

**Town of Swansboro**  
**Board of Commissioners**  
**April 8, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes**

In attendance: Mayor William Justice, Mayor Pro Tem Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Pat Turner, Commissioner Joseph Brown, Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf and Commissioner Tamara Pieratti.

\*\*\*\*\*

**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**

Kim Kingrey of 212 Elm Street shared her concern about the future of the Visitor's Center. She emphasized its historical significance as a contributing structure to the town's historic district designation. Kingrey urged the Board to carefully consider any decisions regarding the building, noting its importance to Swansboro's heritage and potential impact on grant eligibility.

Lisa Maness Prakash of 532 Sabiston Drive shared her concerns about the Visitor's Center and highlighted the need for public restrooms downtown. She stressed the building's historical value and questioned whether it could legally be sold given its donated status. Maness also voiced opposition to allowing guns in Town Hall, suggesting alternatives like panic buttons or metal detectors instead.

Wayne Herbert of 102 Oyster Bay Road provided input on the potential allowance of weapons at Town Hall. He recommended the Board seek advice from local law enforcement, the town attorney, and other municipalities before making a decision and emphasized the importance of maintaining a safe and welcoming environment for all citizens visiting Town Hall.

Laura Thompson of 613 W. Russell Street expressed opposition to allowing firearms in the Town Hall, stating her trust in the fire chief's ability to protect the town.

Martha Oyan of 204 Wild Oak Drive, representing the Seaside Arts Council, emphasized the need for public restrooms downtown, particularly during events like the Swan Fest concerts. She urged the Board to consider the Visitor's Center's potential role in addressing this need.

Jamie Petani of 2102 Holly Hills Court shared that she strongly advocated for keeping the Visitor's Center, citing its historical significance and the urgent need for public restrooms downtown. She questioned whether the town had the authority to sell the donated property.

Randy Swanson of 206 W. Corbett Avenue suggested considering the needs of boaters who visit Swansboro and the potential role of the Visitor's Center in serving them. He supported the idea of having a centrally located facility for visitors.

Bob Shuller of 140 Front Street shared his concerns about how the lack of public restrooms might place a burden on local businesses, which often cannot accommodate large numbers of visitors due to space limitations. Mr. Shuller urged the board to keep the visitors center as a restroom, with handicap accessibility.

### **Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items**

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, the consent items below and the agenda as amended to remove item *IV b. Employee Introduction & Oath of Office* were unanimously approved.

- Appointment of Members to Swansboro Fire Department Relief Fund Board
- Resolution 2025-R4 Requesting Special Election

### **Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations**

#### *Oath of Office for Tamara Pieratti*

Mayor William Justice administered the oath of office to Tamara Pieratti to fill the vacant commissioner seat which would expire November 2025.

#### *Recognition of Parks & Rec Program Supervisor Sara Elliott*

Parks & Recreation Director Anna Stanley recognized Sara Elliott for earning her Certified Park and Recreation Professional (CPRP) certification, a national standard in the field. Mrs. Stanley emphasized the certification was a significant milestone that reflected Sara's dedication, expertise, and commitment to the profession. The Board expressed pride in her achievement and looked forward to the positive impact she would continue to have on the community.

### **Business Non-Consent**

#### *2nd Amendment/Weapon Allowance at Town Hall*

Town Manager Barlow reviewed that continued discussion focusing on the rights contained within the 2nd amendment to the US Constitution, pertaining to the allowance of weapons at Town Hall was requested by the Board.

Several Commissioners were in support of the installation of a panic button over the allowance of weapons at Town Hall.

Commissioner Eckendorf spoke at length in favor of allowing weapons at Town Hall, citing constitutional rights and personal safety concerns. He emphasized that these rights were unalienable and rooted in both the United States Constitution and the North

Carolina Constitution, asserting that they do not cease to exist at a building's door or a municipality's borders. He highlighted his experiences and argued that evil does not recognize boundaries or adhere to municipal limits, pointing to incidents in other small towns as examples to illustrate his point. Commissioner Eckendorf also stressed the importance of individual choice and challenged the Board to remain consistent with their oaths to uphold constitutional rights.

Police Chief Taylor raised significant concerns about potential civil liabilities associated with arming town employees. He noted risks, such as untrained staff mishandling situations or firearms, which could lead to severe repercussions. Chief Taylor spoke the necessity of maintaining a strict training regimen, highlighting that police officers regularly undergo comprehensive training to safely handle confrontational situations and firearms.

