



**CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
**DECEMBER 18, 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 with the following changes:

- Removal of item 11C
- Removal of 13A and 13B

Seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright

**5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS**

**A. Certification Presentation- Police Department**

Police Chief Kerry Thomas announced that the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police awarded the City of Port Wentworth Police Department its State Certification Certificate and Award. He explained that the department completed a comprehensive and rigorous assessment process, including a review of policies and procedures to ensure they reflect best practices and are fair, transparent, and meet the standards and criteria required by the Georgia Association of Chiefs of Police. Chief Thomas noted the process was lengthy and challenging but credited staff for their commitment, resilience, and use of available resources to successfully achieve state certification.

Amanda Barnhill of the Brunswick Police Department stated that she has assisted the Port Wentworth Police Department with state certification. She expressed pride in the department's progress and commended Amanda King for working tirelessly to ensure the department conformed to the required standards. She also acknowledged Scott Robidier and Chief Kerry Thomas and thanked the Commission for standing behind the department in meeting these standards.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that the state certification provides a significant discount on the department's insurance. He stated that the effort toward certification began prior to his arrival and that the department had been working toward this goal for some time but was not able to achieve it until now, making it a significant accomplishment.

Chief Kerry Thomas gave a presentation focused on bridging the gap between the community and law enforcement and reinforcing professionalism, mindset, and best practices. He stated that the department prioritizes being on the cutting edge of technology and leadership education. Chief Thomas reported that the entire command staff has completed the FBI Leader Trilogy Program, which includes supervisory, command, and executive-level training, and as a result, the Port Wentworth Police Department received the FBI Agency Leader Award for valuing education and leadership training.

Chief Thomas also highlighted upcoming community outreach efforts, including the annual Shop with a Cop event, noting its importance in building relationships with youth and strengthening community trust. He explained that the department, along with its partners, will take children shopping and provide gifts to ensure no child in participating households feels left out on Christmas morning. He thanked the Commission and community for their continued support and donations, including contributions made through the QR code, and reiterated the department's commitment to bridging the gap with the community, particularly with youth and teenagers.

Chief Kerry Thomas gave the second presentation, emphasizing a leadership paradigm shift focused on bridging the gap between the community and law enforcement and reinforcing professionalism, mindset, and best practices. He stated that the department prioritizes being on the cutting edge of technology and leadership education. Chief Thomas reported that the entire command staff has completed the FBI Leader Trilogy Program, which includes supervisory, command, and executive-level training, and as a result, the Port Wentworth Police Department received the FBI Agency Leader Award for valuing education and leadership training.

City Manager stated that this was the last official Council meeting with action items during the Mayor's eight-year term. He noted that the Mayor previously served on Council and the Planning Commission and has been actively involved in the community, including serving as a coach and in many other capacities. He stated that the City wished to recognize and thank the Mayor for his years of service and presented him with a commemorative memento in appreciation.

Mayor Gary Norton expressed appreciation for the recognition and stated that he has been involved in the community since childhood, participating in activities such as golf and baseball throughout the city. He shared his love for the children and residents of Port Wentworth, stated that it is a great city, and thanked everyone for the honor and support.

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

A. Jenny Hines

Discussed the following topics:

- Community Access

## **7. ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS**

**8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

**A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes- November 20, 2025**

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Thomas Barbee, 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

**9. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS**

**A. City Manager Update**

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

- Parents’ Night Out – December 22
- Open Gym – December 23, December 29, and January 2
- Baseball, T-Ball, and Softball Sign-Ups – Begin January 1
- Police vs. Fire Basketball Tournament – January 5
- Line Dancing & Inauguration Event – January 9
- Public Works vs. Recreation Coaches Basketball Game – January 17
- Adult Basketball League Registration – Begins January 21

**10. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

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

**11. CONSENT AGENDA**

<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

- A. City Council meeting dates for 2026.
- B. Chatham County Superior Court Clerk Agreement
- C. Amended Affordable Housing Development Agreement Chatham County and Coastal Empire Habitat

**12. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

- A. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Trent Thompson as Agent for Jeanine Thompson et al, 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.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Shawn Randerwala, 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. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for JACP Properties, LP, requesting to rezone 74.56 of 344.86 acres from R-1 to I-1, to allow for future industrial development. PIN # 709076 01016, located in the 1st Council District, off Highway 30.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Gabrielle Nelson, Mayor Pro Tem
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Rufus Bright, Council Member
<b>AYES:</b>	Gabrielle Nelson, Thomas Barbee, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala
<b>NAYES:</b>	ArtLise Alston-Cone

- C. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for Angela J. Anderson, Andrea J. Anderson, & Sparkman Properties, LLC,

requesting to rezone 22.43 acres from R-1 to I-1, to allow for future industrial development. PIN # 70975 01033, located in the 1st Council District, off Highway 30.

<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

D. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of an Ordinance to Amend the City of Port Wentworth Zoning Ordinance to Define and Set Rules for Data Centers

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson recused herself.

