



2025 Legislative Priorities Agenda

The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce represents approximately 850 businesses and organizations in Dare County, Currituck County and Ocracoke Island in Hyde County. Each year the Chamber publishes a Legislative Priorities Agenda to highlight those topics and issues that the Chamber will follow throughout the year. This is not to be construed as an “all-inclusive” document as new issues come up throughout the year impacting the community and the local business community that the Chamber will address.

- COVID 19
- Education
- Environmental Issues
 - o Clean Energy
 - o Offshore Drilling
 - o Seismic Testing/Blasting
 - o Plastics
 - o Balloons
 - o Jockey's Ridge AEC Designation
 - o Buxton Beach Clean-up
- Fishing Community
- Housing
- Inlet Access
- Insurance Issues
 - o Flood Insurance
 - o Homeowners Insurance
 - o Healthcare
- J1 Visa Student Work Program
- Tax Issues
 - o Sales Tax Redistribution
 - o State Taxes
- Transportation Issues

COVID19

- COVID19 Liability
 - o The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports legislation that protects business owners from COVID litigation.

Education

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the existing law and legislation regarding the school year/school calendar that has been in place since 2004 that specifies that schools cannot start earlier than the Monday closest to August 26 or end later than the Friday closest to June 11. This legislation helps ensure our local/seasonal workforce is not negatively impacted by a school year that begins in early to mid-August or one that continues into the start of the tourist season.

Environmental Issues

- **Beach Re-nourishment:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce continues to support solutions that address erosion problems on our beaches including beach re-nourishment. With an economy that depends on tourism, our beaches are one of our strongest assets.
- **Clean Energy:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce continues to support the research, feasibility, and development of clean energy development. This is a critical issue for the Outer Banks business community and its economic prosperity.
 - o **Wind Farms:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is in favor of clean, alternative energy. The Chamber supports offshore wind farms as long as these are located a minimum of 25 miles off the coast. Onshore wind farms are also supported by the Chamber as a clean energy alternative.
- **Offshore Oil Drilling:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce continues, as it has for the past 15 years, to oppose offshore drilling for oil and natural gas. Potential benefits to the coast of North Carolina are few, if any, but the risks and associated impacts could be devastating to our area and our tourism driven economy.
- **Seismic testing/blasting:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is opposed to exploration, and seismic testing/blasting off the coast of North Carolina as well as all along the entire Atlantic seaboard. While we as an organization recognize and support the need for energy independence and alternatives, exploration along our coast would be catastrophic for an area that depends on its natural beauty and environment for not only tourism related industries but for our recreational and commercial fishing fleet, our boat builders, and our entrepreneurs.
- **Plastics:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the reduced use of plastics due to their negative impact on our environment, this includes straws, plastic bags, cups, lids, Styrofoam, etc. In addition, we encourage the use of re-usable items for these purposes. The Chamber also encourages the legislature to develop and adopt legislation that reduces non-bio-degradable products in the environment.
- **Balloons:** The Outer Banks chamber supports and encourages the proper disposal of balloons by placing them in appropriate trash containers after deflating and shredding. We also support the ban of balloon releases into our environment, understanding the impact these items have on our wildlife, our waterways and our land.
- **Jockey's Ridge:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is opposed to the removal of Jockey's Ridge and other properties in our area from the Areas of Environmental Concern (AEC) designation. AECs are coastal areas that contain natural hazards or important environmental, economic, or cultural resources. An AEC designation allows those designated areas to receive special protections aimed at preserving their unique qualities.
- **Buxton Beach Contamination:** The Outer Banks Chamber supports the need to find a solution to the beach and water contamination in Buxton's Old Lighthouse Beach at the site of the former Navy and Coast Guard Station. This contamination is impacting an important area of beautiful shoreline; one that, if not contained and a solution found quickly, will have detrimental implications for our businesses, rental properties, hotels, restaurants and residents. This has the potential to become a reason our visitors will find to change their summer vacation plans and go elsewhere thus impacting the local economy during peak season.

Fishing Community

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce continues to be supportive of our long heritage of commercial fishing and the industry it has created. We are also supportive of the charter and recreational fishing community.
- We continue to be aware of and monitor the regulations regarding the marine fisheries and the impacts to our commercial fishing industry.

