

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
March 25, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Mayor William Justice, Mayor Pro Tem Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Pat Turner, Commissioner Joseph Brown, and Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf. The board had one vacancy.

Call to Order/Opening Prayer/Pledge

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

Public Comment

Several citizens voiced strong opposition to the proposed paid parking downtown, raising concerns about negative effects on local businesses, added burdens for workers and visitors, and the potential disruption to Swansboro's small-town character. In addition, multiple citizens expressed concerns regarding the vacant commissioner seat, emphasizing the need for transparency and community representation in the appointment process. Speakers advocated for a candidate who valued historic preservation, supported managed growth, and aligned with the community's stance against overdevelopment, with several referencing past appointment practices and calling for the public to determine the appointee through the municipal election in November 2025. Citizens who spoke included:

- Susan Fewell – 502 Sabiston Drive
- Glen Van – 722 Cedar Point Boulevard
- Jamie Petani – 2102 Holly Hills Court
- John Sloan – 119 Front Street
- Terri Herbert – 102 Oyster Bay Road
- Larry Philpott – 706 Hummingbird South
- Lee Shuller – 140 Front Street
- Constance Crawford – 111 Jones Road
- Cindy Garb – 137 Front Street
- Lisa Maness Prakash – 532 Sabiston Drive
- Randy Swanson – 206 W. Corbett Avenue
- Cynthia Lacorte – 220 Elm Street
- Heather Landry – 117 Front Street

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, the agenda and the following consent items were adopted unanimously.

- January 28, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes
- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2025-9
- Ordinance Amendment #1 to Grant Project Ordinance for Emmerton School Repairs

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Recognition of Trevor Hucal - 100-yard Breaststroke State Champion

Mayor Justice recognized Trevor Hucal for winning the 100-yard breaststroke state championship for the second consecutive year. The mayor presented details of Trevor's achievement at the NCHSAA 3A swimming and diving state championships held at the Triangle Aquatic Center in Cary, where Trevor finished with a time of 56.85 seconds.

Recognition of James Yesunas - Pole Vault State Champion

Mayor William Justice recognized James Yesunas for his achievement as the pole vault state champion. The mayor emphasized the importance of unity and collaboration in achieving greatness and expressed pride in celebrating the achievements of Swansboro residents.

Appointment to Vacant Commissioner Seat

Town Manager Barlow reviewed that at the February 25, 2025, regular meeting, the board by consensus chose to follow the town code for vacancies over the North Carolina General Statutes, resulting in a call for applications to be announced with a deadline of March 19, 2025, for an appointment to the vacant seat to occur at this meeting. The individual selected would serve the unexpired term through December 2027. Five applicants submitted resumes: Joe Brown, Ralph Kohlmann, Andy Morrow, Tamara Pieratti, and Tim Vannoy.

Mayor William Justice proposed rescinding the prior action from February 25th and holding a special election in November for the remaining two years of the vacant term.

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Turner, and unanimously approved, the Board rescinded its previous action to follow the Town Charter for filling board vacancies and instead voted to follow the North Carolina General Statute by holding a special election in November.

Before making an appointment, board members emphasized selecting a candidate who reflected community values and priorities, including public safety, infrastructure improvements, talent retention, responsible growth, and preserving Swansboro's small-town character, while also considering public feedback and ensuring a fair, transparent process.

Oa a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conway, Ralph Kolmann was nominated for appointment to the vacant seat. The motion tied 2:2.
Ayes: Turner, Conaway, Noes: Brown, Eckendorf.

Breaking the tie vote in accordance with Town Code § 3.2 which designates *"Where there is an equal division on a question, the mayor shall determine the matter by his vote"*, Mayor Justice voted against the appointment of Mr. Kohlmann.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Brown, Tamara Pieratti was nominated for appointment to the vacant seat. The motion tied 2:2.
Ayes: Eckendorf, Brown, Noes: Turner, Conaway.

Breaking the tie vote in accordance with Town Code § 3.2 which designates *"Where there is an equal division on a question, the mayor shall determine the matter by his vote"*, Mayor Justice voted for the appointment of Mrs. Pieratti.

Mrs. Pieratti would take her oath of office during the April 8, 2025, regular meeting.

Business Non-Consent

Paid Parking Downtown

Police Chief Dwayne Taylor provided a detailed overview of the coastal paid parking systems in effect from Carteret to Brunswick County. These systems typically operated seasonally, with implementation periods from either March or May through October. He noted that the operational hours generally spanned from 8 AM to either 5 or 6 PM, with pricing structures that varied (including hourly, daily, weekly, and annual rates), showcasing different revenue figures from each municipality. Key management and enforcement responsibilities were frequently outsourced to third-party firms, offering a turnkey solution for these coastal towns. Chief Taylor highlighted specific parking challenges that Swansboro might face if a similar system was adopted, such as setting appropriate fees, determining exemptions for residents and business owners, defining operational timings, and developing robust enforcement protocols.

