

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
June 23, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes

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

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 Eckendorf, the agenda as prepared and the following consent items were unanimously approved.

- April 14, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes
- April 14, 2026, Closed Session Minutes
- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2026-7
- Tax Refund Requests

Vehicle Tax

Britt, Patrica Cook - \$34.76 - Sold/Traded

Campbell, Jade - \$27.64 - Tag Surrender

Klein, Iryna Anatoliyivna & David Russell - \$125.87 - Tag Surrender

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Educators on Mission

Jacob Mabry, Principal of Sand Ridge Elementary School, presented information on Educators on Mission, a ministry established to support educators in public and private schools. He reviewed an upcoming mission trip to Peru, where a team of local educators would work with students at a school serving an underserved community. The team would also provide professional development and instructional support to the school's teachers, many of whom had not received formal educational training. Mr. Mabry explained that the ministry's broader purpose was to encourage educators and provide opportunities for educators to use their professional skills in service to others.

In response to Board questions, Mr. Mabry explained that the ministry also supports local educators through voluntary, before-school Bible studies. He confirmed that donations were being accepted to assist with the mission trip and the ministry's continuing work.

Public Hearing

UDO Text Amendment to §152.016 Definitions of Basic Terms

Town Planner Rebecca Brehmer reviewed a proposed amendment to Section 152.016 of the Unified Development Ordinance to correct the definition of “Fence (Protective).” Ms. Brehmer explained that the existing definition incorrectly used the word “minimum” instead of “maximum” when referencing a six-foot fence height and included design standards that should be located in the applicable standards section. The proposed amendment would replace the definition with general language describing a fence and direct users to Section 152.196E for specific design requirements. The Planning Board recommended approval of the amendment at its June 2, 2026, regular meeting.

In response to inquiries from the Board, Planner Brehmer and Attorney Rasberry clarified the following:

- All fence design standards, including the six-foot maximum height and requirements concerning fence orientation, would remain in Section 152.196E.
- The existing definition could create enforcement issues because fences shorter than six feet technically did not meet the ordinance’s definition.
- The revised language was satisfactory and removing the ambiguity would make the ordinance clearer and easier for the Town to enforce.

The public hearing was opened at 6:16 pm, then closed as no comments were made.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, Ordinance 2026-O4 amending §152.016 Definitions of Basic Terms was unanimously approved.

UDO Text Amendment to §152.400-462 Flood Damage Prevention

Planner Brehmer reviewed a proposed amendment to Sections 152.400 through 152.462 of the Unified Development Ordinance to incorporate the updated 2026 Model Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance for coastal communities. The amendment included required updates and selected optional provisions recommended for Swansboro, including expanded definitions, references to the revised elevation certificate, and the addition of the Coastal A Zone designation. The Flood Management Appeal Board recommended approval at its May 18, 2026, special meeting, followed by a recommendation of approval from the Planning Board at its June 2, 2026, regular meeting.

In response to inquiries from the Board, Planner Brehmer and Attorney Rasberry clarified the following:

- Language regarding the termination of utility service was supported by the Town’s existing working relationships with the applicable utility providers.
- The model ordinance contained conflicting language regarding whether administrative appeals would be heard by the elected governing body or the Flood Management Appeal Board. Staff recommended revising both provisions to consistently designate the Flood Management Appeal Board.

- The proposed correction was appropriate and consistent with similar ordinances adopted by other municipalities.
- The National Flood Insurance Program planner confirmed that the Town could designate the Flood Management Appeal Board to hear administrative appeals.
- Maintaining a flood damage prevention ordinance is required for continued participation in the National Flood Insurance Program, and using the model ordinance helps maintain consistency with program requirements.

The public hearing was opened at 6:23 pm then closed as no comments were offered.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, Ordinance 2026-O5 amending §152.400-462 Flood Damage Prevention was unanimously approved.

Business Non-Consent

FY 2026/2027 Budget Ordinance, Tax Rate, Stormwater Ordinance, Fee Schedule, and Salary Schedules (tabled 6/9/2026)

Town Manager Jon Barlow presented the proposed FY 2026/2027 Budget, which had been tabled from the June 9, 2026, meeting. The required public hearing was conducted and closed on June 9, after which the Board held a special meeting on June 15 to further discuss the proposed tax rate, fund balance impact, public safety staffing, and other budget priorities. The revised budget presented for consideration reflected the direction provided by the Board during those meetings.

Manager Barlow summarized the principal components of the proposed budget:

- The total budget across all funds was \$7,364,397, representing an eight percent decrease from the prior fiscal year.
- The General Fund totaled \$6,679,173, the Stormwater Fund totaled \$157,574, and the Solid Waste Fund totaled \$527,006.50.
- The ad valorem tax rate remained unchanged at \$0.35 per \$100 of assessed valuation.
- The tax levy was calculated using the 2025 assessed valuation of \$734,795,000, as required by the revaluation moratorium established under Senate Bill 889.
- The budget included one additional police officer beginning January 1, 2027, one patrol vehicle, one public service vehicle, and replacement police radios.
- Employee compensation included a 1.35 percent cost-of-living adjustment and merit increases of up to 1.35 percent.
- The budget accounted for increased health insurance, property and liability insurance, and required retirement contributions.
- No changes were proposed for the Stormwater Fund.
- Solid waste fees would increase by \$2.10 per month for residential customers and \$3.59 per month for commercial customers after approximately eight years without a rate adjustment.

