

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
January 27, 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/Opening Prayer/Pledge

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 Herbert, the agenda as prepared and the below consent items were unanimously approved.

- Budget Ordinance Amendment #2026-4
- Resolution Declaring Official Intent to Reimburse Expenditures-Police Interceptor Vehicles
- Resolution Dissolving the EOC/PSB Site Selection Committee
- Property Easement for 199 Williams Road/ONWASA Wastewater Treatment Facility
- Tax Refund Requests

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

FY 2024-2025 Audit Report

Gregory Redman, CPA, presented the audit report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, confirming that the Town received an unmodified opinion, indicating that the financial statements were free of material issues. He outlined the general fund's strong financial position, including \$5.2 million in cash, \$133,000 in restricted Powell Bill funds, no general-fund debt, and an unassigned fund balance of \$3,673,757.

Revenues totaled \$6.1 million, and expenditures totaled \$6,522,480, resulting in a net decrease of approximately \$73,000 after accounting for a \$349,860 equipment loan. Despite the slight decrease, the town effectively broke even. The unassigned fund balance ratio stood at 56%, down from 74% the prior year due to \$1.2 million in capital asset purchases, but it remained well above the Local Government Commission's 34% benchmark and close to the 63% average for similar-sized municipalities.

Mr. Redman also reviewed the proprietary funds, reporting \$29,000 in stormwater income and a \$1,300 deficit in the solid waste fund, largely due to \$17,000 in depreciation. The town's property tax collection rate remained high at 98.57%, outperforming several comparable towns. He noted new loans related to equipment purchases, confirmed ongoing state-funded pension obligations, and reported an OPEB liability of \$374,194.

Mr. Redman shared that the town also received its 29th consecutive Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting, reflecting the finance department's diligence and accuracy.

Public Hearing

UDO Text Amendment – Establishing §152.034 Appearance Commission

Town Manager Jon Barlow presented the proposed ordinance to establish an Appearance Commission. The Board had previously discussed options for a beautification committee, and this ordinance was the option they wanted to consider. The draft ordinance proposed a 7-member commission appointed by the Board, with members required to be Swansboro residents, serving staggered 3-year terms with a limit of two consecutive full terms. The commission would select a chair and vice-chairman annually, the town clerk would serve as secretary, and meetings would be held monthly under open meeting laws.

Manager Barlow highlighted paragraph 5, which involved plans for improved appearance on both public and private property, and paragraph 7, which dealt with recommendations for ordinance amendments affecting zoning and subdivision changes. The Board's intent was to focus the commission's duties on beautification, landscaping, and signage, rather than expanding into broader regulatory powers.

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

Attorney Francis Rasberry noted the ordinance should include extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ) representation and that he had missed that detail in his review. After a discussion on Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) involvement, the Board agreed on some level of HPC liaison but would determine more details on that matter at a later time.

On a motion by Commissioner Pieratti, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, Ordinance 2026-O1 establishing the Appearance Committee as a Town Advisory Board was unanimously approved with the following amendments:

- 1) include ETJ representation in section (B) *Membership*
- 2) remove the term "and private" from section (E) *Powers and Duties (5)*
- 3) eliminate in its entirety, section (E) *Powers and Duties (7)*

Rezoning Request- Parcel ID 012535 (Swansboro Loop Road)

Planner Rebecca Brehmer presented a rezoning request from Pinnacle Construction and Development LLC for a 1-acre property on Swansboro Loop Road. The request sought to change the zoning from RA (Residential/Agricultural) to R10SF (single-family residential). The applicant was under contract to purchase the property, contingent upon rezoning approval, with plans to subdivide the land and construct single-family homes.

Planner Brehmer highlighted that the current RA zoning requires 1-acre minimum lot sizes, thus hindering subdivision. An R10SF designation would allow 10,000 square-foot lots, permitting the potential creation of up to four lots on the acre. Although the CAMA Land Use Plan lists the area as RA to preserve agricultural lands, adjacent properties are currently zoned R10SF and R20SF residential. The Planning Board did not recommend approval due to inconsistency with the future land use plan.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Planner Brehmer shared that the adjacent property for the Sand Dollar Homes subdivision, was rezoned around 2023-2024. The R10 zoning of other properties predated her tenure.

