Preface

Ocracoke is a formerly isolated small island community in North Carolina, which, in recent years, has experienced an unprecedented influx of tourism. As a result of the associated rapid economic growth, many residents have chosen to live in travel trailers when faced with the rising costs of traditional homeownership. While there is an existing Development Ordinance, the Ocracoke Advisory Planning Board is interested in alternative measures by other communities, and most importantly how these measures are enforced.

Their primary concerns are about health, safety, water & sanitation, and property setbacks of these travel trailers.

To address these concerns, we have researched communities of similar size and composition to Ocracoke. Communities with comparable historical, economic, and geographical characteristics, particularly a strong tourism industry, have been selected for case studies. Using municipal code databases, such as Municode, we examine the ordinances implemented by these communities and identify publicly employed measures that could work well for Ocracoke. While not all communities presented in this report allow for people to take up residence in travel trailers, we included reference to these communities, which specifically mention travel trailers in their codes, so that the Advisory Planning Board can further examine these communities’ methods of enforcement and penalties.

Results & Suggestions

Concerns about both health & safety issues and preserving local character have led some communities similar to Ocracoke to opt for outright bans on the use of travel trailers as dwellings. If the need for affordable housing outweighs these concerns for Ocracoke, we have several recommendations to offer based on our findings.

First, we suggest that Ocracoke implement a mandatory permitting process for any travel trailer that is to be used as housing. Every community that we surveyed required that travel trailers be permitted by the town, city, village, or county. This permitting process allows communities to maintain a high degree of control over the use of travel trailers within their respective jurisdictions. Required annual site inspections would likely improve compliance with local ordinances pertaining to travel trailers. Inspections could be performed by the Code Enforcement Division of the Hyde County Department of Building Inspections.

Several of the communities surveyed prohibited the use of travel trailers in certain areas. In some cases, this was a reaction to safety concerns: for instance, Dare County, North Carolina, limits where travel trailers can be used based on their level of wind resistance. Any amendments to the travel trailer ordinance that Ocracoke adopts should bear in mind that travel trailers are not stormproof, and consequently highly vulnerable to both high winds and flooding.

In addition to limiting the areas where travel trailers can be used, we suggest that Ocracoke require that all travel trailers be kept in a state of road-readiness, so that residents can remove their travel trailers from the island when extreme weather is expected. Further limitations on where travel trailers can be kept could be based on concerns of community character might also be desirable.

Other provisions included in many travel trailer ordinances include specifications for minimum lot sizes for each trailer, limits on the number of trailers allowed per lot, minimum setback requirements, and requirements that all travel trailers be used as dwellings have adequate water and sewer connections. We believe that Ocracoke would benefit from including all four of these conditions in its ordinance. These provisions could be enforced by requiring that residents submit site plans for approval as a part of the permitting process, and through the aforementioned annual inspections by the county’s Department of Building Inspections.

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