



# The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

*Serving Currituck and Dare Counties, Ocracoke Island*

P.O. Box 1757 • 101 Town Hall Drive • Kill Devil Hills, NC 27948

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info@outerbankschamber.com

The Honorable Phil Berger  
President Pro Tempore  
North Carolina Senate  
via electronic mail

The Honorable Thom Tillis  
Speaker of the House  
North Carolina House of Representatives  
via electronic mail

Dear Senator Berger and Speaker Tillis:

On behalf of more than 1,000 business members of the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to strongly urge the continued funding and support for the Roanoke Island Commission (RIC) that oversees Roanoke Island Festival Park.

Festival Park is the only site in the state that interprets the Roanoke Voyages which led to the colonization of the New World by the English. Roanoke Island is the site of the first colony of English-speaking people and predates both Plymouth Rock and Jamestown settlements. It is the bedrock of this nation's history.

The RIC has requested about \$1 million in state funding - less than half of what appropriations were just three years ago. Receiving this support is critical to keeping the site open. The Outer Banks is still feeling the pain of the recession has high unemployment and has seen a downturn in business in some areas of the county due to beach closures and the unreliability of NC 12 south of Oregon Inlet.

Before the park's opening and the building of the Elizabeth II, Manteo had almost no tourism. Now the businesses estimate about 5,000 visitors a day there during the summer season. The park directly and indirectly creates about 300 jobs for the town and gives visitors another reason to visit the Outer Banks. It also is one of the primary destinations of both school and tour buses. The latter provides a significant revenue stream for businesses across the Outer Banks.

The site offers a venue for many indoor and outdoor activities including the Bluegrass Festival, the OBX Marathon, and the summer arts series.

The nonprofit friends group, The Friends of Elizabeth II, has committed to providing \$325,000 annually to help make up the budget shortfall. And the RIC will provide funding from its enterprise fund comprised of unspent appropriations from earlier years. The park also derives income from gate fees and rental of the auditorium and outdoor pavilion. Although the operating budget has been cut by more than 50 percent in the last three years to adjust to state cuts, it still needs state support. The state owns the property and all the site's assets so should at least appropriate enough to maintain them.

*Your key to information and services on North Carolina's Outer Banks!*

[www.outerbankschamber.com](http://www.outerbankschamber.com)





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As part of the Outer Banks visitor experience, Roanoke Island Festival Park has made many significant impacts, both locally and statewide. Income from vacation home rentals benefits all of North Carolina because a majority of rental properties are owned by investors who reside outside of Dare County. Much of the income is spent throughout the state in other communities. State coffers benefit from the sales taxes as well as the investment income taxes collected.

Any reduction in venues that educate and entertain the public will have a ripple effect throughout the state. When choosing a vacation destination, visitors want to insure an assortment of activities that are family oriented. Roanoke Island Festival Park certainly enhances the visitor experience on the Outer Banks. Over 146,000 visitors last year benefitted from visiting the park and participating in its education programs or by touring the Elizabeth II as it visited ports along the coast.

Last calendar year, visitors spent more than \$385 million for lodging and \$208 million for prepared food. These expenditures generated a significant amount of sales tax revenue as well as income for investment owners in places such as Chapel Hill, Greensboro, Rockingham and many other communities throughout the state. Visitors to Dare County also contributed revenues to the state through taxes collected on merchandise sales as well as gasoline sales.

The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is comprised of business people who do understand the need to cut costs in tough times. However, they also understand that an investment from the state of \$1 million to generate more than \$680 million flowing through the state's economy is a valid investment.

We understand the desire for the RIC to be self-sufficient. However, this transition must occur in such a way as not to destroy everything that accomplished thus far.

We respectfully, but strongly, ask that funding to the Roanoke Island Commission be continued until such time that it is feasible for it to be self-supporting.

Sincerely,

Ali Breaux, Chair  
Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce  
Board of Directors

Karen S. Brown  
President & CEO  
Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce

cc: Sen. Bill Cook  
Rep. Paul Tine  
Dare County Board of Commissioners

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