



**North Carolina Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores
Pier Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
September 23, 2009**

Present:

Dr. Bogus- Chair
Jay Barnes- Aquarium Director
Frank Rush-Emerald Isle Town Manager
Mal Boyette- Committee Member
Randy Mason- Committee Member
Jim Woolard-Committee Member
Kasey Ginsberg, Civitas Institute (guest)

Absent:

Art Schools- Emerald Isle Mayor
Rick Luetlich-Committee Member
Alex MacFadyen-Committee Member
Greg “Rudi” Rudolph-Committee Member
Don Eglinton-Committee Member

Dr. Bogus called the meeting to order, and discussed the day’s agenda. A site visit is planned that will take a portion of the meeting time.

Jay welcomed Kasey Ginsberg, with the Civitas group in Raleigh. He encouraged the committee to visit the Civitas website to learn more about their interest in the Aquarium piers.

Jay reviewed some recent discussions regarding the scope, scale and cost of our pier project. In meetings with Moffatt & Nichol, Frank, and with the Aquarium leadership, we learned that everything we have discussed to date would bring the cost of the pier in above \$25 million. After much discussion, it was decided that this figure might be unrealistic, if we hope to see construction begin in the near future. The Aquarium still has plans for a pier at Carolina Beach as well, and if the costs were to remain this high, we might never see them built. Jay informed the committee that the Division leadership wants the parameters of the pier to be kept within \$16 to \$17 million range.

Jay encouraged this group to weigh in on this reduction in scope. He said that his feeling was we needed to prioritize what was most important. Through discussions with Frank and David Griffin, they determined the following priorities for Emerald Isle pier:

1. The pier should be 1,000 feet in length, because a shorter pier would not be nearly as fishable, given our bottom profile. Though a wooden pier might be cheaper, our plan would be to remain with concrete for durability.
2. The pier house will be 10,000 square feet. The new bath house would be removed from the design specs and the one on the property be kept.

3. The soundside portion of our project would be removed from the scope. This could easily be treated as a separate project and funded later (or earlier).
4. Additional land for parking is being considered, if feasible. BJAC sent information on the number of spaces that will be available on the Oceanside; approximately 160. The property across the street on the corner (approximately 15,000 square feet) may be available for additional parking, but the exact number of spaces that would hold is not yet available. There are 260 parking spaces at Jennette's Pier.

Moffatt & Nichol commented that this was the time to realign our expectations before they do the design work. Jay and Frank talked with David about the priorities and must-haves with the pier. The committee plays a very important role and its input concerning the priorities needs to be heard. The first priority is that the pier needs to be concrete and be 1,000 feet in length. The length of the pier is where the bulk of the cost is. The pier width is in question, but if too narrow, it would be unfishable. We are trying to remain comparable to Jennette's Pier. The second priority is that the pier house is to be 10,000 square feet. This gives us the space to do the things we need to do to function and to generate revenue. At this point we are not considering downsizing the size of the pier house, but BJAC stated that if the pier house is 10,000/12,000 square feet., it would have to fall in line with CAMA rules.

After designing the 1,000-foot pier and the 10,000-square-foot pier house, everything else is second priority. A lot of the items such as energy components, water reuse system, wind turbines, geo-thermal heating and cooling and solar panels may be added in the future, but at this time we will opt for more traditional methods for these items. As a result, LEED certification appears unlikely.

Another major topic is the bathhouse; we propose to delete this from the design and use the one that is located on the property.

The budget range at this time is \$15/16/17 million for our pier project. We could add on lots of our wants later on down the road. It is hoped the soundside portion of the budget will have grant funding at a later date. Jay remarked that the reality of the project is if we want the pier built, we have to keep the costs down. Based on comments made, there appeared to be understanding from the participating committee members that these priorities are correct.

Frank commented that the focus of the Town's grant funding will soon shift from the boat facility in Emerald Isle to the soundside project. It may be the soundside portion could be completed sooner than expected, depending on grants received. It is hoped there will be continued success with grants. The soundside project is a very important part of the education and access process. We may regret not obtaining the property we need for parking, as this would be our additional parking area. The only reason we would decide not to purchase the property would be that the number of parking spaces would not be as expected. If it is decided to go ahead with the purchase, the money would come from the WAMI grant.

Jay stated that at this point we will go back to the design team and ask members to move forward with their design phase. Based on the changes that are necessary, we will need to sort the priorities. The design work would take the project and reassess:

1. Things we want to design and build.
2. Things we no longer want to build or design.
3. Things we might want to go ahead and design, with the thought we could build or add on at a later date. Perhaps these could be bid-alternates in the bidding process.

Jay spoke with BJAC and Moffatt regarding the next round of meetings with us. It may be that the meeting will be with Jay and Frank, and they in turn would present to the committee the early design. The Pier Committee will have input all along the design process. The next round of discussions has not been determined.

Update on Jennette's Pier: The trestle has been place for the cranes to start the process for placing the pilings in place. At this point, everything is on schedule and the storms over the summer did not cause any setbacks. There was a meeting to discuss the pier operating hours and fees and if it will be opened year round. Admission fees were discussed, along with the number of required employees. The staff will be paid from the admission receipts of the pier. Chances are the pier will be open 24 hours, at least through the peak season.

The height of the pier at Nags Head will be 26 feet above mean high water. The normal height of most North Carolina piers is 18 or 20 feet.

Perhaps next summer, the Pier Committee could take a field trip to the Jennette's pier site to get a better handle on the project. =The targeted opening date is May of 2011.

The question of the proposed width of the end of the Emerald Isle pier was brought up. At this point the width is 44 feet. It is recommended to make it wider, if at all possible. It is just not enough room. (Note: After reviewing the proposed pier end with BJAC, it was determined that the actual T end of the pier is designed at 66 feet across.)

Jay encouraged everyone to view the Aquarium website and check out the Jennette's Pier construction pictures. It shows the stages of the construction process.

The next meeting date is unresolved at this time. With Jay's leaving at the end of October, and new director coming in later this winter, it was decided to wait until we get preliminary plans, then send an email out with the date and time of the next meeting.

Ms. Ginsberg was asked if she had any questions for the committee. She inquired about the source of funding for the construction of the EI pier. Jay commented that we are uncertain at this point, but that there are only three possible sources: state funds, which might include Aquarium admission receipts and state grants; federal support; and private support. Likely, the funding might be accomplished with a combination of funding sources.

She also inquired about whether this project is supported by local legislators. Jay replied that although we have not had recent specific conversations with all of our coastal legislators, the Aquariums have always had strong support from the coastal delegation. Other groups such as the chamber of commerce and tourism authority have voiced strong support for the project.

Frank elaborated on how important a project like the Aquarium Pier at Emerald Isle was to this area, and to the state. Unlike major metropolitan areas such as Raleigh or Charlotte, whose economies depend on manufacturing and other economic drivers, the coast depends on tourism. Projects like this pier might seem frivolous to some at first, until they realize that it is an example of essential infrastructure to the future economic health of this region.

Mal added that we badly need this pier. There are so few opportunities for families to enjoy time together, and nothing is more wholesome than spending time fishing. It has been a tradition for many generations, and now we are losing that tradition. If we want to keep kids off drugs and out of trouble, we need to provide opportunities like this. We are losing our piers in North Carolina, and he can see a time where the only piers left might be these three Aquarium piers.

The meeting was adjourned for an informal tour of the Emerald Isle Eastern Regional Access property.