The public hearing was opened at 6:28 pm and the following individuals spoke:

Vicki Brown of 601 West Broad Street opposed the rezoning, referencing the area's existing developments like a new housing project at the entrance and the approved 50-home Sand Dollar development. She worried about Loop Road becoming a detour for Highway 24 traffic and questioned continual ignorance of the land use plan and Planning Board recommendations, deeming four homes on one acre too dense.

Helen Cizerle of 303 River Reach Court also opposed, initially thinking it would be for one house, but objected to four. He expressed concerns over increased traffic problems, speeding, and red-light infractions, noting the town has higher priorities like the previous Flybridge project rezoning issue and school intersections.

Cynthia LeCorte of 220 Elm Street supported the request, stating living in a town like Swansboro, within an ETJ, means developing an area with expected noise and traffic—this isn't rural living. She recalled citizen demands during the Flybridge discussions for affordable single-family homes for EMS workers, police, teachers, and military families over apartments. She saw this as a chance to provide such homes and argued Swansboro should operate as the town it is.

The public hearing was closed at 6:34 pm.

Commissioner Eckendorf raised a procedural issue, noting a Planning Board member had mention to him and other board members that he had “misvoted” due to confusion. If voted differently, it would have shifted the recommendation to a tie and that he supported sending it back to the planning board for review again. Commissioner

Eckendorf shared his support to approve the rezoning, noting its common-sense growth potential with possibly 2-4 houses, a minimal traffic effect, and catering to middle-income residents earning \$60,000-\$80,000 annually.

Commissioner Wayne Herbert questioned sending cases back to the Planning Board after a vote, worried about setting new precedents.

Mayor Justice confirmed past instances where matters had been sent back.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway agreed with sending back to the planning board for reconsideration, noting there were absences and hopefully the planning board could vote again with all members present.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, the rezoning request would be sent back to the Planning Board for reconsideration. The motion passed 3:2.

Ayes: Eckendorf, Conaway, and Pieratti

Noes: Herbert, Vannoy

Business Non-Consent

EOC/PSB Design-Build Firm Selection

Town Manager Barlow reviewed that the Town solicited Requests for Qualifications (RFQ) for Design-Build services for the construction of the new Emergency Operations Center/Public Safety Center and staff interviewed two firms. Both applicants, Oakley Collier and Bobbitt had extensive experience, but Fire Chief Randall and Police Chief Taylor felt Bobbitt was a better fit. Manager Barlow proposed entering contract negotiations with Bobbitt.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Manager Barlow shared that those involved with interviews were, himself, Fire Chief Randall, and Police Chief Taylor.

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, with unanimous approval, staff was authorized to enter contract negotiations with Bobbitt for Design Build Services.

Correction to Public Safety Salary Schedule FY 2025-2026

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented a correction to the public safety salary schedule that was adopted with the FY 2025-2026 budget. She explained that staff identified an administrative error where the minimum salary column didn't update correctly to reflect the Board-approved 1.5% cost of living adjustment. The formula error had been corrected in the revised schedules. She emphasized no employee salaries were affected, and the budgeted amounts were already included in the approved budget.

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, the Amended Salary Schedule for Public Safety for FY 2025-2026 was unanimously approved.

Monthly Financial Report as of December 2025

Finance Director Sonia Johnson presented the October 2025 financial report. She highlighted the following points:

- The two-year comparison showed an excess of revenues over expenditures with encumbrances of \$514,007, and ad valorem tax collections were at 81.22% as of December 31.
- For actual revenues and expenditures (without encumbrances), the Town had an excess of \$705,325, with total expenditures at 43.09% of budget, which was 6.91% below the monthly projection of 50%.
- A few departments exceeded the 50% threshold—most notably Non-Departmental (65.9%), due to annual insurance and workers' compensation premiums paid upfront, and Emergency Management (63.8%), due to software costs—while most departments were near expected spending levels.
- The Stormwater Enterprise Fund showed an excess of revenues over expenditures of \$78,389; Finance Director Johnson noted that the continued absence of a Public Works Director was affecting spending, though stormwater project planning is underway.
- The Solid Waste Enterprise Fund showed a temporary deficit of \$4,865 due to the December-to-January payment lag, and Finance Director Johnson emphasized that she had no concerns about this timing issue.

