

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
May 26, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Mayor William Justice, Mayor Pro Tem Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf, Commissioner Tamara Pieratti, Commissioner Tim Vannoy, and Commissioner Wayne Herbert.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm and Mayor Justice led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Citizens were offered an opportunity to address the Board regarding items listed on the agenda. No comments were given.

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Vannoy, the agenda as prepared and the following consent items were unanimously approved.

- March 24, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes
- Resolution 2026-R7 Authorizing Withdrawal from ECC
- Tax Refund Request

Vehicle Tax

Duncan, Jeffrey L - \$24.01 - Sold/Traded

Newcomb, Roger D & Mary E - \$137.70 - Tag Surrender

In response to an inquiry from the board, Manager Barlow confirmed that withdrawal from the ECC would not result in loss of any services or benefits to the town.

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Gigi's Farm

Helen Gross and her daughter Emily French presented details about Gigi's Farm, a five-acre flower and produce farm at 160 Queens Creek Road. Opened a year ago, the farm emphasizes agritourism, community ties, and nature engagement with activities like seasonal flower planting and blackberry cultivation. Aiming to become a pick-your-own produce venue, the farm has initiated community programs, including recognizing 37 local educators with weekly gift baskets and partnering with students for volunteer hours, enhancing their understanding of agriculture.

Mrs. Gross explained that while the property was purchased earlier, the first six months were devoted to building infrastructure — including restoring electricity, water service, and the historic red barn built by the veteran Finley family — meaning the current season represents the farm's first true growing season.

Bucket Brigade Program

Laura Hagerman and Jan Smith of the Salvation Army of Jones and Onslow County, shared details about the Bucket Brigade program, an initiative that helped food-insecure and food-desert residents grow fresh vegetables using free, self-contained fabric buckets with potting soil and plants, grown by master gardeners or students. Each bucket had a drip saucer for use on patios or balconies. Operating alongside monthly Salvation Army food distributions, the program included nutrition education through a USDA affiliate and hosted 25 outreach events over four years, attracting 399 participants in March. The program received the United Way of Onslow County's Volunteer Group of the Year award.

In response to inquiries from the board, Ms. Hagerman or Ms. Smith clarified the following details.

- Follow-ups were not conducted, but participants could access instructional materials and extension office support.
- Plans were in the works to host a Bucket Brigade in Swansboro, potentially with Military Appreciation Day at Hammocks Beach State Park and Swansboro United Methodist Church partnership.

Business Non-Consent

Emergency Operations Center/Public Safety Building Design Contract Award to Bobbitt Construction, Inc.

Town Manager Jon Barlow reviewed the request to award the design phase contract for the Emergency Operations Center and Public Safety Building to Bobbitt Construction, Inc. He explained that the Town Attorney had completed an extensive review of the standard AIA design-build agreement and that the design-build method was consistent with North Carolina statutes and appropriate for the complexity of the project. Manager Barlow noted that the approach allowed cost management to be incorporated into the design process. He further explained that the total project budget was approximately \$8.5 million, funded through the original \$9 million in SCIF grant funds following the expenditure of approximately \$1.3 million for land acquisition. The contract before the

Board applied only to the design phase, with construction to proceed following completion of the design and subsequent Board approval.

In response to inquiries from the board, Manager Barlow clarified the following:

- Payments would be made periodically based on project progress
- Design work was expected to take approximately one year, and that construction-related amendments were anticipated by June 2027.
- The public would have an opportunity to review the project once a concept was ready.
- The timeline for the \$3 million grant component had been extended. He also explained that land acquisition had been paid from those grant funds and that those funds were nearing exhaustion following the proposed contract.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, the contract for design services to Bobbitt Construction, Inc. in the amount of \$952,741 was unanimously approved.

Emergency Operations Center/Public Safety Building Project Management Services

Town Manager Barlow reviewed the request to award a project advisory services contract to MPB for owner's representative services for the Emergency Operations Center and Public Safety Building project. He explained that the services would assist the Town during the design and construction phases due to the size and complexity of the project.

Manager Barlow shared that the Town issued an RFQ, received four responses, conducted interviews, and unanimously recommended MPB based on its experience, qualifications, and ability to mobilize quickly.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Manager Barlow clarified that the fee represented approximately 2.95% of the total project cost, which was within the typical industry range.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, the contract for EOC/PSB Project Advisory Services to MPB in the amount of \$254,345 was unanimously approved.

Audit Contract-Anderson Smith & Wike, PLLC

Finance Director Sonia Johnson reviewed the request to approve an audit services contract with Anderson Smith & Wike, PLLC from Elon, North Carolina for fiscal year

ending June 30, 2026. She explained that the town's previous auditor had notified the town that he would no longer be providing audit services to governmental entities. In April, a Request for Proposals was issued, and two proposals were received. Anderson Smith & Wike, PLLC was the recommended firm based on its more than 25 years of accounting experience, with the majority of that work dedicated to governmental entities. Director Johnson also shared that the firm was a member of both the North Carolina Association of Certified Public Accountants and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

In response to inquiries from the board, Finance Director Johnson confirmed the following:

- The new fee was approximately \$11,000 more than the prior auditor.
- A small contingency was built into the contract ceiling to accommodate a single audit component without requiring a contract amendment.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, the Audit Contract with Anderson Smith & Wike, PLLC for period July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026 in the amount of \$26,500 not to exceed \$29,000 was unanimously approved.

