

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
June 24, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

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

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

Laurent Meilleur of 220 River Reach Drive addressed the board about the Swansgate Stormwater agenda item, recapping his memory on the project sharing that he felt drainage was always an issue at the location of this subdivision.

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

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

- April 22, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes
- April 22, 2025, Closed Session Minutes
- April 23, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes
- Tax Refunds Request totaling \$223.08
 - o Vehicle Tax
 - Hill, Christopher Joseph, \$142.61, Military
 - Hill, Elvia Ruth, \$80.47, Military
- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2025-12

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Recognition of Logan Walters

Mayor Justice recognized Logan Walters for attaining the Morehead Kane scholarship. Walters, who graduated as a valedictorian and obtained an associate's degree from Coastal Carolina Community College, was commended for his academic excellence and community support.

Parks & Recreation Month

Mayor Justice proclaimed July as Parks and Recreation Month in Swansboro for its contributions to health, wellness, and economic development and acknowledged and commended the department's exemplary efforts and achievements. Assistant Parks & Recreation Director, Sara Elliott conveyed appreciation for community support, mentioning that benefits extended beyond physical spaces. She recognized both new and longstanding sponsors, as well as grants provided by local authorities, while highlighting July's scheduled events and various innovative activities.

Public Hearing

2025-2026 North Carolina Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant Program Application
Town Manager Jon Barlow presented information on the town's intention to submit a grant application to the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management for the replacement of the Main Street Dock. He explained that the dock, originally built in 1988 with an addition in 1992, was the oldest in town and had been inspected in February/March. The inspection revealed that full replacement would be more cost-effective than repairs.

Barlow provided details on the estimated cost of replacing the dock, including engineering, permitting, surveying, and construction administration, totaling \$164,000. He noted that the grant match would be 25% of the cost, approximately \$42,541, which would be the town's responsibility.

The public hearing was opened at 6:19 pm then closed, no comments were offered.

On a motion by Commissioner Brown, seconded by Commissioner Turner, Resolution 2025-R6 stating the support to submit a North Carolina Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant Application to the North Carolina Division of Coastal Management for the Main Street Dock Replacement Project was unanimously approved.

Business Non-Consent

Swansgate Stormwater Easement Consideration

Town Planner Rebecca Brehmer presented the need for a stormwater easement at the Swansgate Subdivision to facilitate transitioning the stormwater permit from A. Sydes Construction to the Swansgate HOA. Swansgate, established in 2019 as an R-20 single-family cluster development, included town-dedicated open space. She shared that this was required for DEQ compliance in order to shift maintenance responsibilities for the stormwater system from the developer to the HOA.

Josh Edmundson from Tidewater Engineering explained the easement was primarily administrative, confirming DEQ found no flaws and noting that no changes would be made to the stormwater system. It was necessary to connect the HOA formally with the system's management.

Public Works Director Tank Bates reported existing drainage issues, especially at the subdivision's rear, despite improvements like the NCDOT's pipe replacement under Main Street Extension. He highlighted the need for further action once the HOA assumes control.

Commissioner Brown voiced concerns about the developer's historical practices and sought assurance that unresolved issues would not fall on residents.

Attorney Rasberry explained that the easement was required in order for the HOA to fulfill responsibilities for maintenance, upgrades, and adherence to DEQ permits. This easement restricted development to preserve the property's role as a drainage resource, acknowledging its designation as town-owned public open space.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, unanimous approval was given for execution of the easement.

Monthly Financial Report as of May 31, 2025

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented the financial report for May 31, 2025. Key takeaways were:

- General Fund: Surplus of \$280,269 with encumbrances; \$491,497 without encumbrances.
- Overall Expenditures: 73.11% of the budget, 18.56% below the fiscal year's expectation.

Summaries were provided for the town's debt status, cash and investment accounts, and outstanding grant balances. No questions were raised by the Board about the report.

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:

- Future discussion on sidewalks and the skatepark was recommended

Town Manager Barlow addressed concerns that were raised about limited public amenities due to the temporary visitor center closure. He shared that portable restrooms and handwashing stations, similar to those for events, which would require weekly maintenance costs were being researched.