- The budget required a \$486,000 fund balance appropriation and was projected to leave the General Fund balance at approximately 52 percent, above the Board's 50 percent policy minimum.
- No contribution to capital reserves was included in the proposed budget.

In response to inquiries from the Board, Town Manager Barlow and/or Finance Director Sonia Johnson clarified the following:

- The \$0.35 tax rate and the assessed valuation of \$734,795,000 remained unchanged from the current fiscal year because the Town was required to use the 2025 property valuation figures.
- Funding for the additional police officer was based on a January 1, 2027, hiring date and therefore included only one-half of the annual salary and benefit costs.
- The \$486,000 fund balance appropriation was less than the amount appropriated in the prior year and would leave the Town slightly above its 50 percent policy minimum.
- The budget did not include a contribution to capital reserves, but restoring that funding would remain a priority during the next budget cycle.
- The Solid Waste Fund fee increases were necessary to address increased operating costs and maintain the financial stability of the fund.
- The proposed budget preserved current service levels while providing limited investments in public safety staffing, vehicles, and equipment.

During final discussion, the Board acknowledged that the proposed budget resulted from an extensive process and recognized that the State-mandated revaluation moratorium limited available revenue and prevented the Town from funding all requested initiatives. The Board agreed that the revised budget reflected its prior direction by maintaining the \$0.35 tax rate, preserving essential services, adding one police officer beginning in January, and keeping the projected fund balance above the Town's policy minimum. The Board also expressed appreciation to staff for the numerous revisions completed throughout the budget process and identified public safety, capital reserves, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, and stormwater management as continuing priorities.

On a motion by Commissioner Pieratti, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway the FY 2026/2027 Budget Ordinance with an ad valorem tax rate of \$0.35 per \$100 of assessed valuation, along with the associated Salary Schedules and Fee Schedule was unanimously approved.

Monthly Financial Report as of May 31, 2026

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

- The General Fund reflected an excess of revenues over expenditures of \$395,835 with encumbrances and \$565,520 without encumbrances.

- General Fund expenditures were at 72.84 percent of budget, compared with the projected benchmark of 91.67 percent.
- The Stormwater Fund reflected an excess of revenues over expenditures of \$55,502.
- The Solid Waste Fund reflected an excess of revenues over expenditures of \$17,618; however, depreciation had not yet been recorded.
- Outstanding Town debt totaled \$995,238 as of May 31, 2026.
- The June report would reflect the approved \$150,000 transfer to capital reserve and Emergency Operations Center grant agreements received during June.

Mayor Justice noted that debt obligations for two vehicles and a fire truck would be retired during the fiscal year. No questions were raised by the Board.

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. The following items were addressed:

- Begin providing a grants status slide in the monthly financial report
- Schedule a presentation by JOED

Public Comment

Citizens were offered an opportunity to address the Board for no more than five minutes regarding items not listed on the agenda. No comments were made.

Manager's Comments

Town Manager Barlow spoke about the following project updates:

- The renovated visitor center ribbon-cutting ceremony was tentatively scheduled for 9:00 a.m. on July 2, 2026, with invitations to the County Board of Commissioners, the Swansboro Tourism Development Authority, builder Rob Steel, and the public.
- The Emmerton School restoration project was nearing completion by its August 30, 2026, deadline, with ceiling painting and front-door replacement remaining before a planned ribbon-cutting or dedication ceremony.
- Fireworks were planned for approximately 9:00 p.m. on July 3, 2026.

Board Comments

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway reported that JUMPO would address missing traffic-signal reflectors identified as a safety hazard during a recent power outage, that the Town had forwarded the Food Lion/Mavis Tires right-in, right-out issue to NCDOT, and encouraged property owners to appeal their revaluation assessments with the Onslow County Tax Office.

Commissioner Herbert thanked everyone who supported the successful Arts by the Sea Festival and praised the new visitor center bathroom and command facility, including funding support from the Swansboro Tourism Development Authority and Onslow County Board of Commissioners.

Commissioner Pieratti thanked festival staff, wished Town Planner Brehmer well, and recognized Town Manager Barlow, Finance Director Johnson, and Town Clerk Fender for their budget and ongoing work.

Commissioner Eckendorf thanked the Board and staff for their budget work, highlighted sidewalks and pedestrian mobility, public safety investment, and stormwater management as priorities, invited community input, and requested a Mullet Festival planning brief with a weather contingency plan at least 90 days before the event.

Commissioner Vannoy asked staff to explore moving Appearance Commission meetings to the evening for greater accessibility, thanked regular meeting attendees, and praised the visitor center facility and Arts by the Sea volunteers.

Mayor Justice encouraged support for Major James Capers and his foundation, promoted Safety Town and National Night Out, praised Police and Fire services, noted the need for expanded emergency medical capacity, and invited input related to his work on the county opioid funding committee.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, the meeting adjourned at 7:12 pm.