



**CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
**APRIL 17, 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**

Councilman 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 adding item C, the Downtown Sewer Rehabilitation Project.

<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**

City Manager Steve Davis acknowledged the city's ongoing effort to recognize employee milestones and longevity. He stated that this month they are recognizing the Fire Captain of Training, Dustin Holden, who is celebrating his five-year anniversary with the city. He stated the importance of in-house training and how the fire department is growing.

Fire Chief Lance Moore recognized Dustin Holden for his five years of service calling him arguably the best training officer that the city has had. He stated that Holden rose through the ranks and fully embraced the training captain role, contributing to department growth and improvements in ISO rating and overall safety. Chief Moore noted his initiative in building relationships with other departments and expanding training opportunities. Chief Moore noted Dustin's involvement with the Maritime Fire Brigade, a regional collaboration.

City Manager Steve Davis recognized Omar Senati Martinez for earning his Certified Public Works Manager designation through Carl Vinson Institute of Government. He emphasized the difficulty and significance of this certification, comparing it to that of a master's or law degree. City Manager commended his skills and his contributions to the city.

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

A. Glenn Hibberts

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Development plans for the Houlihan Bridge Boat Landing Project

B. Kerry Smart

Discussed the following topic(s):

- Dumping and sanitation concerns

## **7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS**

## **8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

### **A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes - March 20, 2025**

<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**

City Manager Steve Davis shared several upcoming community events and announcements:

- Broncos Football Game
- Tree Planting (phase 2)
- Stand Up for America Day: April 26th
- Arborview Townhomes Ribbon Cutting: May 1st
- Broncos Football Game: May 3rd
- Planning and Zoning Meeting: May 5th at City Hall
- Senior Olympics: May 9th at the downtown gym
- City Council Meeting: May 15th
- Councilwoman Cone's Citizen Advisory Group Meeting: May 20th

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson read the Autism Awareness Month Proclamation, the Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation, the Fair Housing Month Proclamation, and the Georgia Cities Week Proclamation.

A. Autism Awareness Month Proclamation

CEO of the Matthew Reardon Center for Autism, Jacqueline Smith thanked the city for recognizing Autism Awareness Month saying that she has a very strong passion for children with special learning needs, especially autism. She stated that it was an honor to accept the proclamation on behalf of the center which serves children with autism ages 5 to 21 and support families, professionals, and educators across the Southeast.

B. Child Abuse Prevention Month Proclamation

Daisy Hernandez, Director of Domestic Violence Services at Safe Shelter, thanked the Mayor and Council for the proclamation recognizing April as Child Abuse Awareness Month, saying it is more than a statement, it's a commitment that shows the city stands with children and families. She also shared words from a child advocate at the shelter, who said working with over 500 children affected by domestic violence has shown how deeply it impacts their mental and physical health, from depression and sleep issues to developmental delays and health conditions.

She described Safe Shelter's broader mission, including the VIP Kids Program, which helps break the cycle of violence by working with counselors, schools, and organizations to teach non-violent conflict resolution and raise awareness of teen dating violence. She emphasized that Safe Shelter provides far more than room and board, including counseling, case management, legal assistance with temporary protective orders, creative expression activities, and a two-year follow-up program for families after they leave the shelter. She states that services are free and offered to anyone in Chatham County.

C. Fair Housing Month Proclamation

Executive Director of Housing Savannah Inc., Laura Lane McKinnon, joined by her colleague Quin Peterson, thanked the Council on behalf of Housing Savannah for recognizing Fair Housing Month. She said they were honored to stand with a city working to expand access to safe, stable, and affordable housing. McKinnon explained that Housing Savannah soon to be Housing United is a nonprofit that collaborates, educates, advocates, and raises funds to support housing solutions across the region. She emphasized that housing is the foundation for health, opportunity, and long-term stability. She states that their work focuses on increasing affordable housing supply, supporting repair and down payment programs, and building public and political support for long-term change.

She also congratulated the City of Port Wentworth on its leadership and partnership with Habitat for Humanity and Chatham County. She stated that Fair Housing Month is about ensuring everyone has a fair shot at having a place to call home and thanked Port Wentworth for setting an example of what's possible through collaboration.

D. Georgia Cities Week Proclamation

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson explained that cities across Georgia typically hosts events to highlight their communities. She states that for the City of Port Wentworth, this is mainly done during Stand Up for America Day.

## 10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Councilman Rufus Bright recognized all the faculty who take part in making the city what it is today.

Councilman Mark Stephens thanked EOM for the job that they have been doing since they have partnered with the city.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Rufus Bright, 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

**11. CONSENT AGENDA**

**12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

**13. NEW BUSINESS**

- A. Approval of the draft Comprehensive Plan and submission to DCA.  
 Approve the draft Comprehensive Plan and it's submission to the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.  
 City Manager Steve Davis stated that all DCA guidelines had been followed for the proposal. He states that the architect of the project, Ms. Lauren, was present to answer any questions. He also stated that the speaker confirmed that all obligations and requirements had been met to move forward with making it law, and if approved by Council, it would be immediately transmitted to DCA.  
 Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson asked for the importance of sending the city's comprehensive plan to DCA to be highlighted and addressed.  
 City Manager Steve Davis explained that without a DCA-certified comprehensive plan, the city is ineligible for state or federal grant funding. They state that this was discovered a few years ago when the city was denied eligibility, which led to recertifying a previous plan and transmitting it to the state for approval.

<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. Cooper Carry Master Planning Proposal for Port Wentworth  
 City Manager Steve Davis stated that the proposal from Cooper Carey, a large Atlanta based firm known for its work on architectural standard, focuses on creating plans for the city's overlay districts, beginning with the Anchor Park overlay district. He states that this plan will set architectural and signage standards for both commercial and residential buildings aiming to ensure long-term quality and consistency. He states that it is intended to go beyond the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances, establishing a higher standard to support future growth.

<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. Downtown Sewer Rehabilitation Project

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

## 14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

- A. Amend the City of Port Wentworth Sign Ordinance  
City Attorney Scott Robichaux explained that this ordinance is an update to the city's outdated sign ordinance as part of a broader effort to review older ordinances. He stated that these spot fixes aim to bring the city into compliance with current needs, especially with new developments and projects like Anchor Park. He stated that the update ensures the city stays aligned during ongoing planning and growth.

City Manager Steve Davis explained that the current sign ordinance is very outdated, especially when it comes to things such as electronics on billboards, which were not common when the ordinance was originally adopted. He stated that this update brings the city into state compliance regarding regulations on digital boards such as how many flips or changes are allowed.

## 15. EXECUTIVE SESSION

### A. Litigation

### B. Personnel

### C. Real Estate

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson made a motion to adjourn to executive session. Second by Councilman Mark Stephens. Approved Unanimous.

Councilman Mark Stephens made a motion to reconvene, seconded by Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone. Approved Unanimous.

City Attorney Scott Robichaux asked for a motion from council to acquire a real estate easement related to the park project, specifically on Highway 30 area and surrounding roads, in order to help finalize the project. Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone made the motion for what the City attorney stated, second

by Councilman Mark Stephens. Approved Unanimous.

**16. ADJOURNMENT**

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem
<b>SECONDER:</b>	ArtLise Alston-Cone, Council Member
<b>AYES:</b>	Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, 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 Smiley, Clerk of Council