

TOWN OF OCEAN VIEW
DELAWARE

November 1, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council

FROM: Carol S. Houck, Town Manager

SUBJECT: 2022 PILOT SHUTTLE – INITIAL EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATION

BACKGROUND

Our outreach efforts associated with our Comprehensive Plan update as well as a general concern for traffic congestion during the summer months suggests offering a public transit option may be beneficial. To that end, the Planning staff and I engaged in conversation with DeIDOT and DART. While there is some level of interest to provide transit by DART it was clear no near term decisions were likely. Further outreach related to attempting a PILOT shuttle effort in Ocean View met with support, especially as it related to data collection/sharing and DART'S provision of a used bus or buses for the effort. In addition, a parallel request for the Town to be granted control of certain excess parcels in Ocean View (right of way parcels no longer necessary in association with the Atlantic Avenue improvement project – but purchased by the State using Federal Highway funds) continues to be discussed with DeIDOT.

Mayor Reddington and I met with the Bethany Beach Mayor and Town Manager to share the shuttle idea. The meeting resulted in their agreement to allow a shuttle from the Town of Ocean View to drop off passengers in Bethany Beach at no charge to the Town. Bethany Beach also provided good insight into its shuttle operations and challenges.

BASIC SHUTTLE DETAILS

Once DART confirmed availability of used buses for the purpose of the Pilot Shuttle the following took place:

- Engagement with Jolly Trolley company to determine interest in operating the shuttle for Ocean View and the cost to do so.
- Jolly Trolley is interested and provided a quote
- Jolly Trolley would utilize the used DART buses but handle all personnel, fuel, insurance, and bus maintenance for the pilot.

- Three buses would be necessary as we would want to run two daily with one backup unit. Three buses are available as early as this December/January.
- For the pilot effort a limited route along Atlantic Avenue to Bethany Beach was the focus, with the intent to offer some limited short term parking/bike racks (in association with the excess parcels we are seeking).
- The intent was to run the pilot during peak summer months.
- Shuttle ridership information was obtained from Bethany Beach and Bear Trap Dunes to attempt to gauge probable ridership.
- The buses would be required to be wrapped as all DART markings would be removed prior to our taking possession of them.

BASIC EXCESS PARCEL DETAILS

Our continued engagement with DelDOT regarding the excess parcels continues. The most recent communication suggests we are to receive a use and occupancy agreement for the parcels. We have not yet been advised of any cost associated with the agreement.

Outreach to the Town by a developer interested in one of the parcels took place and resulted in the suggestion of a possible partnership opportunity for at least one parcel. More effort and engagement would be required before the viability of such a partnership is known. More information will be shared if/when available.

I believe the excess parcels which could serve as our Pilot shuttle drop off and pick up locations are necessary to a successful pilot effort. Not having a final answer regarding them is therefore problematic. There would also be some costs associated with preparing the lots for such a use which are not yet known.

VIABILITY OF PILOT SHUTTLE

While a pilot shuttle effort would be beneficial to

- determine true level of interest,
- the impact on traffic congestion,
- to provide data to DART to assist with its decision making and planning,

the viability of an Ocean View specific pilot is only possible with significant financial subsidy by the Town of Ocean View. You will recall that \$45,000 of emerging project funds were aligned with our attempt at offering a pilot shuttle in 2022.

The service options considered in this initial evaluation included the following:

- A **36 day/12 weekend pilot** (from June 3 to Aug 21) weekends only (Fri. to Sun.) operating from 11a.m. to 9p.m.
- A **57 day/19 weekend pilot** (from May 13 to Sept. 18) weekends only (Fri. to Sun.) operating from 11a.m. to 9p.m. and

A review of the options using financial detail obtained from our engagement with Jolly Trolley, other price quotes obtained and information from Bethany Beach, Bear Trap Dunes and DART resulted in the finding that even with donated buses, the cost to offer a shuttle is cost prohibited if it is to be self-supporting. Not knowing the level of subsidy, the Town might welcome, I share the following examples:

