



CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH
CITY COUNCIL
NOVEMBER 20, 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
Thomas Barbee	Council Member	Present
ArtLise Alston-Cone	Council Member	Present
Mark Stephens	Council Member	Present
Rufus Bright	Council Member	Present
Gabrielle Nelson	Mayor Pro Tem	Absent
Shawn Randerwala	Council Member	Absent

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilman Thomas Barbee made a motion to approve the agenda with an addition of item G, Zoning Ordinance Amendment, under new business seconded by Councilman Mark Stephens.

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

5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS

A. Fire Department Dive Team

Fire Chief Lance Moore recognized members of the Port Wentworth Dive Team which include Lance

Moore, Emmanuel Morilla, Dusty Holden, Sam Floyd, Caleb Lindsey, Austin Grimes, Brett Minnis, Hannah Floyd, Brett Copeman, Seth Moore, and Rodney Thomas. He stated that the team is primarily composed of volunteers and emphasized that participation in diving is optional due to its demanding and specialized nature. He stated that the team has conducted extensive training in various locations including Florida, Garden City, multiple local lakes, Lakeshore, Anchor Park, etc. He stated that the team has trained in low visibility and zero visibility environments, noting the difficulty of operating on lake bottoms where visibility can be nonexistent. He stated that the team plans to work closely with Garden City allowing both cities to provide automatic aid for dive operations. He expressed appreciation for the team's commitment and professionalism and stated that he was proud of their efforts. He thanked council for supporting the program.

The Grant Coordinator for Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Shy Duncan, provided an overview of the Coastal Incentive Grant(CIG) Program and stated that this funding opportunity is available to the City of Port Wentworth. She explained that the program is funded through a federal NOAA grant and distributes approximately \$750,000 annually to communities and research institutions in Georgia's 11 coastal counties. She stated that the program supports coastal protection, research, and sustainable development, and that Cycle 29 project themes include sustainable communities, oceans, and wetlands, public access and land conservation, disaster resiliency, and nature-based solutions. She stated that projects may receive up to \$80,000 per year of \$160,000 over two years, with a required one-to-one non-federal match. She stated that pre-applications are due December 5th, with full applications due February 13, 2026, and a cycle start date of October 1, 2026.

Police Chief Kerry Thomas introduced Joyce Williams, survivor and founder/ executive director of the Keepers of the Flame Foundation, Inc. Joyce Williams thanked the Council for the opportunity to speak and stated that she is a breast cancer survivor. She stated that her experience led her to recognize the need for additional support for local survivors, particularly in the area of mental health. She stated that the organization provides free psychotherapy sessions and hardship assistance to individuals in the community who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. She described the foundation's lighthouse symbol and its mission of helping individuals navigate difficult times.

Chief Thomas stated that cancer affects all communities and emphasized the importance of partnering with the Keepers of the Flame Foundation to support local residents.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS

A. Isaac Wright

Discussed the following topics:

- Road Safety

B. Georgia Benton

Discussed the following topics:

- Public Comment Concerns
- Congratulated the Fire Department
- Park behind City Hall

7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS

8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes - October 16, 2025

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

9. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

A. Recognizing Diwali – The Festival of Lights – and Encouraging a Season of Renewal and New Year’s Resolutions

- SGVP Gurukul Savannah
- Mandir Savannah
- BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Sanstha

B. City Manager Updates

City Attorney Scott Robichaux recognized representatives from the SGVP Temple and the BAPS Temple in honor of Diwali. He noted that the City of Port Wentworth joins communities around the world in celebrating the Festival of Lights, which symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil.

A representative of the BAPS Savannah Mandir thanked the Mayor and Council for the Diwali proclamation and stated that the organization was honored to participate. He stated that Diwali, India’s largest and most significant holiday, was celebrated in October, drawing more than 2,300 visitors to the local mandir. Nationally, BAPS celebrated at over 133 locations, and nearly a billion people observe the festival worldwide. He explained that Diwali is a multi-day celebration symbolizing the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness. He stated that the local temple, located at the intersection of I-95 and Highway 204, was built in 2004 and recently marked its 21st anniversary. He also described BAPS Charities, the organization’s 501(c)(3) nonprofit arm, which supports community empowerment, education, environmental initiatives, health and wellness, and humanitarian relief. Local annual events include walkathons benefiting organizations such as the Ronald McDonald House and the Lowcountry Down Syndrome Society. He thanked the Council again, invited the mayor to visit the temple during next year’s Diwali celebration.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that councilman Shawn Randerwala is the first elected Indian American in Chatham County’s history and had hoped to attend. He stated that the recent visit by the City’s delegation to the temple was an enjoyable and meaningful experience, highlighting the “Mountain of Food” display and the hospitality shown by the community.

