



**CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
**JANUARY 16, 2025**

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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**

Mayor Pro-Tem made a motion to add the IGA as item 14C and the opt-out vote as 14D

<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, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

**5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

**A. Remembering 39th President of the United States: James "Jimmy" Carter-Proclamation**

**B. Recognizing Heroic Service- Proclamation**

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson read a Proclamation in Honor of President James Earl Carter III.

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson read a Proclamation to recognize the Heroic Service of Golden S. Frazier and Keyondre Ellison.

Chief Kerry Thomas recognized Mrs. Cindy Sands for her fifteen years of unwavering dedication, hard work, and exceptional contribution to the success of the city. He stated that Ms. Sands works very hard in the court, right next to the judges, and does a phenomenal job for the city day and night.

Chief Thomas also recognized Lieutenant Walter Anderson for his retirement. He shared that Lieutenant Anderson began his law enforcement career in November 2004 and served through November 2024, with six of those year dedicated to the City of Port Wentworth. Chief Thomas highlighted that dedicating twenty years to law enforcement means building relationships, mentoring others, and growing from the beginning of a career to leadership.

<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, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

**6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS**

- A. Georgia Benton  
Discussed the following topic(s):
  - City Ordinances
  - Tax Exemption Concerns

**7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS**

**8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

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

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Shawn Randerwala, 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

## 9. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

### A. Financial Audit Presentation

Assistant City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Thomas Kilmartin, stated that the audit presented to the city reflects the hard work done throughout the year, cumulated in a financial report. He states that this effort is not just by one person but by billing clerks and personnel across all departments. He introduces the auditor from Mauldin and Jenkins, Trey Scott, who would present the findings of this year's independent audit.

The city's auditor, Trey Scott from Mauldin & Jenkins, presented the findings of the independent audit, stating that the financial report is the responsibility of city management, while the auditors provide an opinion based on generally accepted auditing standards. Mr. Scott reported that the city received a clean and unmodified opinion the highest level of assurance confirming that the financial statements fairly represent the city's financial position. He states that the city's ACFR includes a Yellow Book compliance report, which highlights any significant issues, but there were no audit findings this year. He states that unlike previous years, the city did not require a single audit for major federal grant programs, as it did not exceed \$750,000 in federal expenditures for fiscal year 2024. He expresses that the city continues to go above and beyond reporting requirements by preparing an Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR), earning a Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting each year. He explains that financial highlights included a net position of approximately \$81 million, which represents the city's overall equity, and a fund balance of about \$20.5 million in the general fund. He noted the city's healthy investment in infrastructure, with a strong balance between new and older assets, indicating solid financial health at both the government-wide and fund levels. He emphasized that they are independent of the city in accordance with all applicable professional standards.

Assistant City Manager and Chief Financial Officer, Thomas Kilmartin, explains that the City will benefit from lower interest rates, improved borrowing, and a stronger position in the bond market. He recognized Monica Woods who he states has been by his side for the past three years, ensuring that when financials are presented to the auditor, there are no mistakes. He states that she is a significant asset to the city, and appreciates her friendship, work ethic, and everything that she has done to make the final report possible.

## 10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mayor Gary Norton states that Parks and Recreations has opened Spring registration for soccer, girls volleyball, and t-ball. They are having a Sweetheart Dance on February 7th. He states on February 22nd, the city is having the 3rd Annual Black History Month Program. On February 28th, there will be team laser tag. He also stated that the Youth Football Clinic will start on March 31st and end on April 3rd.

City Manager Steve Davis states that there will be a Stakeholder meeting for the comp plan which would take place the day after. He states that Martin Luther King Holiday is on the 20th and City Hall will be closed. He states there will be a planning and zoning meeting on the February 3rd as well as a public open house meeting for the comp plan on the 4th. He states that the City's partner, Live Like Locals, is hosting a Valentines Fun Fest behind City Hall on February 14th. City Hall will be closed on February 17th for President Day. On the 18th, Councilwoman Cone's Citizen Advisory Meeting will take place. City Hall's expansion will begin on February 3rd and will be completed in October.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Rufus Bright, Council Member
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Mark Stephens, Council Member

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

## 11. CONSENT AGENDA

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

- A. Well Permit Applications for resident at 1124 Meinhard Rd  
Approve
- B. Department of Community Affairs Grant Services

## 12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

## 13. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Steven Campisi as Agent for Coastal Club Port Wentworth, requesting to rezone 20.989 of 22.239 acres from C-2 to R-5, to allow for a multifamily residential development. PIN # 7-0037-02-019, located in the 3rd Council District, on Newport Blvd.