Monthly Financial Report as of April 30, 2026

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented the April 2026 financial report. She highlighted the following points:

- Excess revenues over expenditures: \$595,766 (with encumbrances included).
- Overall departmental expenditures were 65.35% of budget, 17.95% below the monthly projection of 83.3%.
- Stormwater Enterprise Fund excess revenues over expenditures were \$63,338.
- Solid Waste Enterprise Fund excess revenues over expenditures were \$15,446.
- A new debt item for two police vehicles in the amount of \$104,000 was scheduled to appear on the following month's report.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Finance Director Johnson shared that while she did not have the capital reserve report available at the meeting she confirmed that the balance was over \$120,000 and offered to provide the precise figure afterward.

Future Agenda Topics

Future agenda items were shared for visibility and comments. In addition, an opportunity was provided for the board to introduce items of interest and subsequent direction for placement on future agendas. No additional items were requested.

Public Comment

Mary Pat Smey thanked those involved in the successful Memorial Day ceremony. She announced that Military Appreciation Day was scheduled for June 6th at Hammocks Beach State Park, aligning with D-Day, where Major James Capers was scheduled to receive a key to the city. Commissioners were invited to volunteer for the dunk tank, with six to eight thousand attendees expected and parking plans arranged to ease congestion.

Fred Schachter, president of the Friends of Hammocks Beach and Bear Island, stated that the ferry service had consistently reached over-capacity on three out of its first four weekends, partly due to higher parking fees at a nearby beach. The Friends group employed 19 weekly volunteers for a golf cart shuttle service, and the campground was booked every weekend. Schachter informed the Board that upcoming funding requests might be needed from the Board and the Tourism Development Authority, due to forthcoming changes from the North Carolina Department of Natural Resources regarding Friends groups' spending allocations. He urged exploration of a shuttle service to connect the campground, local hotels, and downtown Swansboro during peak holiday weekends like July 4th, highlighting the potential to boost sales tax and increase visitor awareness of Swansboro.

Manager's Comments

Town Manager Barlow reported that Steve Edwards was scheduled to begin as the new Public Services Director on June 1st, returning to a role he had previously held with the town. His first formal introduction to the Board was anticipated at the June 9th meeting.

Town Manager Barlow also provided an update on the Visitor Center renovation project, reporting that work was progressing well with no unexpected issues. Wall and trim paint had been applied, cabinetry was installed, and the project was awaiting flooring and fixture installation. The previously delayed bathroom partitions had been delivered. Completion was anticipated within two to three weeks, at which time a ribbon cutting ceremony would be scheduled for the Board.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Manager Barlow explained that the design phase for sidewalk priorities was complete, showing where sidewalks were expected to fall within or beyond road right-of-way. The next steps involved securing easements from around 30 property owners for sections outside public right-of-way, which was time-consuming. The project costs were approximately \$1.1 million, while capital reserves

were under \$200,000, indicating a funding gap that needed to be resolved before construction could proceed.

Board Comments

Commissioner Vannoy thanked Mary Pat Smey for her efforts and all those who attended the Memorial Day event and echoed appreciation for the staff and chiefs. He noted resident concerns that had come to his attention regarding a new convenience store that had opened near the library and confirmed that communications had been sent to ensure the business was operating in compliance with applicable town standards.

Commissioner Eckendorf thanked all parties involved in the EOC project process over the past two and a half years and acknowledged the difficulty of the property search and acquisition phase. He also thanked Junior Freeman, for identifying the ultimately selected site. He also recognized the work of both chiefs and Town Manager Barlow for their perseverance throughout the process.

Commissioner Herbert shared highlights from the ONWASA budget meeting held the prior Thursday. Customers were expected to see a rate increase of approximately 9.5% for base water and sewer charges, equating to roughly \$1.99 more per month for water and \$3.20 for sewer. The average user—consuming approximately 4,100 gallons per month—was expected to see a combined bill of approximately \$44.65 for water and \$81.95 for sewer, for a monthly total of approximately \$126.60. He noted that ONWASA had developed a tiered rate structure so that lower-usage customers would be affected proportionately less. Commissioner Herbert also thanked the Memorial Day event organizers for a well-executed ceremony.

Commissioner Pieratti thanked staff and the town attorney. She provided additional context on the Board's decision to withdraw from the ECC, noting that during her attendance at two ECC meetings following her January appointment to that body, she found limited benefit to Swansboro's membership. She also observed that the organization was carrying a multi-year pattern of poor audit results and faced an uncertain financial future without emergency county funding, which county and municipal members were not prepared to provide.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway thanked the fire department for their participation in the Memorial Day flag display and encouraged residents interested in civic engagement to submit talent bank applications for upcoming advisory board vacancies.

Mayor Justice reported on the Onslow County Municipal Managers meeting held May 14, 2026, at which the primary topic was the upcoming property revaluation. He noted that the state legislative outcome affecting how the revaluation would be applied remained unresolved and that he had not received substantive responses from legislative contacts. Manager Barlow clarified that the town was required to use the county's new revaluation figures as the basis for calculating property tax revenue in the upcoming budget. Mayor Justice also recognized Major Capers, who was scheduled to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor on June 18, 2026, and noted the recent dedication ceremony at St. Thomas AME Zion Church, which had been added to the African-American Heritage Trail. He closed by noting that the Jones Onslow Economic Development (JOED) committee had hired a new executive director, Melissa Brandt, and that a JOED meeting was anticipated in the near future.

Adjournment

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, the meeting adjourned at 7:16 pm.