Councilman Mark Stephens left the dais.

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

- Teen Skate Night –
- Police Dept. Promotional Ceremony
- Hart Festival Thanksgiving Event
- Thanksgiving Sports Camp – During Thanksgiving break
- City Hall Closed – Thanksgiving Day & Friday

- Planning & Zoning – December 1
- Basketball Registration Ends – December 1
- Annual Tree Lighting – December 5
- Christmas Parade – December 6
- The Point Grand Opening – December 9
- PWDA Economic Luncheon (GA Tech) – December 17
- City Council Meeting – December 18
- Shop with a Cop – December 20
- Parents’ Night Out – December 22
- Goodwill Drop-Off- January 22
- Inauguration Ceremony: January 9
- Councilwoman ArtLise Alston- Cone stated that the citizen output meeting will be suspended for the next two months because of the holidays.

10. COMMITTEE REPORTS

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
SECONDER:	ArtLise Alston-Cone, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

11. CONSENT AGENDA

12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member

SECONDER: Rufus Bright, Council Member

AYES: Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

- A. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for L-A Crossgate-Savannah, LLC, requesting to rezone 7.6 acres from R-3 to C-2, to allow for commercial development. PIN # 70005 01005, located in the 2nd Council District, on Bonnybridge Road.

13. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Consideration of a Special Use Permit Application submitted by Kei-Mar, LLC, requesting to allow a self-storage facility in the C-3 zoning district. PIN# 7017 03002 located in the 3rd Council District, on Highway 30, zoned C-3.

City Planner Katie Dunnigan stated that the applicant is requesting a special use permit for self-storage in the C-3 Interchange Commercial Zoning District. The property is located on State Highway 30, just off Keller Road. The future land use map identifies this parcel as commercial. She stated that the applicant has been in ongoing discussions with staff over the past several months and has agreed to include a commercial retail space along the Highway 30 frontage in addition to the proposed self-storage use.

City Attorney Scott Robichaux Stated that there was no second to the motion at the Planning Commission. He Explained that when a motion receives no second, it is effectively treated as a denial and so because the motion died on the vine, their recommendation comes to you as a denial. He stated that there was not an affirmative vote and no formal denial vote, but under Robert's Rules of Order, that is how it is interpreted.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked if this can be voted on since it is a special use permit?

City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated that it can be voted on.

John Paul Moore with Thompson Hutton, on behalf of the owner and applicants, who are also present this evening stated that over the past few months, they have worked closely with the City Manager and staff, making several adjustments. He stated that they added the retail space on the Highway 30 frontage as a compromise to help meet the City's goals while still allowing the project to move forward.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked within the proposal will they be building a commercial and storage at the same time?

The representative stated that they are fully committing to reserving the space needed to construct the retail component once it becomes economically viable and feasible to move forward. He stated that to his understanding, approval of this special use effectively locks the property into that layout. He stated that if they proceed with the self-storage development, then the retail footprint is also set and preserved as part of the overall site plan.

City Attorney Robichaux stated that this is a zoning decision for the special use permit, not an approval of a site plan. He stated that a special-use permit is often considered alongside a site plan showing all proposed uses, which allows the City to enforce specific conditions for each use. In this case, only the application for the special-use permit has been submitted, so the Council is being asked to approve the self-storage use itself as an allowable use on the property. He stated that because this is a zoning decision, certain conditions can be applied, while others cannot. For example, staff's recommendation regarding allowable uses is enforceable, but requirements such as a minimum commercial square footage or a condition that both the commercial and self-storage components be built concurrently would not be enforceable. He stated a vote tonight would only authorize the self-storage facility as a special-use allowance and it would not mandate the construction of the retail space.

stated that once approved, the applicants will proceed to the concept plan stage and work with staff to finalize the design and other specifics.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that the recommendation for a 7,500-square-foot retail component was based on his discussions with the applicants. He stated that the intent was to make the self-storage project more acceptable by including retail space. He noted that, legally, the city cannot enforce the construction of the retail portion concurrently with the self-storage. He stated that his support for the project is conditioned on the retail component being included, but he acknowledged that the Council must decide whether to approve the self-storage independently. If approved, the retail portion could be added in the future when feasible.