Commissioner Eckendorf shared his opinion on the importance of reviewing data from other towns to understand how paid parking has affected local businesses and tax revenue before making any decisions. He noted that this information could help determine if such a program would help or hurt Swansboro.

Other members acknowledged strong public opposition to the downtown paid parking proposal, with concerns raised about possible negative effects on businesses and the town's small-town feel, and felt paid parking was not the way to go at this time.

Commissioner Eckendorf made a motion to pursue paid parking further by gathering more details on other towns who implemented paid parking. The motion failed for a lack of a second.

No further direction was given.

Downtown Speed Survey

Police Chief Dwayne Taylor presented the results of speed surveys conducted on Elm Street and Walnut Street in response to residents' concerns about vehicle speeds in the downtown residential district.

For Elm Street he reported:

- Survey period: January 6 to February 5
- Average daily vehicles: 22.5 (inbound), 43.3 (outbound)
- Average speed: 16.11 mph
- Maximum speed recorded: 22 mph

For Walnut Street he reported:

- Survey period: February 18 to March 14
- Average daily vehicles: 34.32 (inbound), 45 (outbound)
- Average speed: 19.68 mph
- Maximum speed recorded: 52 mph (on March 10 at 8 AM)

Chief Taylor noted that the higher outbound traffic on both streets was likely due to people heading towards Main Street and using alternate routes to return.

Swansboro Police Department 2024 Annual Report

Police Chief Dwayne Taylor presented the Swansboro Police Department's 2024 Annual Report. Key points included:

- Department composition: 13 full-time sworn officers and 4 reserve officers
- Equipment: All officers issued body-worn cameras
- Certifications: 3 officers with advanced law enforcement certification, 1 with intermediate certification
- Total calls for service in 2024: 6,901
- Arrests: 182 physical arrests (9 felony, 132 misdemeanors)
- Citations and warnings: 555 citations issued, over 1,600 verbal and written warnings
- Administrative tasks: 3,503 phone calls answered, 1,580 people assisted in person
- Community engagement: Shop with a Cop program, golf cart registration, fingerprinting services
- Officer recognition: Two officers recognized by a citizen for dedication to service
- Training and recruitment challenges due to increased training hours required

Chief Taylor also mentioned the success of the police cadet program, which has grown from 2-3 participants to 20.

Monthly Financial Report as of February 28, 2025

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented the monthly financial report as of February 28, 2025. Key points included:

- General Fund comparison (with encumbrances): Total excess of revenues over expenditures was \$731,938
- General Fund comparison (actuals): Total excess of revenues over expenditures was \$838,949
- Expenditure by department: 56.99% of the monthly budget
- Summary of town debt and current loan balances were provided

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:

- Recognition of Military Child of the Year
- Recognition of the Swansboro High School Varsity Basketball team
- Discuss 2nd Amendment/Weapon Allowance at Town Hall at next meeting
- Discuss Visitor's Center Future Plan at next meeting

Public Comment

Lisa Maness Prakash of 532 Sabiston Drive asked how soon the Flybridge development could reapply following its recent denial. She also raised a question about whether it might be a conflict of interest that Tamara Pieratti's husband is currently serving on the Planning Board.

Manager's Comments

Town Manager Barlow shared that the Main Street dock could be eligible for a grant to help with repairs or upgrades. He mentioned that the town planned to submit a pre-application before the late April deadline and will assess the condition of the clock to determine what work is needed. He noted this was a good opportunity to get funding to improve the dock.

Board Comments

Commissioners thanked the citizens for their participation and expressing their views and also shared appreciation with the staff for their work and all welcomed Tamara to the board.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway emphasized the importance of moving forward despite disappointments and noted that the board consists of five different personalities, which can lead to varying outcomes.

Commissioner Eckendorf expressed appreciation for the board's cooperation and reminded everyone of their charge to work together, listen to each other's ideas, and come to a consensus with the future of Swansboro in mind. He mentioned upcoming projects such as EMS, EOC, public works improvements, and budget settlement.

Closed Session

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Turner, with unanimous approval, the board entered closed session at 8:33 pm pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a) (3) To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged; and (5) to establish, or to instruct the public body's staff or negotiating agents concerning the position to be taken by or on behalf of the public body in negotiating the price and other material terms of a contract or proposed contract for the acquisition of real property by purchase, option, exchange, or lease.

Pursuant to a motion duly made and seconded in closed session the board returned to open session with nothing to report.

Adjournment

On a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway the meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.