- If a **zero subsidy by the Town** of the pilot effort were desired, **the per ride rate** for the shuttle running **36 days** (12 weekends; Fri. Sat. and Sun.; 11a.m. to 9p.m.) is estimated at **\$8.38 per ride**. (Note: Bethany Shuttle is 25 cents a ride).
- If a partial subsidy were deemed suitable, **the per ride rate** for the shuttle running **36 days** (12 weekends; Fri. Sat. and Sun.; 11a.m. to 9p.m.) was estimated at between **\$1.00 to \$2.50 per ride** and resulted in a **subsidy of between \$53,100 to \$42,300 respectively**.
- If a **partial Town subsidy along with a longer pilot period** were deemed suitable, **the per ride rate** for the shuttle running **57 days** (19 weekends; Fri. Sat and Sun.; 11 a.m. to 9p.m.) was estimated at between **\$1.00 and \$3.00 per ride** and resulted in a **Town subsidy of between \$79,197 and \$56,397 respectively**.

Certainly, the scenarios can be tweaked by the number of days we run the shuttle or the number of hours the shuttle runs daily. However, reducing hours and confidence that the shuttle will be there when needed will also likely reduce ridership. The 11a.m. to 9 p.m. (10 hour days) was deemed a span of time that offers confidence to our community such that they may consider leaving their car at home. (Bear Trap Dunes runs 9a.m. to 5p.m. in season and Bethany Beach runs 9:30a.m. to 10p.m. Memorial Day to Mid-September).

It should be noted that the review of the shuttle ridership of Bethany and Bear Trap required me to make assumptions which may or may not prove accurate any given weekend or season. Weather apparently negatively impacts ridership in relationship to both wet weather and overly hot or cool temperatures. I assumed 200 riders a day (100 per bus a day/ 600 overall per weekend).

My spread sheets stepping through the scenarios is attached for reference and consideration. In addition, I share the detail I received from Bethany (2018 daily data/2019 and historical overall

counts) and Bear Trap Dunes (2017, 2018, and 2019 – I used 2019) electronically only due to size. Note the data is presented in different formats causing me to look at each differently and I was only attempting to determine a feasible weekend count for our pilot effort.

Bethany Beach weekend counts evaluated:

Early June 2018 – **243** total passengers over a weekend with 2 shuttles running.

End of June 2018 – **1751** total passengers over a weekend with what appears to be 2.5 shuttles running (one only ran on Friday and Sunday).

Mid July 2018 – **1683** total passengers over a weekend with 2 shuttles running.

Mid Aug 2018 – **1466** total passengers over a weekend with what appears to be 2.5 shuttles running (one of them only ran on Sunday)

Total for all 4 of these random weekends is **5,143**

Average weekend using the above would be **1,285** bringing the average day (Fri. Sat, and Sun.) to around **428** riders a day over the weekend.

Bear Trap Dunes weekend counts evaluated (there were various shuttle counts running over period):

Took the average of all the weekends from June 9th through the August 27,2019.

The total for 12 weekends was **8424** riders

Averaging to approximately **702** passengers a weekend and the average day (Fri., Sat., and Sun.) to **234** riders a day over the weekend.

Note: There is better awareness of both the Bethany and Bear Trap shuttles, they are more convenient than our pilot would be (not going into neighborhoods) and certainly the Bethany shuttle is a more attractive open air option.

The above count averages and information resulted in my 200 riders a day which I note may very well not be conservative enough for a start-up with limited route.

RECOMMENDATION

It is therefore recommended that unless another entity was interested in assisting the Town of Ocean View in offering a pilot shuttle service during the summer of 2022, it is in the best interest of the Town to abandon the effort. The cost to offer a shuttle is substantial and ridership access to stops remains in limbo. There would also likely be and additional yet unknown workload for the Town staff above that which has been anticipated to date. Certainly, the effort to educate and encourage participation would require a good deal of time and effort.

If agreed, engagement with DART, DeIDOT and surrounding communities should continue with a goal towards impressing upon all, that addressing congestion, the summer influx of visitors to our area and safety along our main corridors can't be achieved if we don't all work together.

Finally, at time of writing we still have no firm commitment from DelDOT related to our use of excess parcels for pick up and or drop off locations. This information when/if received will possibly require additional considerations such as lease payments.

We do however believe there is value to adding some short term parking options strategically along the Ocean View Atlantic Ave corridor if able to through developer partnerships and or with access to excess parcels.

Finally, for awareness, I met with a DART representative last week and the below photos show the type of shuttle busses DART is prepared to offer for our Pilot shuttle effort:

