

**Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
February 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

Margaret Poindexter of 626 West Fire Tower Road spoke, representing herself and her mother, a resident of The Landings of Swansboro. She expressed gratitude to the fire department and officials who responded to an incident at The Landings, praising their efforts in relocating residents and ensuring their safe return. She specifically thanked Mr. Ingram for his role in facilitating the process.

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Turner, the agenda and the below consent items were adopted unanimously.

- December 10, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes
- December 10, 2024, Closed Session Minutes
- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2025-7

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Recognition – The Landing Incident Response

Fire Chief Jacob Randall recognized the extraordinary efforts of various agencies who responded to the emergency at The Landings of Swansboro on January 24, 2025. He detailed the incident, which involved an electrical issue causing a small fire at the senior assisted living facility. Chief Randall highlighted the successful evacuation of 47 residents and all facility personnel to a temporary facility in Jacksonville. He issued a meritorious unit citation to all involved personnel from Swansboro Fire Department, Police Department, Building Inspections, Onslow County Emergency Management, EMS, Morehead City Fire and EMS, Novant Healthcare, New Hanover Regional EMS, and Jacksonville Fire and Emergency Services.

ARP Projects Update

Parks & Recreation Director, Anna Stanley, provided an update on the following ARP-funded projects:

- **Splash Pad Enhancement:** The area around the splash pad was expanded by 5 feet, with a concrete seating wall added. Two 16x20 shades were installed, covering the extended patio area. Additional seating and picnic tables will be added in spring, with a grand reopening planned for May.
- **Basketball Courts:** Resurfacing and new equipment installation are in progress, expected to be completed soon.
- **Outdoor Restrooms:** New toilets were installed in Bicentennial Park, Pirate's Den, and Municipal Park. Some plumbing issues are still being addressed.
- **Water Fountains:** New water fountains with bottle fillers were installed in the recreation center.

Public Hearing

CAMA Future Land Use Map Amendment for parcels on W Corbett Ave from RA to Suburban Town Center

Planner Rebecca Brehmer reviewed that Flybridge Swansboro LLC, sought to amend the future land use map designation for tax parcels 19494 and 27733. These parcels were proposed to change from Rural Agricultural (RA) to Suburban Town Center (STC). This amendment marked the initial step in a three-step approval process aimed at facilitating a mixed-use development project.

The public hearing was opened at 6:14 pm.

Kyle Fountain, an attorney for Flybridge Swansboro LLC, provided a detailed explanation of the application. He discussed the current land designations and emphasized how the proposed change aligns with Swansboro's long-term planning goals. Mr. Fountain highlighted the plan to change the existing RA-designated land to one that could support a variety of uses. He pointed out that this re-designation could help meet the growing demand for both residential and commercial development.

Corey Mabus, representing Flybridge LLC and Carolina Commercial Contractors, shared a vision for careful and responsible growth. Responding to community concerns, Mabus discussed the challenges and solutions related to school capacity, traffic management, and the economic benefits of the project. Mr. Mabus emphasized that Flybridge is aware of these issues and is committed to addressing them carefully, ensuring the development complements Swansboro's existing infrastructure and community values.

Brad Schuller from Paramount Engineering presented the updated concept plan, which included six commercial lots along the growing Highway 24 area and a central section of multi-family housing on the property. He explained how the plan aimed to balance business and residential areas in a way that supports economic growth while meeting the needs of the community.

John Plegman, local architect, also spoke positively about the project. He highlighted his extensive experience with Carolina Commercial and vouched for their integrity and ability to responsibly work within the community's guidelines. Mr. Plegman emphasized that the present land use designation is a misfit for current needs and expressed trust in Carolina Commercial to work with the community towards legitimate concerns while ensuring Swansboro's growth.

Eleven citizens addressed the Board to express concerns regarding the proposed development. Speakers cited potential impacts including increased traffic congestion, school overcrowding, and strain on emergency services. Many voiced apprehensions that the density and scale of the project could overburden existing infrastructure and alter the established character of the Town of Swansboro. Common themes among the comments included the preservation of neighborhood quality of life and the long-term implications for the town's identity. The following individuals spoke:

- Frank Cizerle, 303 River Reach Court
- Ed Binanay, 222 Elm Street
- Elanie Sioufi, 717 Phillips Drive
- Wayne Herbert, 102 Oyster Bay Road
- Jamie Petani, 2102 Holly Hills Court
- Ryan Rockriver, 418 Patriots Point Lane
- Constance Proctor, 111 Jones Road
- Debbie Walker, 120 Camp Queen Road
- Joyce Johnson, 195 Peninsula Manor Lane
- Rita Blackburn, 524 Sabiston Drive

Junior Freeman of 714 W. Corbett Avenue, a local realtor and former town board member, advocated for the project. Mr. Freeman pointed out the demand for affordable housing and economic development, arguing that such a project was essential for regional growth and would address prevailing housing deficits sustainably.

The public hearing was closed at 7:33 pm, and the board took a 3-minute recess.

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, for approval of Resolution 2025-R2, for the proposed amendment to the CAMA Land Use Plan Map, changing the site from a RA (rural/agricultural) designation to a Suburban Town Center. The vote was 2:2. Ayes: Brown, Eckendorf, Noes: Conaway, Turner

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 opted against the amendment.

Mayor Justice explained that his decision was guided by a commitment to representing citizen concerns, balancing the potential long-term benefits of growth with the community's expressed values and priorities.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway emphasized the importance of sticking to the town's existing land use plans to avoid setting a precedent of changing them too readily.

Commissioner Pat Turner thanked the citizens for their participation and acknowledged the merits of the proposal but felt it was not the right time for the project.

Commissioner Doug Eckendorf emphasized that growth in Swansboro is inevitable and highlighted the importance of respecting property rights in development decisions. He acknowledged that while many residents value the town's small-town charm, change is constant, and areas now zoned for rural use will eventually support higher-density development. He praised the Flybridge presentation for addressing traffic, environmental, and infrastructure concerns, and encouraged logical, forward-thinking planning despite the emotional nature of public input. Eckendorf noted that growth must be managed in a way that balances community values with the realities of development.

Commissioner Joe Brown expressed disappointment with the decision, stating that the town missed an opportunity to improve local resources and support economic growth through the proposed development. He noted the project's alignment with the land use plan and highlighted the preparation efforts made by the developer, including plans for traffic, environmental care, and infrastructure. Commissioner Brown mentioned the potential financial benefits for the town and questioned whether Swansboro was ready to take advantage of growth opportunities. He also expressed concern that the opposition did not reflect the views of most residents and stressed the need to consider long-term economic impacts to support key services like EMS.

Following the denial of the CAMA Land Use Plan Map amendment, the applicant withdrew their rezoning application.

Business Non-Consent

Board of Commissioner Vacancy

Town Manager Jon Barlow presented the options for filling the vacant commissioner seat, resulting from appointing Mr. Justice, who had filled the mayor's position following the resignation of the previous mayor. This appointment process was complicated by a conflict between the North Carolina general statutes and the town charter. Mr. Barlow elaborated on the differences: while the town charter mandates the Board to appoint someone to fill the full unexpired term until November 2027, the general statutes offer an alternative that the appointment would be only until the next municipal election in November 2025, followed by a special election to complete the remaining term.

During the discussion, board members shared different views on how to fill the empty seat. Some supported a shorter option that would lead to a special election, while others preferred following the town's rules to appoint someone for the full remaining term to keep things steady.

A motion to follow the NCGS to fill the vacancy through November 2025 was made by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway and seconded by Commissioner Turner. The vote was 2:2.

Ayes: Conaway, Turner

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 opted against filling the vacancy following the NCGS.

Therefore, the appointment made to fill the vacancy would be in accordance with the Town Charter for the unexpired term until November 2027.

The Board agreed to open applications for the vacant commissioner seat starting on February 26, 2025, and ending on March 19, 2025, and the applicants would be considered for appointment at the March 25, 2025, meeting.

Funding Request – PirateFest

Parks & Recreation Director Anna Stanley presented a request for \$3,000 to support the annual PirateFest, a Swansboro tradition for the past 14 years. Now held in collaboration with Onslow County Parks and Recreation, the event takes place on the second Saturday in May and draws approximately 6,000 to 7,000 attendees during a six-hour period—reflecting a 77% increase in attendance since 2019. PirateFest featured historical reenactments, pirate encampments, folk music, sword-fighting demonstrations, live mermaids, and interactive displays that provide both entertainment and educational value.

Director Stanley reported that the total budget for the event was estimated at \$14,000. Swansboro TDA had already contributed \$2,000, and Onslow County Parks and Recreation remains a major partner, covering over 50% of the costs and providing staffing support. Additional funding was supplemented by in-kind media partnerships, including radio promotions and coverage in *Our State Magazine*. An analysis using Placer.ai data indicated a strong local economic impact, with around 1,200 attendees patronizing local businesses.. The funding request aimed to sustain this collaborative event that enhances community engagement and supports Swansboro's tourism economy.

On a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, the allocation of \$3,000 for the annual PirateFest event held each May was unanimously

approved. Subsequently, a Budget Amendment would be provided for approval at the next regular meeting.

Monthly Financial Report as of January 31, 2025

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented the financial report. Key points included:

- General Fund: Excess of revenues over expenditures of \$863,144 (with encumbrances) and \$1,084,283 (without encumbrances)
- Ad Valorem tax collection at 94.61%
- Overall expenditures at 50.53% of budget, 7.78% less than the monthly projection
- Updates on Stormwater and Solid Waste Enterprise Funds
- Summary of town debt and current loan balances
- Overview of current cash and investment accounts

Commissioners discussed the possibility of paying off some debts early, but it was determined that the current low interest rates make it more beneficial to maintain the existing payment schedules.

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 James Yesunas for State Title achievement

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.

Board Comments

Commissioners thanked the citizens for their participation and the staff for their work.

Commissioner Joe Brown apologized for getting "testy" with the group and expressed his belief that an opportunity had been missed with the denial of the Flybridge proposal.

Mayor Justice explained his decision-making process, acknowledging the difficulty of the choice and the desire to represent the citizens' wishes.

Closed Session

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf the board entered closed session at 8:27 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 Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf the meeting adjourned at 9:11 pm.