourn

Motion was made by Commissioner Messer to adjourn the meeting. The Board voted unanimously 5-0 in favor. Motion carried.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted:

Rhonda C. Ferebee, CMC, NCCMC
Town Clerk