Housing

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports efforts to increase the number and availability of reasonably priced housing units, both rental and purchase, for our workforce; this includes zoning ordinance review, and land use plan updates.
 - o The Chamber of Commerce supports changes to legislation that would reduce the burden on the Outer Banks allowing property owners the ability to increase housing options (i.e., Accessory Dwelling Units ("ADU's"), Multi-Family Units) for the area.
 - o The Chamber of Commerce supports legislation that will result in a solution to the need for regional septic regulations which would allow for our residents to have an easier path to adding ADU's to their property without unnecessary septic requirements.
 - o The Chamber also supports the need for a dedicated housing staff and council who can identify areas where land may be available as well as secure grants for wastewater treatment infrastructure.
 - o The Chamber supports the need for collaboration and coordination between the county and the local municipalities to find solutions. This includes reaching out to Currituck County and Tyrell County as well.

Inlet Access

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the continued need for ongoing solutions regarding issues affecting access and dredging of our inlets. The addition of the Miss Katie dredge is a strong, positive step in this direction. The Outer Banks Chamber supports the operations of the Miss Katie as it helps alleviate the issues at our inlets. The inlets provide vital lifelines for the residents of Dare and Hyde Counties. Oregon and Hatteras Inlets are crucial to the economy of Dare, Hyde, and Currituck Counties and the surrounding region.
- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce also supports the efforts of the Oregon Inlet Task Force as it continues to look for solutions and funding to alleviate the issues at Oregon Inlet.

Insurance Issues

- **Flood insurance:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is opposed to programs or changes that increase the National Flood Insurance Program premiums. These increases will have a detrimental impact on our local economy.
- **Homeowners Insurance:** As the largest business organization in the Outer Banks, the Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce is opposed to any increases to homeowners insurance rates proposed by the North Carolina Rate Bureau.
- **Healthcare:** Government should build on the strengths of market-based employer-sponsored systems or purchase pools to obtain stable premiums while enacting reform to lower costs, improve quality and access, and build a more value-driven system. The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports working towards implementation of initiatives that will provide the insured with sustainable benefits for the future and provide business with predictability in the cost of employee benefits.

J1 Visa Student Work Program

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the need for the federal government to allow for the J1 Visa program to continue. This program is instrumental to satisfying our workforce needs in the spring/summer/fall months. As the lack of local workforce continues to be an issue for our seasonal economy the Chamber is a strong advocate for the continuation of the J1 program in our local area. This is tied directly to the need for housing in our community.

Tax Issues

- **Sales Tax Redistribution:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce opposes any change to the current sales tax distribution formula for the state. In the tourism economy that exists along the Outer Banks with a small year-round population, the costs associated with support services for our tourists include added expenses for fire, rescue, medical/hospital, trash collection, and more. To tamper with the revenue received from sales and used for these services could jeopardize our ability to continue to attract the same level of tourists to our area thus impacting the overall dollars collected for the state of North Carolina. In 2019, the NC Department of Commerce reported that out of the 100 counties in the state, Dare County was #5 in travel expenditures, generating over \$1.267 billion and over 13,800 jobs. In Currituck County, tourism results in over \$253 million in expenditures and 2,000 jobs.
- **State Taxes:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce believes that North Carolina should create a tax environment that provides a stable, predictable, competitive, and equitable tax base. This includes state taxes, income taxes, and the like.

Transportation Issues

- The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of our transportation system in relation to public safety, health, and welfare as well as the economic impact on our tourism, boat building, and commercial fishing industries. The Outer Banks transportation system includes roads, bridges, inlets/waterways, and pedestrian walkways. Without adequate means of transportation people cannot reach their destinations, goods cannot be delivered in a cost-effective manner, and public safety is at risk.
 - o **NCDOT STIP (Strategic Transportation Improvement Program) Funding Formula:** Ensure adequate funding for critical projects in Division I including bridges and inlets/waterways.
 - o **Bridges:**
 - The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the projects that include the construction of the long-anticipated Mid-Currituck Bridge project.
 - The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the replacement of the Alligator River Bridge. This project needs to become a priority as we are dependent on that route for the overall welfare and safety of our citizens, businesses, and visitors to our area.
 - o **NC 12 and other high-traffic roadways in the Outer Banks region:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports the ongoing efforts to find a more permanent solutions to the issues of over wash, flooding, and sand.
 - o **I-87 Corridor:** The Outer Banks Chamber is supportive of the I-87 Corridor proposed project. This project has impacts for our tourism economy as well as the overall economic benefits for our region.
 - o **Ferry System:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce recognizes the importance of the Ferry System for continued access to and from Hatteras Island and Ocracoke. This system is also a vital transportation link in times of disaster and limited or no road access on NC 12 South.
 - o **Local Pedestrian and Bicycle Pathways:** The Outer Banks Chamber of Commerce supports continued development of pathways to accommodate our pedestrians and cyclists as an alternative form of transportation.
 - o **Public Transportation:** The Outer Banks Chamber is supportive of the need find a solution for public transportation for our workforce.