



**CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
**FEBRUARY 13, 2025**

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**Council Meeting Room**

**Public Hearing**

**6:00 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
Mark Stephens	Council Member	Present
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 the city has held three public hearings regarding House Bill 581, which was passed last year and requires counties or municipalities to decide by March 1 whether to opt out. He states that if no action is taken, then they are automatically opted in. House Bill 581 introduces a new floating homestead exemption tied to the Consumer Price Index. However, Chatham County and Port Wentworth already operate under Stephen's Day Homestead Exemption, which offers a full exemption without CPI adjustments. He states that for properties under five acres, nothing will change, meaning they will remain under the Stephen's Day exemption. Only seventeen or eighteen properties in the city exceed five acres and do not qualify for Stephen's Day exemption which means House Bill 581 could apply to them. He states 99.9% of Port Wentworth residents will see no impact, regardless of if the city opts in or out.

Councilman Mark Stephens states that there is a goal that the city is wanting to accomplish, and that the outcome will not be available until May. City Manager Davis explains that this is not part of the current legislation under House Bill 581 but is in the draft of House Bill 92. He states that he has communicated the City's concerns through the administration team in Atlanta and is uncertain where the changes will come from. He states that if a new requirement forces the tax assessor to release information sooner, then the city will have time to analyze it and decide in the next steps. He states that this is only a proposed law, and not an enacted one.

City Manager Davis explains that as City Council, they control the city tax digest. He states they do not have authority over county or school board taxes. While the school board operates under a version of the Stephen's Day exemption that allows for CPI adjustment, this will not impact city taxes. He states that the only way to change city tax amount is by adjusting the millage rate.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson asked that for those seventeen or eighteen properties, will staying opted in cause harm and will they be given a choice through the assessor to choose the valuation they prefer. City manager Davis explains that those properties would fall under House Bill 581 because they are not covered by the Stephen's Day exemption. They only have the regular homestead exemption, not the floating one.

City manager Davis explains that the city does not handle tax bills. Tax bills are done by the commissioner and the tax assessor's office. He states that the state will fund software that allows these offices to work seamlessly together across the county and all municipalities, thanks to the City's IGA with the county tax commissioner's office. He states that for property owners, the current arrangement remains unchanged. He states that those subject to House Bill 581 will follow that process, while everyone currently under the Stephen's Day exemption will remain so. New property owners under five acres will be placed under Stephen's Day with a current valuation, unlike older properties where the valuation is based on the purchase year. He states that new homes in neighborhoods like Rice Creek or Rice Hope will be valued at the sales price and then float from there. He states that this process poses no significant administrative burden on the city. The only concern is if new legislation introduces requirements that affect our ability to produce an accurate tax digest and budget, since the city cannot set the rollback rate without necessary data.

City manager Davis states that for properties under five acres, the Stephen's Day exemption will always be superior to House Bill 581 because it is 100% with no CPI adjustment. Unless legislation eliminates the Homestead Exemption entirely, House Bill 581 will not affect the base year value. He states that while we cannot predict what the legislature might do in five or ten years in which the administration will have to address any changes, he does not believe the state legislature will reverse course on this.

## 5. ADJOURNMENT

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

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Mayor Gary Norton

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

ATTEST:

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Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council