- **Public Hearing**

City Planner, Katie Dunnigan, states that this application is requesting R5 zoning to develop a 192-unit apartment complex. The proposed development will be served by two access points on Newport Boulevard, with approximately one and a quarter acre retained as C2 zoning for future commercial use. She states that this project fits in well with surrounding zoning, which includes a mix of commercial and different residential uses, including multifamily.

City Manager Steve Davis explained that this is Point Grand, and they contributed a significant amount of money to the Newport Boulevard expansion, which created the cut-through from Newport over to 21. He states that this parcel was left over for this project, and they have worked very well with the City and the Economic Development Director to carve out another restaurant site for the frontage.

- B. Consideration for the approval of a General Site Plan "Novo Wentworth Multifamily". PIN# 7-0976-02-035, located on Saussy Road in the 1st Council District, zoned R-5.  
City Planner Katie Dunnigan states that the application for Novo Wentworth multi-family residential community on Highway 21 near Saucy Road was presented for general site plan approval. The Development includes approximately 300 apartments, ranging from one to three bedrooms, with access to both Saucy Road and Highway 21. She states that the applicant is currently working with GDOT, and the submitted site plan conforms to the City of Port Wentworth zoning ordinances.

The developer thanked the city staff for working with them.

<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

- C. Consideration for the approval of a General Site Plan "Express Oil Change & Tire Engineers" . PIN# 7-0906-04-086, located on Highway 21 in the 4th Council District, zoned PUD (Rice Hope, Commercial).

City Planner Katie Dunnigan states that this is a request for approval of a general site plan for Express Oil, proposing to develop an oil change facility on one of the public's out parcels of Rice Hope. It is within the commercial portion of the Rice Hope PUD, where the equivalent zoning is C2, which permits minor automotive repair as use. She states that the site plan conforms to the City's zoning ordinances.

City Manager Steve Davis states that regarding the architectural features, they have been very cooperative while the city works to ensure that we raise the standards of the development coming in.

Mayor Pro-Tem expresses that this is just the practically of having a service that the city needs.

<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, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

#### 14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

- A. Future Bond Proceeds Resolution

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Thomas Barbee, 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

B. City Retirement Plan Update-1st Reading

14.C) IGA between the City and Development Authority

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Shawn Randerwala, 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

14.D) House Bill 581 Opt-Out

City Attorney Scott Robichaux explained that this was a new law that was going to be going into affect and could conflict with the Stephen's Day Homestead Exemption that we already have. A lot of the surrounding Cities and Counties are opting out, but there is a specific opt-out provision that must take place and it requires multiple public hearings and notices. We are asking for approval for staff to prepare for all of those things, so that we can fully explain everything.

City Manager Steve Davis asked that in the motion can they allow for staff to set the dates for the special called meetings and/or public hearings, and we will follow the guidelines with the public notice.

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to approve as so stated, and it was second by Councilman Mark Stephens.

<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

**15. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

**A. Litigation**

**B. Personnel**

**C. Real Estate**

Mayor Pro-Tem made a motion to adjourn to executive session. Second by Councilman Rufus Bright. Approved Unanimous.

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to reconvene regular session. Second by Councilman Mark Stephens. Approved Unanimous

Councilman Shawn Randerwala made a motion to approve the ordering judgement for the settlement

that's in the Grange Investments vs the City of Port Wentworth case as presented in executive session, and to direct the City Attorney to finalize all of the settlement paperwork. Which is to approve the settlement as presented. Second by Mark Stephens.

**16. ADJOURNMENT**

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor Gary Norton

The foregoing minutes are true and correct and approved by me on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2025.

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council