

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
March 24, 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 item was unanimously approved.

- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2026-5
- Tax Refund Requests totaling \$94.65

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

WithersRavenel - Stormwater Master Plan Project Update

Planner Rebecca Brehmer introduced Amanda Hollingsworth and Emily Pettruny of WithersRavenel, who presented an update on the Town's Stormwater Master Plan. Planner Brehmer reviewed that the project was funded by a \$400,000 grant from the NC Department of Environmental Quality's Local Assistance for Stormwater Infrastructure Investment Program, awarded in 2023. This was the first comprehensive stormwater master plan for the Town of Swansboro.

The project involved surveying and digitally mapping the town's entire stormwater pipe network, which had not previously been documented in a usable format. That data was incorporated into the town's ArcGIS system and includes pipe sizes, materials, depths, and drainage basin delineations. The data was then used to build an engineering model to test how the system performs during a 10-year, 24-hour storm event. The modeling focused on the Halls Creek area and the downtown historic district. Many pipes throughout the system were found to be undersized.

Based on the modeling results and input from town staff, three concept improvement areas were identified:

Concept 1 – Forest Brook Neighborhood: Existing 15- and 18-inch pipes were undersized, causing road flooding. The proposal was to replace them with larger and dual-barrel pipes. Estimated cost: \$935,000.

Concept 2 – Holly Lane / Old Hammock Road Area: Undersized pipes and an open drainage channel between Dogwood Lane and Phillips Drive were causing road flooding. The proposal was to extend the trunk line along Holly Lane to a new outfall and redirect some flow to a new system on Dogwood Lane. Estimated cost: \$2,474,000.

Concept 3 – Downtown Historic District: The pipe network was undersized and also experiences backwater from the White Oak River and Hawkins Creek during storms, which pushes water back into the system and causes persistent flooding. The proposal includes upsizing pipes along Waterfront and Church Streets and installing intentionally flooding structures near the water's edge to relieve pressure on the system. CAMA permitting restrictions prevent upsizing the outfall pipes closest to the water. This concept also incorporates the previously designed Water Street Drainage Improvement Project. Estimated cost not fully detailed due to the CAMA constraints. Concept 3 was ranked the top priority using a scoring matrix that weighed infrastructure condition, project cost, flooding severity, and drainage area served.

Additional recommendations in the report included maintaining the stormwater asset inventory over time, developing a pre-approved emergency pumping plan for major storm events, continuing to pursue the water quality goals from the 2017 Nine Element Plan and the Resilient Coastal Communities Program, investigating backflow prevention devices for downtown outfall pipes, formalizing a capital improvement plan for stormwater projects, and continuing to seek grant funding. The PowerPoint slides reviewed are attached to the minutes herein.

In response to inquiries from the Board, Ms. Hollingsworth and/or Ms. Pettruny clarified the following details:

- Project implementation would likely occur in phases beginning with the highest priority areas. The overall timeline was expected to span several years.
- Consultant assistance with grant applications depended on the funding source. Smaller grants may be completed by Town staff, while larger or federal grants typically require outside support due to increased complexity and documentation requirements.
- This effort represented the Town's first comprehensive stormwater master plan. Previous work had addressed specific elements, such as water quality initiatives or individual project designs, rather than a system-wide plan.
- The final draft of the stormwater master plan was anticipated to be submitted to the Division of Water Infrastructure around April 10, following any remaining input. Then the Board would be asked to formally adopt the plan, with overall completion anticipated by the end of the calendar year.

- Stormwater structures included all junction components within the system, such as manholes and inlets. For planning-level cost estimates, it was generally assumed that these structures would require replacement along the identified pipe segments.
- Regulatory limitations prevented upsizing outfall pipes near waterfront areas. As an alternative, proposed designs included placing structures outside regulated buffer areas to allow controlled surface release of excess stormwater in designated locations, minimizing impacts to buildings and parking areas.
- Identified priority areas were consistent with known system issues and field observations. The next step would be to determine which project to advance and pursue funding opportunities.
- Flooding caused by storm surge and tidal backflow could not be addressed through pipe improvements alone. Recommended approaches included development of emergency pumping plans and consideration of temporary flood protection measures.

Board discussion included recommendations, such as establishing a formal capital improvement plan, and fall under Board direction, while other items may be implemented administratively by staff. Consideration was also given to public education on property-level mitigation strategies and available funding resources.

Town Manager Barlow shared that the Town had initiated an asset management program and had existing GIS capabilities to support ongoing system tracking. While the proposed concepts were not construction-ready, they were sufficiently developed to support grant applications.

Fire Department 2025 Annual Report

Fire Chief Jacob Randall's 2025 report emphasized departmental improvements and transparency. Out of 1,493 incidents, medical calls were predominant, totaling 999 with 527 for illness and 327 for trauma, about 60-70% of the total. Fire incidents numbered at 111, alarm activations at 125, rescues at 114, and hazardous situations at 23. Response time averages were reduced to 8 minutes and 9 seconds, a 2-minute improvement through enhancements like dispatch software and data tracking. Challenges include overlapping incident delays and station location issues affecting nighttime response. The department conducted 351 inspections and began the Hammocks Beach trail marker program and ICW mapping. Staff accomplishments included Fire Academy, EMT, and Fire Rescue Management Institute training, partnering with Camp Lejeune. The PowerPoint slides reviewed are attached to the minutes herein.

