



**CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
**OCTOBER 17, 2024**

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**Council Meeting Room**

**Regular Session**

**7:00 PM**

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**7224 GA HIGHWAY 21**  
**PORT WENTWORTH, GA 31407**

**1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER**

Mayor Gary Norton called the meeting to order.

**2. PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Council Member Rufus Bright Led the Prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

**3. ROLL CALL - CLERK OF COUNCIL**

| <b>Attendee Name</b> | <b>Title</b>   | <b>Status</b> |
|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Gary Norton          | Mayor          | Present       |
| Gabrielle Nelson     | Mayor Pro Tem  | Present       |
| Thomas Barbee        | Council Member | Present       |
| ArtLise Alston-Cone  | Council Member | Present       |
| Mark Stephens        | Council Member | Present       |
| Rufus Bright         | Council Member | Present       |
| Shawn Randerwala     | Council Member | Present       |

**4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Councilman Mark Stephens made a motion to approve the agenda with the following changes made by City Attorney Scott Robichaux:

-amended to add 12b under unfinished business: Consideration of the 2nd Reading of an application submitted by Steven M. and Janet N. Hester, requesting to rezone 12.27 acres from R-1 to C-2, to allow for commercial development. PIN# 7-0978-05-016, located in the 3rd Council District at 440 Meinhard Road and the accompanying development agreement.

|                  |  |
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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>  |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Mark Stephens, Council Member  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Rufus Bright, Council Member   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

## **5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson recognized Dr. Brenda Roberts and Mrs. Princetta Simmons in regard to Georgia Retired Educators Day and showed appreciation to all retired teachers.

Councilman Mark Stephans recognized and congratulated members of the ILA that were present for their negotiations.

A. Retired Educators Proclamation

## **6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS**

A. Georgia Benton

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Thanked the city for all the assistance they have provided during the storm
- Thanked Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson and Councilwoman Cone for doing a check-up during the storm
- Zoning & Agenda item 12B

B. Laray Benton

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda Item 12B

C. Marcus Turner

Discussed the following topic(s)

- Agenda Item 12B

D. Steve Hester

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda Item 12B

E. Hannah Hester

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda Item 12B

F. Ricky Crummey

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Guard rails added for semi-trucks turning into DSI
- A plant is releasing a white substance onto vehicles

G. Eric

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda Item 12B

H. Glenn Hibberts

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda item 14 A.B.C

I. Anna Dunnigan

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda item 14 A.B.C

J. Jim Dunnigan

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Agenda item 14 A.B.C

## **7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS**

## **8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

**A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes - September 19, 2024**

Councilman Barbee made a motion to adopt the minutes, and it was second by Councilman Stephens. Councilwoman Cone asked to change her vote from Nay to Yes on item 14A. on the September 19, 2024 Agenda.

Councilman Stephens made a motion to accept the minutes with the amendment stated by Councilwoman Cone, and it was second by Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson. Approved Unanimously.

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

**9. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS**

City Manager Steve Davis discussed upcoming community events, beginning with the Fall Festival featuring costume contests, food, vendors, a petting zoo, and more at the downtown festival site. He highlighted the Port Wentworth Broncos Breast Cancer Awareness Month football game on October 26th. He announced the ribbon cutting for the new Police Training Center, a facility with advanced AR/VR training. Additionally, he announced the City's Halloween Trunk or Treat will be held at City Hall starting at 5pm. On November 2nd, there will be a Harvest Market behind City Hall from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. followed by a movie night at 6:30 p.m. He announced City Hall will be closed on November 11th due to Veterans Day, moving the Planning and Zoning meeting to November 12th. He also mentioned the upcoming Port Wentworth Development Authority's Economic Outlook Luncheon on December 4th at the Georgia Tech campus, featuring Dr. Tomei from Georgia Southern.

Councilman Thomas Barbee stated that there is a rescheduling of the Citizen's Engagement Meeting on October 25th at 6:30 p.m.

Mayor Pro-Tem thanked everyone who assisted with the Front Porch Friday Concert Series Events.

**10. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Rufus Bright, Council Member  |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

**11. CONSENT AGENDA**

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem   |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

A. Port Wentworth Downtown Vision Plan

City Manager Steve Davis discussed the Downtown Vision Plan which involves over a year of citizen engagement and a strategic committee. He states the plan focuses on revitalizing downtown Port Wentworth by addressing truck traffic issues, improving public facilities, and enhancing the area all together. The city has begun implementing improvements, including cleaning, painting, and adding credit card capabilities at facilities such as Mobley Park and the gym. He also discussed ongoing efforts to get grants for generators and work with GDOT to reroute truck traffic.

B. Port Wentworth HWY21 Streetscape and Beautification Study & Vision Plan

City Manager Steve Davis discussed the HWY21 Streetscape and Beautification Study and Vision Plan which will enhance the City's commercial area by improving interchange, visibility, connectivity, and walkability. This plan includes new lighting, walkways, natural vegetation, and other upgrades. He also states the City is also considering overlay districts to support commercial entities in need of updates. The plan works together with recent parking and zoning ordinance changes, addressing issues like container use as sheds and tractor-trailer parking in residential areas. He commended the efforts of staff members and council on these projects. He encouraged the council's approval on this.

Councilman Mark Stephens thanked the Stakeholders and the residents who chose to participate in the strategy meetings.

