

The Minutes of the City of Ocean Springs
Unified Development Code (UDC) Committee
Wednesday, November 19, 2025

Initial meeting of the UDC Committee (Unified Development Code)

Agenda is attached

Committee Members Present:

William “Bill” Betterton (Ward 1)

Julia Illanne (Ward 2)

Shawn Senseney (Ward 3)

Ben Smith (Ward 4)

Mike Davis (Ward 5)

Libbi Miller (Ward 6)

Dennis Warren via phone (At-large)

Also in attendance:

Pat Bonck – Neel Schaffer

Amanda Crose – City of Ocean Springs Planning Director

Christy Duggan – Minutes Recorder

Observers:

Steve Tillis (Ward 1)

Karen Stennis (Ward 2)

Kevin Wade (Ward 3)

Shannon Pfeiffer (Ward 4)

Julie Messenger (Ward 6)

Matthew Hinton (Alderman At Large)

Mike Whitney

Mr. Pat Bonck started the meeting by congratulating everyone on being selected to serve on The Ocean Springs Unified Development Code (UDC) Committee. He stated the tasks are to review the Ocean Springs UDC and to make specific recommendations on how it can be improved to better serve the whole community.

Mr. Bonck stated introduced himself stating his role is to moderate discussions and to compile the committee’s recommendations into actionable tasks for the Planning Commission and Board of Aldermen to consider adopting. He has been a Planner on the Coast since 1998 for the City of Gulfport, Harrison County and now with Neel-Schaffer since 2022. He has conducted a couple hundred Planning Commission meetings and stated community angst over Planning Commission cases is not unique to Ocean Springs. Cities are filling up with development and have started losing development to

unincorporated areas. Adding to the growth challenge, residents of the unincorporated counties generally don't want the new subdivisions either. Ocean Springs is widely considered a very desirable place to live in South Mississippi. Kids that have grown up in Ocean Springs would like to live here as adults and others are looking to come here too because of the high quality of living Ocean Springs offers. There is pressure for more housing and commercial developments in Ocean Springs.

Mr. Bonck stated, your new Planning Director, Amanda Crose, is here to learn from you, expand her knowledge of Ocean Springs and to provide interpretations on the specific language of the UDC. Amanda did not write the code or make the Zoning Map. Generally, the city planner works with applicants to help them make the right applications for the developments they envision and works with neighbors to help them understand what is being proposed. Christy Duggan is here to take minutes of our meetings, and we will provide these to you to confirm that the comments and recommendations accurately reflect your intentions. She is not a court reporter, she cannot make a verbatim transcript, but we intend to capture your individual concerns the specific recommendations you make. We will compile all letters and emails of significance; any reference exhibits you submit and any articles or sections of ordinances that we study. These materials will be used as an appendix to the formal recommendations that you make.

Mr. Bonck stated he expects each of you will have experienced positive and possibly negative impacts from developments in your neighborhood or larger community. Share those experiences. Is there anything that could have been done by the developer to mitigate the impact of the development on its neighbors? Is there a gap in the UDC to address an issue that proved to be significant? When I share my thoughts on an issue, it will be from the perspective of a bureaucrat, not as an applicant or opponent. Over the years, I have told developers to imagine - what if you lived next door? What would be your concerns? The goal is not to extract kindness from a developer but to help them understand that legitimate concerns may exist.

Mr. Bonck continued in saying, the UDC is legal and enforceable. He is not aware that a court has invalidated it or even sections of it. No zoning or development ordinance is perfect. All of them are bound to the limits of the Mississippi Code and Case Law developed over the years. Each different ordinance has clauses that have been added to prevent something that has previously been allowed that caused some level of community pain. There is a delicate balance between objectivity and subjectivity in administering a zoning ordinance. Some level of administrative flexibility is desirable, learning what the communities' concerns are helps the Director manage applicants throughout the development process. In an ideal world, developers would read the Comprehensive Plan, study the UDC and apply to develop land in a way that is consistent with the

Comprehensive Plan and meets all the zoning requirements. Residents want developments that complement their neighborhood and fulfill a need for the city. Obviously, that doesn't always happen, but he bets the number of troubling cases are a small percentage of the overall number of applications. He is aware the Mayor and Board of Aldermen want to improve the ordinances and processes, not start over. We have a good chance of achieving that goal. Each of you will have a special area of interest. He encourages everyone to study the area of the UDC that you think needs attention and we will work on it.