City Manager Steve Davis presented a proposed ordinance defining "data center" and "data center complex" for Port Wentworth. Key points included:

- The ordinance does not approve any specific data center but establishes a definition for regulatory purposes.
- Power: Data centers would require their own substations, which would enhance the power grid's redundancy. Georgia Power has sufficient capacity in the region, and data centers can help offset high residential power costs.
- Fiber and Telecommunications: Port Wentworth owns its own fiber optic network connecting to Savannah, Jacksonville, and Atlanta, with open micro ducts available for potential data center use.
- Buffers and Noise: The proposed ordinance includes a 500-foot setback from residential zones, a significant increase from the current 75–100 feet in industrial zones.
- Generators: Generators are limited to emergency use and monthly testing during daytime hours for 15–30 minutes, as recommended by industry experts.
- Location and Zoning: Data centers must be located on industrial-zoned property and cannot be placed in commercial or residential areas.
- Property Values and Taxes: Studies indicate proximity to data centers can increase property values, and Port Wentworth residents benefit from a 100% floating homestead exemption.
- Traffic and Transportation: Data centers generate significantly less truck traffic than warehouses; impacts are limited primarily to car traffic for employees and occasional deliveries.

Councilman Mark Stephen's stated that concerns regarding declining property values near data centers are not supported by evidence. He cited Alpharetta, Georgia, as an example, noting that property values there have significantly increased despite the presence of multiple large and small data centers. He stated that data centers have not negatively impacted noise levels or property values and expressed concern that much of the information circulating on social media is misinformation. He noted his personal experience working in and around data centers and emphasized that few individuals present had firsthand experience with such facilities.

Mayor Gary Norton stated that during his term, water and sewer rates and the millage rate have each been raised only once, and he opposed those increases. He acknowledged both potential benefits and drawbacks of data center development but expressed his belief that the increased tax base from a data center could help keep property taxes, millage, and utility rates lower for residents. He emphasized that his decisions are guided by what he believes is best for the city and its citizens, noting the city's current investments in public infrastructure, such as parks.

Councilwoman Cone expressed concerns regarding the proposed data center ordinance, citing information indicating significant growth in data centers statewide and nationally. She stated the

importance of ensuring the ordinance is written correctly and includes clear terminology consistent with the Georgia Power 2025 Integrated Resource Plan and relevant industry research. She emphasized that while she is not opposed to data centers, she believes the current proposal does not sufficiently protect the city, residents, or quality of life. She further stated that the ordinance should address different types and sizes of data centers, define technical terms, identify permitted locations based on scale, specify resource usage limits, and clarify buffer requirements. She emphasized Council’s responsibility to ensure development regulations are clear, transparent, and protective of the community.

Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone made a motion to table until February or March of 2026, no second.

City Attorney Scott Robichaux explained that the revised ordinance with tracked changes is titled Ordinance 25-12-01, with redlines showing all modifications discussed. Staff noted that Ordinance 25-12-01 is the clean, updated version, while Ordinance 11-10 is the original version.

Councilman Thomas Barbee made a motion for approve the Ordinance 25-12-01 with a change to G2 to the population correction from 20,000 to 27,500 seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright.

<b>RESULT:</b>	<b>APPROVED</b>
<b>MOVER:</b>	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
<b>SECONDER:</b>	Rufus Bright, Council Member
<b>AYES:</b>	Thomas Barbee, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala ArtLise Alston-Cone
<b>NAYES:</b>	Cone

### 13. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Consideration of a Special Use Permit Application submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for JACP Properties, LP requesting to allow outdoor material storage with a rail spur in the I-1 zoning district. PIN # 709076 01016, located in the 1st Council District, off Highway 30, zoned R-1, proposed zoning I-1.
- B. Consideration of a Special Use Permit Application submitted by Phillip R. McCorkle as Agent for Angela J. Anderson, Andrea J. Anderson, & Sparkman Properties, LLC, requesting to allow outdoor material storage with a rail spur in the I-1 zoning district. PIN # 70975 01033, located in the 1st Council District, off Highway 30, zoned R-1, proposed zoning I-1.
- C. Resolution Extending a Moratorium on the Re-Zoning of Any Property to a Residential Classification or District

Councilwoman Cone recused herself from the meeting.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that the proposed ordinance is an extension of existing regulations already in place, similar to those governing multifamily development and related land use.

<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, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

- D. Resolution to Continue Encouraging New Commercial Development Within the City of Port Wentworth by Reducing Fees by 50%

<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, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

- E. Development Agreement between PWCC Landco Main and City of Port Wentworth

<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, Mark Stephens, Rufus Bright, Shawn Randerwala

#### 14. RESOLUTIONS/ORDINANCES/PROCLAMATIONS

#### 15. EXECUTIVE SESSION

##### A. Litigation

##### B. Personnel

##### C. Real Estate

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

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to reconvene. Seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson.

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

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

## 16. ADJOURNMENT

**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

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Mayor Gary Norton

The foregoing minutes are true and correct and approved by me on this \_\_\_\_\_  
day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2026.

ATTEST:

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Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council