Public Comment

Vicki Brown of 601 Broad Street expressed concerns about the town's consideration of eminent domain for building an emergency operations center (EOC). She questioned the need for an EOC in a town of Swansboro's size and suggested using the state's funds to refit and adapt the existing police and fire department buildings instead.

Joyce Johnson of 195 Peninsula Manor Drive read a statement on behalf of her niece, Renee Isley, criticizing recent city planning decisions and urging for more thoughtful development that preserves Swansboro's natural beauty and supports local businesses.

Terri Herbert of 102 Oyster Bay Road voiced her concerns about drainage issues in Swansgate, questioned the due diligence done for the recently withdrawn JOED property rezoning, and reminded the Board about the potential return of the Flybridge issue.

Jamie Petani of 2102 Holly Hills Court commented on the Swansgate drainage issues and expressed concerns about uncontrolled growth in the town.

Randy Swanson of 206 W. Corbett Avenue spoke against the use of eminent domain for an EOC, questioned the logic of reducing tax rates while considering parking meters, and

suggested that a social district could actually help control alcohol consumption during events like Swan Fest.

Manager's Comments

Town Manager Barlow shared that the Water Street resurfacing project would be starting Thursday through Friday. Town offices would be closed on July 4th, with the fireworks event the evening of July 3rd downtown. Manager Barlow shared several grant achievements: Parks & Recreation were awarded \$20,000 from Onslow County TDA for events, and \$4,800 from North Carolina Amateur Sports Youth Grant Program for recreation equipment. The town was also working on applying for a grant through the NCLM for a no-cost cybersecurity support program.

Board Comments

Commissioner Turner thanked citizens for attending and speaking at the meeting, and thanked staff for their work.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway shared that he also had concerns about persistent flooding, particularly near Main Street Extension and Swansboro Loop Road. He empathized with resident frustrations and identified challenges in finding solutions, pointing out that nearby subdivision developments may have worsened the situation. Mayor Pro Tem Conaway emphasized the need for proactive measures, noting unresolved issues could impact his own property.

Commissioner Eckendorf addressed public concerns about unmanaged development, and the Board's adherence to the 2019 land use plan. He explained that the plan was developed with community input, despite the participation of only about 90 respondents in the survey. Nevertheless, this plan guides the town's development strategies. Commissioner Eckendorf further mentioned discrepancies about rising sea levels in the plan, challenging the validity of some of the projections. Additionally, he emphasized the need for an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) that could withstand severe weather, as the current facility was not rated for Category 4 hurricanes. He highlighted the role of consulting town officials, including fire and police chiefs, for emergency preparedness. Contract and property negotiations occur in closed sessions per state laws for compliance, with all final decisions to be disclosed publicly.

Commissioner Brown highlighted the critical importance of managed growth and the establishment of an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to maintain town safety during emergencies. He stressed the need for planned development to adequately support both existing and incoming residents, emphasizing the importance of appropriate infrastructure and readiness. Commissioner Brown voiced concerns regarding the current facility's limitations in crisis situations, advocating for the establishment of an EOC as vital for

protecting emergency response teams and the broader community, thereby improving disaster management capabilities.

Commissioner Pieratti thanked everyone for speaking and assured the citizens that the Board was listening to concerns.

Mayor Justice thanked attendees for their participation, stressing the importance of dialogue in reconciling differing views and informed decision-making. He addressed a misquote from local news regarding a recent economic initiative, clarifying that both the county and town aimed to contribute \$250,000 each, totaling \$500,000. Reports mistakenly claimed the town's contribution as \$850,000, highlighting the need for clarification to avoid misunderstandings.

Closed Session

On a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf and with unanimous approval, the board entered closed session at 7:25 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.

Mayor Justice reported that the Board had decided to proceed with a proposed offer to purchase the Rotary property, consisting of approximately 5 acres for \$1,000,000. He noted that the Rotary would be responsible for any buyout clause they had agreed to if selling the property within a certain timeframe. The town would not be putting down earnest money and would only build a road to the end of the acquired property.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf seconded by Commissioner Turner, authorization to proceed with the proposed acquisition of the Rotary property as outlined was unanimously approved.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, the meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm.