

# Controversial project on North Carolina coast gains key approval



Image: Getty Images

Southport is in Brunswick County, one of the fastest-growing places in the country.

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## Story Highlights

- Southport's Board of Aldermen approve Waterway Community development.
- Waterway project calls for 1,000 residences.
- Lots for custom homes will start under \$200,000 in Southport.



By [Dane Huffman](#) – Managing Editor, Triangle Business Journal  
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A major development project on the North Carolina coast cleared a key hurdle Monday morning when it gained unanimous approval from Southport’s Board of Aldermen.

The [Waterway Community development](#), a collaboration between Chapel Hill’s [East West Partners](#) and Bald Head Island Limited, gained rezoning approval for the part of the project in the town limits.

That part of the [project is roughly 48 acres](#) of an overall project that will span 375 acres.

The full project is scheduled to include approximately 1,000 residences, which would vastly increase the population in a picturesque town of roughly 4,400.

Southport is easily one of North Carolina’s more beautiful towns and was the site of filming for the 2013 film, “Safe Haven,” starring Julianne Hough and Josh Duhamel. The film was based on the book by Nicholas Sparks.

Many in Southport resisted such a dramatic change. But after years of discussions, the board approved the rezoning Monday.

“It was a long process. This is not a rubber stamp by any stretch of the imagination,” said Rebecca Kelly, the mayor pro-tem.

Mayor Rich Alt noted, “There’s been lots of noise out there about doing things behind closed doors.” He noted the intense interest in the project, including some jam-packed meetings in the past, but said the board had listened to extensive comments and had worked closely with the developer as the process evolved.

“We have come to the best conclusion for the city, for the residents, for the developer, for everybody involved – based on the conditions that we face.”



A look at the location of the Waterway community (formerly Project Indigo) in Southport, a collaboration of East West Partners and Bald Head Island Limited.

#### EAST WEST PARTNERS

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The project was previously known as Project Indigo, but the developers withdrew their application in 2022. At that time, the project was roughly 1,500 units.

But in 2024, the General Assembly passed House Bill 911, which shifted 75 percent of the land to Brunswick County's authority and not Southport's, according to the [Port City Daily](#).

Brunswick County [is one of the fastest-growing places in the country](#), fueling a wave of commercial and residential development.

In 2024, East West Partners and Bald Head Island Limited brought back the plan under the new name of Waterway Community. They held a public meeting May 28 to discuss the portion of the development in Southport. It calls for 199 units with apartments, two-family and single-family homes.

Over the years, interest in the plan gained momentum, in part with the plan to eventually incorporate the community into the town limits, boosting the town's bottom line. Mayor Alt [told WECT in 2024](#), "The world has changed, and we have to change with it."

Leading the marketing of the property is The Beatty Pittman team, which is based in Wilmington.

Lots for custom homes will start at just under \$200,000 and have easy walking access to the heart of Southport. The plan is to use local builders.

"It's a big deal," said Keith Beatty of The Beatty Pittman team. "It's a phenomenal location."