Bill Betterton spoke describing his ward. He has concerns on the length of time it took for him to change the garbage contract by approaching the Board of Aldermen. His background consists of 26 years in the Navy ultimately retiring as a Master Chief. He says he "found paradise here in 1992," and became a full-time resident in 1998. He considers Ocean Springs home. Mr. Betterton is here to effectuate change and update the ordinances and corresponding maps. He specifically referenced the Alcohol Ordinance, that was written in 1983 and is antiquated, but his major concern is the length of time it takes for action to be taken by the elected officials. His model city is Conway, Arkansas, specifically for their downtown areas.

Michael Davis introduced himself. His background is in the hospitality field and has since retired. His concerns are inconsistencies and his perceived understanding of his role on this Committee. He acknowledged his lack of experience in this field and wants to verify he is not here to set policy but to give suggestions for changes.

Mr. Bonck gave an example of how the definition section describes a variance but the section on procedure does not give the same definition. He asked where the Flood Ordinance is located and if it should be included.

Mr. Davis continued with his experience on the Planning Commission. He served 3 years on the Planning Commission. He stated his model city is Charleston, SC. He appreciates how they have handled their growth, rentals, and aesthetics.

Shawn Senseney introduced himself stating he lived here, moved away, came back and settled here. He retired from the Jackson County Road Department 3 years ago. His knowledge is mostly pertaining to roads and drainage. He does not believe the UDC is an easy-to-understand document, but he wants a hand in its growth. His model city is Frisco, Colorado and stated, just driving through makes you want to stop and stay.

Alderman Pfeiffer stated her appreciation for this group.

Alderman Hinton also expressed his appreciation.

Libbi Miller introduced herself and stated she has lived here since she was 5. Her background is in banking and financial management. She recently started a business venture in development and is excited to dive into the guidelines. She wants the policies to be easier to understand, to be read, and ultimately to be followed for responsible development. She does not think she has a model city, and Ocean Springs is stand alone. She does not want to compare it to other places. She is open to researching other cities' rules but wants Ocean Springs to remain an individual.

Ben Smith introduced himself as a long-time resident. His professional background is civil engineering. He says he is familiar with public infrastructure projects and there are several inconsistencies in the current UDC. He referenced the Ordinances' intent and the relevance to the Comprehensive Plan. He says he wants to capitalize on the character everyone loves about Ocean Springs and we should work towards what works better. He can bring knowledge from "the other side of the table" as the viewpoint from the developer. He says his model city is a tough choice as there is no place that got it right but different things within several cities that he can appreciate. He referenced areas he vacations at, Seaside and Watercolor.

Mr. Bonck pointed out that those areas are "form-based" code.

Julia Illanne introduced herself as a generational resident. She says she moved away and ultimately came back. She wants to see that the UDC is "fixed" in a way that it protects Ocean Springs. Ms. Illanne and Mr. Bonck discussed PUD's and their disdain. She also stated she wants to effectuate change in their Waterfront (Waterview) District. Her background is mostly volunteer work and teaching. She does not have a model city other than Ocean Springs.

Mr. Bonck brought up Fairhope, AL and Ms. Miller stated she does not believe Fairhope, AL today is a model city as Mr. Bonck thought someone would.

Mr. Betterton spoke about the growth and development of Gretna, LA as one to be desired.

Mr. Dennis Warren introduced himself as a media professional. He moved to Ocean Springs just before Hurricane Katrina and served on the Ocean Springs Planning Commission. He gave some historical information how the UDC made it to this point and described it as a "Frankenstein." His focus is to protect the R-1 and R-2 Districts and correct zoning issues. He says we need to be smart and keep the "charm" as Ocean Springs is now land-locked and future development cannot be frivolous. He said his son lives in Oxford, which is, in his opinion, the most beautiful city in the state, and his son is trying to move back to Ocean Springs. He says we need to make sure the infrastructure can handle future development. He has concerns of Gautier building low-income housing at

the Ocean Springs border so those children can attend the Ocean Springs schools. This is a major point of contention. His main concern is smart growth and smart development. He does not have a model city, but says we absolutely should not model Meridian, MS.

Mr. Betterton stated the military community gets to choose where they want their children to attend, and most choose Ocean Springs.

Mr. Bonck asked the Committee about recent developments they feel are nice and bring good things to the community.

Mr. Betterton spoke of some subdivisions, Vineyard and Tuscano. He says nothing positive has come to his area. He says the lighthouse is nice and the churches have cleaned up. He says there is potential around the Interstate corridors and Hwy 57 interchange around I-10. He asked why we can't have an agreement with Gautier.

