



CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH
CITY COUNCIL
MAY 21, 2026

Council Meeting Room

Regular Session

7:00 PM

7224 GA HIGHWAY 21
PORT WENTWORTH, GA 31407

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Mayor Tracy Saunders called the meeting to order.

2. ROLL CALL - CLERK OF COUNCIL

Attendee Name	Title	Status
Tracy Saunders	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

3. PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilman Rufus Bright led the prayer and pledge of allegiance.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

RESULT:	APPROVED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER:	Thomas Barbee, Council Member
SECONDER:	Rufus Bright, Council Member
AYES:	None

5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS & Elections and Appointments

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson recognized City of Port Wentworth's City Clerk, Zahnay Smiley, for earning her Certified Public Manager Certification through the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute. She also acknowledged her in recognition of Municipal Clerks week and expressed appreciation for her service to the City.

6. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

- A. National Nurses Month Proclamation**
- B. National Teacher Appreciation Proclamation**
- C. National Small Business Month Proclamation**
- D. National Mental Health Awareness Month Proclamation**
- E. National Foster Care Month**
- F. Port Wentworth Police Department Recognition**

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson presented the National Nurses Month Proclamation, National Teacher Appreciation Proclamation, National Small Business Month Proclamation, National Mental Health Awareness Month Proclamation, and the National Foster Care Month Proclamation.

National Small Business Month Proclamation

Asia Hankerson, Vice Chair of the Greater Savannah Black Chamber of Commerce, expressed the Chamber’s commitment to advocating for and supporting businesses throughout the region and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to witness the growth and success of both local businesses and the City of Port Wentworth.

Mental Health Awareness Month Proclamation

Dr. Gwendolyn Martin, owner of Dr. Gwen’s Counselor Cafe, spoke on the importance of mental health and emotional well-being. She stated that mental health affects all aspects of daily life and noted that many individuals experience challenges that are not always visible. Dr. Martin encouraged reducing stigma surrounding mental health, seeking support when needed, and fostering communities where individuals feel safe, supported, and valued.

National Foster Care Month Proclamation

Terri Wright of Brightside Child & Family Advocacy spoke about the challenges facing children in foster care. She discussed the vulnerability of children removed from their homes and the significant staffing shortages within the foster care system, noting the increased workload placed on case managers. She explained Brightside’s three areas of focus: Court Appointed Special, supervised family visitation services, and the Brighter Futures program for youth aging out of foster care.

Police Chief Kerry Thomas recognized Lieutenant McPhaul, Assistant Chief Walters, and Assistant Chief Sherrod for completing the Certificate in Human Resource Administration program. Chief Thomas emphasized the importance of professional development, leadership, employee retention, recruitment, and workplace culture within the organization. He stated that their achievement reflects the department’s commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in public service.

City Manager Steve Davis commended Lieutenant McPhaul, Assistant Chief Walters, and Assistant Chief Sherrod for their contributions to the Police Department. He gave special recognition to Chief Walters for his leadership of the Professional Standards Division and his work overseeing personnel investigations and human resources- related functions.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS

A. Debra Puckett
 Discussed the following topic:
 - New Program

B. David Dilly
 Discussed the following topic:
 - Thanked the City

C. Patrick Donovan
Discussed the following topic:
- Petition for temporary moratorium

D. Debra Puckett
Discussed the following topic:
- Data center moratorium

E. Jeff Beauvais
Discussed the following topic:
- Data center moratorium

8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes- April 16, 2026

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

9. CONSENT AGENDA

City Manager Steve Davis explained that the Hazard Mitigation Plan is a joint effort between Chatham County and its municipalities to ensure coordinated emergency management planning, including evacuation procedures and storm preparedness. He stated that the intergovernmental agreement with the City of Savannah for the Benton Boulevard Widening Project, a SPLOST Tier One project is scheduled to begin in October. He noted that the project is funded through contributions from the City of Port Wentworth, the City of Savannah, and the State of Georgia.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked if the widening project consisted of going from a 4 lane to a 6 lane?

City Manager Davis stated that the project will consist of going from 2 lanes to 4 lanes. He stated that the project plans have been presented by GDOT and project engineer during public information sessions and that the city may consider hosting an additional information meeting for residents.

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

- A. Adoption of the Chatham County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan
- B. City of Savannah Agreement Benton Boulevard/Highland Widening Project

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- A. Consideration of the 2nd Reading of a Zoning Map Amendment Application has been submitted by Whitney L. Williams, requesting to rezone 2.73 acres from R-1 to C-1, to allow for office use. PIN # 70978 04001, located in the 3rd Council District, at 640 Meinhard Road. 2nd Reading

City Planner Katie Dunnigan stated that the staff’s recommendations for approval included conditions excluding certain C-1 permitted and special-use activities, specifically cemeteries, contractor facilities, antennas or cellular towers, gas stations, and RV parks.

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

11. NEW BUSINESS

City Attorney Scott Robichaux presented two ordinances for first reading amending Chapter 13 of the City Code relating to motor vehicles and traffic. He stated that the first ordinance would establish a 25-mile-per-hour speed limit on the portion of Coastal Highway recently transferred to City jurisdiction by GDOT and would implement a restriction on commercial truck traffic to prevent its use as a bypass route. He stated that the second ordinance would create a city code violation for operating a vehicle too fast for existing conditions and would formally incorporate the Traffic Violations Bureau fine schedule into the City Code. He stated that because both ordinances amend Chapter 13, a combined public hearing could be held.

Councilman Shawn Randerwala asked what speed limit would be set?

City Attorney Robichaux stated the speed limit will be set to 25 mph.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked as a city and enforcement, how will a local driver be differentiated from a non-local driver?

City Manager Davis stated that the City had coordinated with affected stakeholders, including International Paper, the Savannah Sugar Refinery, the Georgia Ports Authority, local timber operations, and DSI. He explained that commercial truck traffic would continue to be restricted from using Coastal Highway as a through route, while allowing limited local access where necessary. He stated that DSI trucks would be permitted to use the shortest available route from Bonnybridge Road to the facility, limiting truck travel to a single block and preventing through traffic in the downtown area. He stated

that local delivery traffic serving businesses along Crossgate Road, including existing and future commercial establishments, would continue to have access for deliveries.

Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone cone asked what the projected cost to taxpayers and officers would be?

City Manager Davis stated that existing personnel would be utilized to monitor compliance and that no additional officers would be assigned specifically to the Coastal Highway corridor. He stated that enforcement efforts would focus more closely on the area during the transition period. He explained that while the upcoming budget includes additional traffic-related personnel, those positions are intended to address increased traffic demands associated with events and activities anticipated at Anchor Park rather than enforcement of the Coastal Highway restrictions. He also stated that the cost would be minimal.

- A. Revising Portions of Chapter 13, Motor Vehicle and Traffic, of the City of Port Wentworth Code of Ordinances, Regarding Speed Limit and Trucks on Coastal Highway 1st Reading

- B. Revising Portions of Chapter 13, Motor Vehicle and Traffic, of the City of Port Wentworth Code of Ordinances, Regarding Too Fast For Conditions and Fines 1st Reading

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

13. ADJOURNMENT

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

Mayor Tracy Saunders

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

ATTEST:

Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council