The representative clarified that the city cannot technically enforce the construction of the retail component, the self-storage area can be limited in size as part of the special-use permit.

City Attorney Robichaux stated that the zoning ordinance already sets maximum building sizes but does not include minimum building requirements; therefore, staff cannot impose a minimum commercial square footage, which is why Recommendation Two cannot be enforced.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that this is located along highway 30 along Keller. He stated that all access points will be worked out by GDOT.

City Attorney Robichaux stated that there is a mechanism for a special-use permit and a site plan to be considered together. He stated that questions arose regarding the potential consequences of a denial, as any subsequent application for a similar request could not be submitted for at least six months. The Council discussed whether to consider combining the special-use permit with the site plan to avoid triggering the six-month waiting period.

RESULT:	DENIED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

- B. A Zoning Map Amendment Application has been submitted by Trent Thompson as Agent for Jeanine Thompson, requesting to rezone 28.7 acres from R-1 to C-3, to allow for future commercial development. PIN # 70906 04008A, 70906 04008B, 70906 03013, 70906 03014, 70906 03026, 70906 03027, and 70906 0322, located in the 4th Council District, on Old Highway 21 and Rice Hope Plantation Road.

City Planner Katie Dunnigan stated that the applicant is requesting to rezone 28.7 acres from R-1 to C-3. She stated that the parcels are currently owned by the applicant's family, who also own adjacent C-3 parcels along Highway 21. The rezoning is intended to consolidate the parcels to improve saleability. She stated that the future land use map identifies this area as mixed-use, so C-3 is not the typical designation; however, it is consistent with adjacent zoning. City manager Steve Davis stated that this is located right across from rice Creek subdivision.

The applicant, representing his family and a family friend who also owns part of the property, explained that the combined parcels total approximately 47 acres, with 18 acres already zoned C-3. They are requesting that the remaining 28 acres be rezoned to C-3 to create a contiguous commercial property. He noted that the family has owned and lived on the land for over 40 years, and that the surrounding area has transitioned from rural residential to a mix of commercial and

residential development. He stated that rezoning the property to commercial is seen as the highest and best use and would allow for quality retail and commercial development along Highway 21.

He also described plans to potentially open Rice Oak Plantation Road as public access, providing an additional entrance to Rice Oak and helping to relieve traffic. He stated that while a red light at the intersection would require DOT approval, the development could encourage traffic calming and safer access for vehicles entering the commercial area. He stated that the proposed rezoning is generally consistent with the City's land use plan and would provide needed retail and entertainment opportunities for residents.

City Manager Steve Davis stated

that if the road becomes public, it would be constructed as a full boulevard with proper infrastructure, including larger pipes, multiple lanes, curb and gutter, and stormwater management.

City Manager Davis stated that the Planning and Zoning Commission had recommended that the applicants meet with staff to review land uses for the property, as was done with the Hester property. He stated that staff met with the Thompsons to discuss certain C-3 uses that would not be permitted, and a full list of restricted uses will be provided when the rezoning returns to Council. He noted that development agreements are being used to protect natural buffers between commercial and residential parcels, rather than relying solely on berms and vegetation as had been done in prior projects. Past issues, such as in Rice Hope where clear-cutting required later remediation with berms and fencing, are being addressed. He stated that a development agreement will be established with the Thompsons to ensure prohibited uses are not allowed on the property.

C. A Zoning Map Amendment Application has been submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for JACP

Properties, LP and Angela J. Anderson, Andrea J. Anderson, & Sparkman Properties, LLC, requesting to rezone +/- 96.99 of 568.26 acres from R-1 to I-1, to allow for future industrial development. PIN # 709076 01016 and 70975 01001, located in the 1st Council District, off Highway 30

City Planner Katie Dunnigan presented a request to rezone a property to industrial, noting that this is the first part of a two-step process. She stated that the proposed use is an outdoor material storage yard with a rail spur, which will require a separate special-use permit. The site is challenging due to surrounding railways and wetlands in Effingham County. She stated that the Planning Commission reviewed the request earlier and recommended approval with the condition that non-rail access be limited to connections within the industrial park on State Highway 30, just off Keller Road. The future land use map identifies this parcel as commercial. She stated that the applicant has been in ongoing discussions with staff over the past several months and has agreed to include a commercial retail space along the Highway 30 frontage in addition to the proposed self-storage use.

