



CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH
CITY COUNCIL
SEPTEMBER 18, 2025

Council Meeting Room

Regular Session

7:00 PM

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

Attendee Name	Title	Status
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

5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

Police Chief Kerry Thomas recognized three employees for five years of service and one employee for ten years, highlighting their commitment to the department's core values of transparency, accountability, and fairness. He acknowledged their professionalism, dedication, and accountability in serving the community. Mayor Gary Norton thanked all the first responders for all their hard work

City Manager Steve Davis recognized the city's HR Director, Ashley Lanier, for being with the city for five years.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS

A. Trevor Ferguson

Discussed the following topic(s):

- District Concerns

7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS

8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes - August 21, 2025

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

9. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

A. National Hispanic Heritage Month (Sept 15–Oct 15)

B. Sickle Cell Awareness month

C. National Hunger Awareness

D. Patriot Day

E. National Literacy Month

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson read the National Hispanic Heritage Month Proclamation, the Sickle Cell Awareness Month Proclamation, the National Hunger Awareness Proclamation, the Patriot Day Proclamation, and the National Literacy Month Proclamation.

Mrs. Shepard and the members of the Sickle Cell Association of Savannah thanked the Mayor and Council for proclaiming September as National Sickle Cell Awareness Month. They expressed their gratitude on behalf of individuals and families affected by the disease and explained the importance of continued awareness and education. The association expressed appreciation to the city for recognizing the seriousness of Sickle Cell Disease and helping raise awareness in the community.

Mary Crutch, a representative from Second Harvest, thanked the Mayor and Council for recognizing September as Hunger Awareness Month. She emphasized that hunger could affect anyone and that many families struggle not from poor choices, but from lack of resources. She stated that Second Harvest operates Kids Café programs, food assistance agencies, and mobile food pantries in Port Wentworth. She encouraged everyone to get involved through volunteering and supporting hunger relief efforts ensuring no child, senior, or individual goes to be hungry.

Joe Higgins, a representative from the Veterans Council of Chatham County, along with other veterans thanked the Mayor and Council for the opportunity to speak in honor of Patriot Day. He shared that at the time of the attacks; he was on active duty at Hunter Army Airfield. He stated that he, along with Lieutenant Colonel, Harry Gardner, and Colonel Robbie Mcgarth, were all in uniform during that time and continued to serve in the years that followed. He expressed gratitude to the City of Port Wentworth for being the "Stand Up for America City".

Ambria Birksteiner, Regional Board Chair for Live Oak Public Library, thanked the Mayor and Council for recognizing Literacy Month. She highlighted the importance of literacy in child development and shared

her own involvement through her nonprofit, Operation One STEM at a Time, which partners with libraries to provide STEM focused programs. She stated that the library system serves Chatham, Effingham, and Liberty County and expressed gratitude for the city's support.

City Manager Steve Davis gave a presentation on the construction of the new amphitheater and ice cove stadium and SPLOST 8.

Key topics from the new amphitheater and ice cove stadium presentation include:

- Progress
 - Roofs completed on both ice rinks and amphitheater
 - Steel framework finished
- Facility Layout
 - Two NHL-size ice rinks
 - Bar and grill, lobby, party rooms, pro shop
- Amphitheater Details
 - 5,200 seats with 8 elevated suites
 - Concessions, staging, AV area, green rooms for performers
- Financials
 - Total cost: \$46.2 million
 - City Investment: \$9.2 million
 - Bond: \$17 million
 - Private Investment: \$20 million (Ghost Pirates and Oak View Group)
- Timeline:
 - Completion: August 2026

Key topics from the SPLOST 8 presentation include:

- Tax Amount: 1-cent per dollar
- Duration: 6 years
- Estimated Revenue: \$700 million (Port Wentworth Portion-\$31.6million)(400% increase from SPLOST 7)
- Election Date: November 4, 2025
- Start Date: October 1, 2026
- Highlights:
 - Benton Blvd Widening Plus Roundabouts
 - Meinhard Road widening
 - Highway 25 Roundabout
 - Water and Sewer Upgrades
 - New Aerial Fire Truck
 - 14 Police Vehicles
 - New Police Headquarters
 - Armadale Pathways
 - Mobley Park- Full Funding