In response to inquiries from the board, Fire Chief Randall or Town Manager Barlow clarified the following details:

- Main Street dock, currently under repair, cannot accommodate a boat lift for water rescues due to legal limitations, although other town access points might could be considered.
- Around 60 to 70 percent of the department's calls were medical rather than fire related.
- Improved response times were attributed to the department's commitment to training and certification.
- Challenges with missed calls occurred when engaged in other incidents, relying on mutual aid which affects response coverage.
- Increasing staffing was the intended long-term solution. Staff retention remained positive following a salary increase, with active recruitment for vacancies, though one position was lost to a larger agency's competitive offer.

The Board acknowledged and expressed appreciation for the efforts of Fire Chief Randall and the Fire Department in carrying out their duties and serving the community.

Business Non-Consent

Monthly Financial Report as of February 2026

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

- Revenues over expenditures were \$819,519 with encumbrances and \$956,482 without encumbrances
- Overall expenditures were at 55.39% of the budget, which was 11.25% below the projected pace of 66.64%
- The emergency management department was at 87.1% expended due to costs from Winter Storm Gianna, necessitating a minimal budget amendment
- The stormwater enterprise fund had revenues over expenditures of \$71,678
- The solid waste enterprise fund had revenues over expenditures of \$6,859
- There were no changes in the debt summary; however, changes were anticipated in March
- The TD Bank interest rate had gradually declined

In response to an inquiry from the board, Finance Director Johnson clarified that she had not yet contacted other banks to compare interest rates but could, noting the process of switching institutions was lengthy.

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:

- Town Clerk Fender confirmed that a service ticket had been submitted to the state regarding four traffic signals at intersections and was awaiting a response. JUMPO was also reviewing the matter.

- Town Clerk Fender shared that scheduling a workshop on the stormwater master plan would take place after the plan was submitted and accepted by the state sometime after April.
- Town Manager Barlow explained that the board cannot dispose of the skatepark equipment until the original grant agency gives consent for its removal, at which point the Board would need to formally decide on a disposal method.

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 addressed Mayor Justice's earlier question about a fire department boat lift, clarifying that he had only examined Main Street dock possibilities due to riparian rights and buffer constraints. He noted they could explore other water access points at Moore Street or Church Street or consider leasing arrangements with private owners.

Town Manager Barlow additionally updated the board on the following:

- EOC/public safety building contract negotiations were ongoing, with the town attorney reviewing the draft. He recommended project advisory services and said the RFQ would be posted, with responses due April 15 and recommendations by April 28.
- The Town had submitted applications to Onslow County TDA for \$21,000 and to Swansboro TDA for the Visitor's Center Renovations. Swansboro TDA was scheduled to meet April 9 to consider applications, including requests for visitor center funding and a new Christmas tree to replace the aging current tree. Manager Barlow noted that the Onslow County TDA operated differently, meeting once annually during its budget cycle, so results might not have been known until June. Because they could not enter renovation contracts without full funding, Barlow said the board could consider allocating the additional \$21,000 from fund balance if needed, with reimbursement if county funding came through.

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

- The timeline for renovation and when the Visitor's Center would be operational was dependent on Swansboro TDA's decision, then potentially asking the board to advance funds for the county portion to proceed further. He would confirm with Onslow County whether advancing funds would affect the Town's application to the Onslow County TDA.
- Approximately 20–30 towns and/or nonprofits organizations had received similar State Capital and Infrastructure Fund (SCIF) funds with the same expiration date,

and many had not fully used their funds, resulting in statewide extension requests that were incorporated into a legislative bill that had not yet been brought forward for a vote.

Board Comments

All expressed appreciation for staff, departments, and members of the public for their attendance, support, responsiveness, and ongoing work on behalf of the community.

Commissioner Herbert reported that wastewater line work from Swansboro to Piney Green remained on schedule for mid-summer completion, noted that ONWASA received a \$175,000 FEMA grant for the Mount Pleasant pump station relocation, and announced the April 26 Historic Homes Tour while encouraging volunteer participation.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway reported that the recent JUMBO meeting approved a pedestrian crossing at Front Street and Highway 24, explained that DOT would conduct warmer-weather surveys before moving forward with a HAWK system, estimated a 1–2-year timeline after evaluations, and noted the upcoming April 1st budget meeting.

Mayor Justice reported on several items to include, continued coordination with JUMBO on traffic issues including discussions on improving traffic-light connectivity, summarized information from the elected officials' lunch regarding the base's community impact and partnerships, noted updates from the chamber breakfast with the school superintendent regarding future school planning, and reported on a recent lunch meeting with county officials regarding EMS, fire strategy, and visitor center coordination.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Herbert, the meeting adjourned at 7:40 pm.