The applicant explained that the request involves two tracts, one owned by SPH, Mr. Brock and Mr. Hanna and the other by the Wynn family. He states that both parcels are being considered together because future development will require securing access across the Norfolk Southern railroad tracks. He states that if access is obtained and the rezoning and site plan are approved, the intent is to develop an aggregate yard allowing materials to arrive and depart by rail, with some truck traffic routed through the industrial park. He states that the property is surrounded by rail lines, making it unsuitable for residential or commercial use and appropriate only for industrial purposes, though not for warehouse development.

Mayor Gary Norton asked if it can be accessed through Highway 30?

Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone asked

what percentage increase in industrial-zoned land this rezoning would represent, noting concern about the balance between industrial, residential, and commercial zoning within the city?

City Planner Katie Dunnigan stated that the rezoning would reflect a shift of approximately 1% in the City's industrial land total and that industrial land currently represents about 28% of the City's total land area.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked if the property is located near the railroad track and if there are any home near the property?

City Manager Steve Davis stated that a key point in discussions with the applicant has been ensuring no access across the railroad tracks, as Council has been clear that industrial uses should not extend to the opposite side of the tracks. He states that the future land use map designates the area on the far side of the tracks for mixed-use, commercial, retail, and residential development. He explained that this parcel sits within a wedge that will not cross the tracks and that a development agreement will be used to restrict access exclusively through the industrial park, not from Benton Boulevard.

D. Contract Award for the Coldstream Force Main Upgrade Project

City Manager Steve Davis explained that the construction project was publicly advertised as a sealed bid on both the City’s website and the state procurement site. He stated that recommended contractor is the low bidder, and their bid came in under the budgeted amount. He stated that although the project is fully budgeted, staff requested that the start date be moved to FY27, noting that construction would not begin until July 1 of next year. He stated that the contract must be awarded now otherwise, the project would need to be re-bid next year.

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to recess, seconded by councilman Thomas Barbee.

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to adjourn seconded by councilman Thomas Barbee.

RESULT: **APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER: Rufus Bright, Council Member
SECONDER: Thomas Barbee, Council Member
AYES: Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

RESULT: **APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]**
MOVER: Rufus Bright, Council Member
SECONDER: Thomas Barbee, Council Member
AYES: Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

- E. Alcoholic Beverage License Application submitted by Dilan Sanjay Bhakta for a Malt Beverage/ Wine Package Retail Sales License for SHRIJI Swamp Fox LLC, DBA Swamp Fox Food Mart (101 Hodgeville Road) located in a C-2 (General Commercial) Zoning District

City Manager Steve Davis stated that all requirements outlined in the ordinance, as well as all necessary state documentation, have been completed. He stated that this request is solely a change of ownership, and the location was already licensed to sell alcohol. He stated that the new owner is simply seeking to have the license reissued under their name.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

- F. Alcoholic Beverage License Application submitted by Shelby N. Harrison for a Malt Beverage/ Wine Package Retail Sales License for Gregory M. Parker, Inc DBA Parker's #128 (132 Highway 30 located in a C-2 (General Commercial) Zoning District

City Manager Steve Davis stated that The Parkers is expected to open in just a couple of weeks, and they are seeking approval to sell beer, wine, and alcohol. He states that they have met all requirements outlined in the ordinance.

Councilwoman Cone asked if this request is for a new alcohol license, not a change of ownership for an existing business?

City Manager Davis stated that this is a brand-new store recently constructed across the street, not an establishment already selling alcohol in the city. He stated that the applicant is seeking approval to sell beer and wine only. He clarified that liquor sales are not permitted.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

- G. Zoning Ordinance Amendment

City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated That this idea comes from discussions with partners interested in

bringing data centers to some of our industrial property. He stated that data centers would use existing industrial or warehouse space but create far less traffic and truck activity than typical industrial uses. He stated that while any project would still need full permits and approvals, our zoning ordinance currently doesn't define data center, so he stated that because this was added after the usual advertising period, tonight is just the first read. He stated that the public hearing and second read will take place next month, along with Planning Commission review. This amendment doesn't add any new industrial zoning it simply allows data centers as a potential low-impact industrial use.

14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

15. EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

Councilman Thomas Barbee made a motion to adjourn to executive session, seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright.

Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone made a motion to reconvene, seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright.

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	ArtLise Alston-Cone, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

16. ADJOURNMENT

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	ArtLise Alston-Cone, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	Thomas Barbee, ArtLise Alston-Cone, Rufus Bright

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