Mr. Senseney added there are protected areas and that could pose an issue for development.

Mr. Davis reminded him that these areas are newly annexed and might not be reflected in the current UDC.

Mr. Bonck asked about lack of developable land and Mr. Betterton says there is not much. Mr. Davis said Ward 6 has the most available land for development. He says the hang-ups are on the city's end as lack of infrastructure to support a new development.

Mr. Betterton asked, "why do we have to develop?" He wants to know why the focus is not more towards tourist driven nature reserves. He thinks the city will not be able to get big-name hotels and the current amenities are not able to hold the intended number of visitors.

Mr. Senseney added there are complications when wetlands are involved.

Mr. Davis says the development should be geared to keep the charm but still allow for growth. He mentioned a vacant parking lot that did not generate taxes or revenue but would be better used as a business that employs its residents and generates revenues.

Alderman Pfeiffer stated the aesthetics need to be more of the focus. She does not like the zero lot line developments as it appears heavy in areas along Washington and Government Street.

Mr. Davis said the intention of the development, OS 1515, was right and the charm is in the canopy trees.

Mr. Bonck explained zero lot line areas in commercial versus residential areas and what is acceptable per IFC.

Alderman Pfeiffer is worried about the “charm” being preserved when those areas are so over developed.

Mr. Bonck spoke of corridor plans and height restrictions. He referenced Selma, AL. He said Montgomery, AL had positive changes, but nothing has happened in Selma. He believes the building height of a city center can determine the city’s success.

Ms. Illanne stated the height is not the issue as much as the building’s proportion. She said the larger scale buildings should have larger green spaces.

Mr. Senseney said changing the setbacks will help with new development but not what’s already there.

Porter Avenue was a topic of conversation, and it was stated it is already in an overlay district.

Mr. Betterton stated the conversation naturally circled to Government Street when they are discussing developments. He said that it seems to always happen. He said Groveland was intended to be a medical area and now its multi-family. He would like to see businesses brought into that area.

Mr. Senseney stated he did not appreciate the new housing development that was brought in along the ditch with the lift station. He was asked about the development on Bills Avenue. He says it was overkill for the area. It is not believed to fit with the character.

Ms. Miller said those higher end developments will push out the majorities. Mr. Betterton asked her about opinions of Old CCC Camp Rd.

Mr. Senseney and Ms. Miller said it is a drainage nightmare.

Mr. Davis brought the discussion back to the need for infrastructure upgrades first.

Mr. Senseney stated if you shrink the value of the home then the lot shrinks too.

Mr. Betterton said maybe lot sizes should be discussed.

Mr. Davis said Ocean Springs has the largest minimum lot size requirement on the coast.

Ms. Miller stated she does not agree with developments that do not conform with the existing and surrounding character, specifically in Ward 6 when the majority of homesites are multi-acre and then a multi-lot development on 4 acres is allowed to come. She said it is behind the Lighthouse Retirement Home off Lee Street.

Mr. Senseney says a lot of these areas were recently annexed from the County and is curious to see if those areas develop quickly.

Mr. Betterton wants to know where the “working class” residents will be living.

Alderman Pfeiffer stated when you develop larger tracts at once then the infrastructure ages at once too. She suggested to encourage staggered development to alleviate that burden on the city and the homeowners.

Mr. Smith said when you build something nice the community tends to take care of it. He stated the issues are the developers do not live here; they get their money and leave. The best developments are those where the developer lives there too.

Alderman Hinton stated we need to blend the new with the old and, do not develop away from starter families. Specifically, Hwy 90 needs to be a corridor that blends with Ocean Springs. He said Bienville Place used to be the place to be and now it is an area needing attention.

Mr. Bonck touched back to the aging infrastructure being a universal issue. He believes the processes for asking for Variances and permits to develop should be a topic of discussion. He said next meeting should be geared toward Zoning Districts.

Mr. Bonck asked Mr. Senseney to review parking and parking lot regulations.

Mr. Betterton made mention of “adult industry” being referenced in the UDC and it does not reflect the ordinance pertaining to that area. He thinks it should be removed.

Ms. Illanne said she will review the Porter Avenue Overlay and Waterview District tweaks.

Ms. Miller asked for the referenced “Appendix A” of the Flood Ordinance so she can review those.

Mr. Smith said he will review Sections 2-6 for Development Standards.

Mr. Davis asked whether it is appropriate to email questions and comments. Mr. Bonck said all emails pertaining to this group need to be kept.

Next meeting date is scheduled for January 22, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 pm.