



CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH
CITY COUNCIL
FEBRUARY 13, 2025

Council Meeting Room

Public Hearing

9:00 AM

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

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Gary Norton	Mayor	Present
Gabrielle Nelson	Mayor Pro Tem	Present
Thomas Barbee	Council Member	Present
Mark Stephens	Council Member	Remote
Rufus Bright	Council Member	Present
Shawn Randerwala	Council Member	Present
ArtLise Alston-Cone	Council Member	Absent

4. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

A. Public Hearing: Intent to Opt Out of House Bill 581

City Manager Steve Davis states that House Bill 92 did not move forward for adjustments to House Bill 581 as more modifications were being made. He states that according to the City's team located in Atlanta, the opt-out date, originally set for March 1 and later changed to May 1 in House Bill 92, has now been adjusted to March 31, 2029, but is expected to change again. He states that there may also be a potential option to opt back in after opting out. He stated that Mr. Vacquer spoke with Chairman Stephens regarding the rollback date and was informed that if the city opts out then the March 31 date would not apply, which is still being confirmed. He states that House Bill 581 and the opt-out decision have no impact on Port Wentworth, as the city has the Stephen's Day exemption, which is superior to House Bill 581. This exemption includes a cost-of-living adjustments, meaning property owners with less than five acres will continue to benefit from the existing floating homestead exemption.

Mayor Gary Norton asked if this would not affect 96 to 98 percent of citizens.

City Manager Davis states that it would not affect 99.9 percent of citizens. He states that the only properties that would be affected are properties over five acres, which would be about seventeen or eighteen, that are not covered under the Stephen's Day exemption as it does not apply to properties over five acres.

Councilman Rufus Bright asked if the Citizen has to be the primary resident for this to apply. City Manager Davis states that it is not only about having more than five acres, but it is about your homestead, the property that you are actually paying for. He states that with any homestead exemption, it must be your domicile, meaning that you reside there for at least six months. This applies across the board, whether under House Bill 581 or the Stephen's Day exemption. He states that you cannot combine separate properties.

City Manager Steve Davis explains that this discussion is solely about city taxes. The school board operates under a separate category, but both the county and city use the Stephen's Day exemption, which is fully floating. However, school taxes include CPI adjustments. He states that there are about 180 school boards, and 176 of them are opting out of this provision of House Bill 581. He states that some regional counties in the Savannah metro area do not have the Stephen's Day exemption, making it much more difficult for them to opt out of 581 compared to the City. He added that whether the City opts out or not will depend on the final provisions and changes, but either way, it will not affect city taxes.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson asked City Manager Davis if he was able to review the presentation from the assessors. City Manager Steve Davis states that it reiterates what has already been discussed. He states that they went into definitions about floating homestead exemption.

Mayor Gary Norton asked if all parties understood if this Act applied to them or not.

City Manager Steve Davis stated if anyone has the Stephen's Day exemption already in Port Wentworth, then they will continue to have the Stephen's Day exemption and will not be impacted.

5. ADJOURNMENT

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Mark Stephens, Council Member
SECONDER:	Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem
AYES:	Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, 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