- Park Fields, Fencing, and Facilities
- New Walking Trails

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

- Latin Festival: September 26
- Football Homecoming: October 24
- Planning and Zoning Meeting: October 6
- National Night Out: October 7
- Pageant: October 11
- Recreation Department Fall Festival: October 17
- Councilwoman Cone’s Advisory Group Meeting: October 21
- Trunk or Treat: October 31

City Attorney, Scott Robichaux, explained the bond process stating that it is transparent and it has been publicly discussed since 2024 during the FY25 budget planning. He states that the process included public votes, budget documents, a future bond resolution in January 2025, and a judicial bond validation in October 2025. He states that all documents and meeting were public, and the city followed all legal requirements. He also clarified that the Development Authority will own key projects like the amphitheater and ice facility and that there are no plans to transfer them to private developers. He addressed questions regarding council members serving on the development authority and confirmed that it is legal under state law for sitting council members to serve if appointed before holding office. He emphasized the importance of maintaining civility, accuracy, and respect in public discourse.

10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

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

12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Update to the FY 2026 Fee Schedule- 2nd Reading
 Approve
 City Manager Steve Davis states that this is the second reading for the Aid to Construction Fees Update. He states that this update simply adds the fees that were budgeted but not included in the official fee schedule. He states that the main change is consolidating the previous five development zones into three: a Downtown Zone, an I-95 South and I-95 North Zone, and a Highway 30 West Zone. He states that this adjustment applies only to developer fees and does not affect any other fees within the schedule.

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

13. NEW BUSINESS

- A. City Planner Katie Dunnigan states that items 13a, b, and c are all city-initiated rezonings. She states that for some background, when the zoning ordinance was updated in 2023, properties previously zoned RIP, Residential Institutional Professional, were automatically rezoned to R4. She states that what the city is doing now is correcting areas where that change did not align properly. She states that the first application is for the existing Point Grand Apartments on Newport Boulevard which are currently zoned R4, which does not allow multifamily residential. She states that the city is recommending rezoning to R5.

- B. City Planner Katie Dunnigan states that this application is similar to the previous one. She states that it involves the existing Wentworth Park Apartment community, which is currently zoned R4, a zoning district that does not permit multifamily residential use. She states that both staff and Planning Commission are recommending approval of the rezoning to R5.

- C. City Planner Katie Dunnigan states that this property is currently home to Fun Times Inflatables and the level of commercial activity operating there is not permitted under the R4 zoning designation. She states that this lot would not be ideal for residential development, therefore, both Planning Commission and staff are recommending approval to rezone the property to C1 for the existing commercial activity.

- D. City Manager Steve Davis states that the county currently collects property taxes for the City and also handles homestead exemptions and related matters. He states that while the city does not have the capability to manage those functions at City Hall, residents can still go through the county at city hall if they choose. He states that there have been some recent changes in state

law affecting how payments are processed.

CFO and Assistant City Manager, Thomas Kilmartin, states that the item is a formal contract between the City of Port Wentworth and Chatham County for the collection of property taxes. He states that although the county has been handling this service for several years, state law now requires that the city has an official agreement in place. He states that the county has prepared and signed the contract and is now ready for approval and signature. He states that there is no increase in collection fees or financial impact on the city so therefore, staff recommend continuing with the county for tax collection services.

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

E. City Manager Steve Davis states that this project covers the fields and concessions. He states that a formal RFP was issued and posted on both the state procurement site and the city website, as required by law. About 50 attendees participated in the mandatory pre-bid, representing multiple contractors and teams, including both civil construction and vertical construction. He states that bids were submitted and scored based on qualifications, not just low price. He states that Chase Merrill Construction received the highest score of 93.5 and they are currently completing the City Hall expansion which will be finished next month.

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

F. City Manager Steve Davis states that the city is rolling over unspent funds from last year's projects. Additionally, the city has extra revenue from collecting more hotel-motel taxes than originally budgeted.

CFO and Assistant City Manager, Thomas Kilmartin, states that there is a refund requiring council approval which is \$14,763 from asset forfeiture funds as directed by the court. He states that the recommendation is to approve the amendments and roll forward the funds previously approved last year into this year's budget. He explains that the reason it is handled this way is because these projects are ongoing and complex. He states that this amendment allows the city to officially close out the fiscal year. He states that once the amendment is approved, the city will be able to move forward into the next fiscal year.

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

14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

15. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- A. Litigation
- B. Personnel
- C. Real Estate

16. ADJOURNMENT

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	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