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Turner, the allowance of weapons at Town Hall was to remain restricted as is. The motion passed 4:1.

Ayes: Brown, Turner, Conaway, Pieratti

Noes: Eckendorf

#### *Visitor's Center Future Plan Discussion*

Town Manager Barlow provided an update on the Visitor's Center, highlighting recent mold remediation efforts completed by a specialized firm. He shared a recommendation to replace the HVAC unit and ductwork and requested further guidance from the Board on how to proceed with the remaining building renovations. Mr. Barlow emphasized the need for a decision regarding the previous planned restroom and shower installations, noting that materials for these had already been purchased.

Public Works Director Bates elaborated on the building's renovation history, noting that parts and materials were procured following engineer designs. However, the project had been stagnant since 2022 due to uncertainty regarding the town dock's contract status. Mr. Bates confirmed the mold remediation was completed but awaited final directions from the Board on future renovations.

Commissioner Eckendorf suggested three potential courses of action for the building's future: restoration and maintenance, increasing public restroom facilities with handicap access, or exploring leasing options to a private entity. He emphasized fiscal responsibility and the need for plans that allow the building to sustain itself financially.

Commissioner Joe Brown proposed a meeting with the historical society to discuss further the Visitor's Center's future roles and gather input on preserving the building's status on the national registry.

There was a consensus on exploring various options for the Visitor's Center, with a priority on gathering more public input. The Board decided to continue consulting with residents and experts and to revisit the topic in a future meeting before reaching a decision.

#### *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:

- Provide details at a future meeting on Food Truck Regulations

#### **Public Comment**

Courtney Haight of 311 Merrick Way addressed the Board expressing frustration about zoning restrictions that prevented her from operating her hot dog cart despite meeting other guidelines and having landowner permission.

Mark Francis, Port Commander of the American Legion reported that after working with the Army Corp of Engineers and associated state agencies, maintenance of the ditches in front on their facility were going to be addressed and that was estimated to occur in 2027.

Randy Swanson of 206 W. Corbett Avenue suggested considering variances for specific situations like Haight's food truck. He emphasized the need to balance business freedom with maintaining the town's desired aesthetic vision, advocating for a solution that wouldn't be a one-size-fits-all but tailored to specific circumstances.

Lisa Maness Prakash of 532 Sabiston Drive raised concerns about the necessity of shower facilities at the Visitor's Center. She pondered whether facilities were more beneficial to shoppers and visitors rather than boaters, questioning the initial reasoning behind focusing on showers. Ms. Prakash also reiterated her opposition to allowing firearms in Town Hall, expressing unease about increasing visibility of firearms in public spaces and suggesting alternatives like panic buttons for safety.

Tom Redfern of 536 Sabiston Drive reported a concerning smell originating near the Public Works maintenance area on Sabiston Drive. He urged the town to investigate and address this odor issue, noting it was a new occurrence since he moved to the area four years ago.

Tom Pieratti of 708 Meeting Park Lane encouraged the Board to gather public input on potential uses for the Visitor's Center. He recommended establishing a suggestion box for residents to propose ideas, highlighting community involvement in determining the building's future purpose. Mr. Pieratti stressed that the building could not serve every

proposed function due to its size and history, suggesting it be dedicated to a singular, beneficial use that aligns with community needs.

### **Manager's Comments**

Manager Barlow reported that the Dockwalk project was complete and a final walkthrough with the engineer was scheduled. He shared that the Main Street dock had been recently closed to the public due to safety concerns, as 18 of the 28 pilings were found to be in severe need of repair. Mr. Barlow reviewed that Kathy Vinson had shared that grant funding may be available to support these repairs and planned to prepare an application; he added that a structural study of the Riverview boardwalk identified several issues, and that Mrs. Vinson would assist in pursuing grant funding for those improvements as well.

### **Board Comments**

Board members welcomed Commissioner Tamara Pieratti to the Board, expressing enthusiasm about working together and offered their appreciation to staff for their work and citizens for their input.

Commissioner Doug Eckendorf emphasized the importance of constitutional rights, particularly highlighting the First and Second Amendments. He reiterated his viewpoint on the Second Amendment.

### **Closed Session**

On a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, with unanimous approval, the board entered closed session at 7:47 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 was 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 Brown, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, the meeting adjourned at 8:12 pm.