**12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- A. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Charles and Gwen Covert, requesting to rezone 5 acres from R-1 to C-1, to allow for future commercial development. PIN # 7-1017-02-003, located in the 3rd Council District, at 1238 Georgia Highway 30.
- Public Hearing

Councilwoman cone asked what percentage of the city would be C1 if the item was approved. City Manager Steve Davis stated that it is a 5-acre piece surrounded by commercial property and that it would take research.

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Thomas Barbee, Council Member |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Rufus Bright, Council Member  |

**AYES:**

Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

**12.B) Consideration of Reading and Application of submitted by Stephen and Janet Hester, rezoning 12.27 acres from R1 to C2, located in 3rd Council District at 440 Meinhardt Road.**

City Manager Steve Davis explained when this was tabled, the purpose was to bring back a development agreement and the goal of that agreement was to ensure the protected use of this site. He stated that there is nothing in the proposed site plan or the projected site plan that the administration opposes, and the plan includes a hotel, restaurants, medical facilities, and a daycare center. He stated necessary signatures on the development agreement have been obtained and ensures that restricted uses are in place to protect the value of the property. He states City Attorney Scott Robichaux has worked diligently to address the legal aspects, ensuring the city's interests are protected.

City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated that C2 is a broad category of uses within the city, and wanted to ensure that the uses allowed align with what makes sense for the area. He stated that that Council directed him to work with the attorneys for the developer and landowner to create a development agreement that protects the uses and incorporates their wish list. He stated that the development agreement begins with the general statements about the project's goals, but Section 6 outlines the permitted and prohibited uses which include a massage parlor, pool billiard halls, sexually oriented businesses, escort services, debt collection agencies, bail bonds. It took a full 60 days to make sure that the city is thinking about what is best for the park. He stated that the agreement also covers the use of public water, public sewer, city fiber optic, aid of construction fees, impact fees, and the incentive to use the city's development authority which supports multi-use trails. He states that any future developer will be held to the agreement, protecting the city. He asked to do the first vote on the development agreement and a second vote on the rezoning.

Mayor Garry Norton explain that it would be a great thing for the city and that he is for the project.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked if it is legal to sign the agreement considering that there is an active litigation against the city. City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated it is legal.

Councilman Thomas Barbee wanted to clarify that there will be a voting to accept the Development Agreement and a voting to rezoning of R1 to C2.

Councilman Rufus Bright agreed with the development.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson thanked them for collaborating with the city to get it done.

Councilman Mark Stephens asked the Hester's if they were okay with the agreement.

Councilman Barbee made a motion to approve the Development Agreement. Councilman Mark Stephens second the motion. Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson, Councilwoman Cone, and Councilman Randerwala voted yes. Councilman Rufus Bright voted no.

Councilman Barbee made a motion to approve the Rezoning of the Property of R1 to C2. Councilman Mark Stephens second the motion. Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson, Councilwoman Cone, and Councilman Randerwala voted yes. Councilman Rufus Bright voted no.

Council Member Barbee made a motion to Approve , which was seconded by Council Member Stephens.

**RESULT:**  
**MOVER:**

**APPROVED[5 to 1]**  
Thomas Barbee, Council Member

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| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Shawn Randerwala |
| <b>NAYES:</b>    | Rufus Bright  |

**13. NEW BUSINESS**

**14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS**

- A. City of Civility Resolution  
 City Manager Steve Davis discussed the importance of our City of Civility Resolution encouraging council members, staff, and residents to treat each other with respect, even in disagreement. He put an emphasis on the need to manage emotions, practice kindness, active listening, and consider the impact of our words.

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

- B. City of Ethics Resolution  
 City Manager Steve Davis discussed the renewal of the Ethics Resolution, which aligns with the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA new City of Ethics designation. He states this designation builds on the City's long-standing ethics ordinance since the City's 1957 charter. It includes five pillars which are serving others, using resources efficiently, treat all people fairly, work together, and use the power of position for well-being of our constituents. He also states that this is for everyone to create an environment of honesty, openness, and integrity.

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| <b>RESULT:</b>   | <b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>   |
| <b>MOVER:</b>    | Mark Stephens, Council Member   |
| <b>SECONDER:</b> | Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem   |
| <b>AYES:</b>     | Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala |

- C. Ethics Ordinance-1st Reading  
 • Public Hearing  
 Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone discussed the importance of ethics, stating that as an educator and as council members, they are obligated to follow state ethics. She mentioned that early in her term, she inquired about Port Wentworth's status on ethics certifications and city civility. She

thanked Mr. Davis for updating her. She expressed that any unethical actions by one member would reflect on the entire council and the city affirming that Port Wentworth will be "one ethical city" moving forward.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson clarified that the ethics and civility resolutions are not new to Port Wentworth, noting that they were created in 2022. She stated that these resolutions approved by the Georgia Municipal Association are meant to promote correct practices across all cities. She explained that the development agreement, which includes stipulations like prohibiting a mortuary near the park, is intended to protect the community, similar to how a school board restricts liquor stores near schools. Councilwoman Nelson also states that the Georgia Municipal Association recommended that all cities take these pledges in which they have been doing at their request.

## **15. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

### **A. Litigation**

### **B. Personnel**

### **C. Real Estate**

Councilman Stephens made a motion to enter into executive session, seconded by Councilman Barbee. Approved Unanimous.

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to reconvene, seconded by Councilman Mark Stephens. Approved Unanimous.

## **16. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Councilman Mark Stephens made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright.

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Mayor Gary Norton

The foregoing minutes are true and correct and approved by me on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2024.

ATTEST:

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Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council