Overall, Finance Director Johnson reported that one debt payment had been made in December on the jet-vac truck lease and that the TD Bank balance had decreased due to the recent land purchase for the EOC/PSB site.

Mayor Justice noted positively that approximately \$119,000 in debt related to fire trucks, sleeping quarters, and vehicle leases is expected to come off the books by year-end.

In response to an inquiry from the board, Finance Director Johnson confidently shared that she had no concerns, crediting strong department heads and staff, and assured the Board that she would immediately bring forward any issues.

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. No additional items were added.

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 Jon Barlow provided updates on several projects.

- Main Street Dock Replacement Project: Contracts from Coastal Management have been received and signed; the Town will now complete the CAMA permit, acquire a design firm, and bid the project. The full process—design, bidding, permitting, and construction—is expected to take about one year within the 18-month grant cycle ending June 2027.
- Public Safety Building Mold Remediation: Completed the week prior, under the \$11,500 estimate, and staff reported significant improvement in air quality.
- NCDOT Pedestrian Improvement Project: Surplus funds for small state-road projects; through JUMPO, were available and four pedestrian projects were submitted. The Hammocks Beach Road/West Corbett Avenue project was selected for preliminary design. Features include high-visibility crosswalks, ADA-compliant pedestrian signals, and illuminated signs.

In response to directions and/or comments from the board, Manager Barlow reviewed that he would be engaging Onslow County for potential grant support for the public safety building, gather additional details on the new Fire Commission being created by Onslow County securing representation for the Swansboro area, and shared that the revised/updated Personnel policy was currently with the Town Attorney for review.

Board Comments

Commissioner Vannoy remarked that the town was in a strong position as it advances the public safety building project, he noted opportunities to learn from recently completed facilities in Onslow County. He offered to reach out to contacts to gather lessons learned. Commissioner Vannoy also complimented Finance Director Johnson and her team for their comprehensive financial package and thanked Town Clerk Fender and her staff for their excellent coordination of the recent Essentials of Municipal Government training that the commissioners recently attended.

Commissioner Eckendorf thanked attendees and reflected on a recent training exercise where commissioners listed why they ran for office, noting his own motivations: a desire to serve, represent residents, and protect individual liberties. He acknowledged that disagreements are inevitable but emphasized the Board's responsibility to make progress for the good of the town. Commissioner Eckendorf encouraged partnering with Onslow County on the public safety building, reminded members to stay focused on their elected purpose while leaving daily operations to the manager, and praised the Board for remaining respectful despite differences. He also announced the swimming pool

committee meeting the following evening at the recreation center for those interested in early survey results.

Mayor Pro Tem Conaway praised Finance Director Johnson for her consistent high-quality work and thanked Rebecca Brehmer for meeting with him on short notice to address questions. He recognized Parks and Recreation Director Anna for running a department that rarely draws complaints and acknowledged Police Chief Dwayne and his officers for their professionalism during a challenging week. He concluded by noting that staff contribute greatly to the Town's success.

Commissioner Herbert thanked those who attended in person and online, then reported on his first ONWASA meeting, outlining the board's structure and ongoing projects. He highlighted two projects affecting Swansboro: relocating a Mount Pleasant Road pump station to higher ground and continuing the Highway 24 project that will expand pumping capacity to Piney Green and Camp Lejeune. He also thanked Town Clerk Fender for coordinating the recent municipal government class in Wilmington and commended Parks and Recreation for their extensive lineup of winter fitness programs and February events.

Commissioner Pieratti thanked attendees and staff, expressed appreciation for their work, and acknowledged the complexity of the financial reports while expressing gratitude for Finance Director Johnson's efforts. She also thanked her fellow commissioners.

Mayor Justice reflected on the recent Essentials of Municipal Government training, noting that the issues discussed showed Swansboro shared many of the same challenges as other municipalities. He thanked Town Clerk Fender for preparing a thorough training notebook, observing they were the only town so well-prepared. He shared his own motivations for serving the community. He praised all departments and staff, reminded the public of the February 4 budget workshop, and thanked the town manager and attorney for their continued support and diligence.

Adjournment

On a motion by Mayor Pro Tem Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Pieratti, the meeting adjourned at 7:19 pm.