



CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH

CITY COUNCIL

JUNE 18, 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

Councilman Mark Stephens made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition of a Proclamation honoring Silas "Bill" William, seconded by Councilman Rufus Bright.

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

5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS & ELECTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

6. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

A. Juneteenth Proclamation

B. National Blood Donor Day Proclamation**C. Men's Health Month Proclamation****D. Pride Month Proclamation****E. Small Cities Month Proclamation- National League of Cities****F. National Garden Week Proclamation**

Councilman Rufus Bright presented the Juneteenth Proclamation.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson presented the National Blood Donor Day Proclamation, the Men' Health Month Proclamation, the Small Cities Week Proclamation, and Silas "Bill" William Proclamation.

Mayor Tracy Saunders presented the Pride Month Proclamation.

Councilman Thomas Barbee presented the National Garden Week Proclamation.

National Blood Donor Day

A representative from The Blood Connection stated that the City's efforts have helped save more than 200 lives. She explained that the blood collected during the City's blood drive remains local and will be available for use at Memorial Health and other local hospitals. She explained the ongoing need for blood donations, stating that blood cannot be manufactured and depends entirely on volunteer donors.

Pride Month

A representative from the Savannah Pride Center highlighted the services provided by the organization, including healthcare, mental health support, and resources for the LGBTQIA+ community, stating that they serve residents throughout the area, including Port Wentworth. The representative emphasized the importance of creating a community where all residents feel safe, respected, and supported, and thanked the city for continuing the conversation around diversity and inclusion.

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

6/19/2026 - Juneteenth Celebration - City Hall - 5:30pm - 9:00pm

7/03/2026 - Independence Day - City Hall Closed

07/06/26- Planning & Zoning - 3:30pm - City Hall

07/10-11* - Basketball Tournament - Hosted by Building Hearts

07/11/26 - Rec Rally & The Heart Festival - Behind City Hall

07/16/26 - City Council Meeting - 7pm - City Hall

07/24/26- Skate Night - Gym

08/01/26 - Jazz Fest -Anchor Park - Vystar Pavilion Opening Day

08/07/26 - Billy Currington - Anchor Park - Vystar Pavilion

08/08/26 - Bronco's Back-to-School Football Game vs Hilton Head - Mobley Park 4pm

Car Show - Festival Site 12pm 3pm

08/14/26 - Skate Night - Gym

July Sports Clinics Begin:

July 6-9 - Basketball Clinic- 9am-12pm - Gym

July 7-9- Football Strength Training 6pm-8pm - FREE

July 13-16 - Soccer Sports Clinic - 9am-12pm - Soccer Fields

Cheer Sports Clinic -9am -12pm - Gym

Football Sports Clinic w/ Bronco's - 9am-12pm- Mobley Park

Summer Open Gym Hours vary throughout the week so check our website with dates and hours:

Sunday's May 24-July 26 Dates: 6:00-8:00

Other City Events Continued:

- Closure of southbound left-turn lanes on Highway 21 at Coldbrook Station Road and Traveler's Way due to safety concerns. The Highway 21 widening project is currently in the right-of-way acquisition phase, with construction anticipated in FY29.

- A delay on the Effingham Parkway Project due to additional drainage and bridge work required after last year’s hurricane event. The project is now expected to open in phases, with completion anticipated in spring of next year.

Deputy Fire Chief Morilla recognized Lieutenant Brent Menace for five years of service with the city.

Police Chief Kerry Thomas recognized Detective Kenneth Meeks for his commitment to enhancing the department’s forensic capabilities. Detective Meeks recently completed his final class to become a certified forensic technician, bringing additional skills and professionalism to the department. Chief Thomas recognized Detective Aaron Green for 10 years of service and thanked him for his dedication, experience, and continued contributions as a supervisor within the Criminal Investigations Division. He also recognized Lieutenant James Allen for his leadership, accountability, and commitment to training and mentoring officers. He highlighted Lieutenant Allen’s dedication to professionalism, public service, and supporting the department’s mission.

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS

A. Patrick Donovan

Discussed the following topic:

- Data Center Moratorium

B. David Dilly

Discussed the following topic:

- Campaign Event

8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes- May 21, 2026

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

9. CONSENT AGENDA

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

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 2nd Reading

City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated that truck restrictions were already in place on Crossgate Road, and this ordinance ensures consistency and eliminates any confusion. He also explained that revisions were made to clarify that vehicles with legitimate deliveries to businesses along the restricted access areas are permitted to access the roadway for delivery purposes but must exit the roadway after completing their deliveries.

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

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 2nd Reading

City Attorney Scott Roichaux stated that the ordinance codifies existing state law regarding the establishment of fines, which may be set by resolution of the Chief Municipal Court Judge. He stated that the update provides clarity and allows the public to easily access information regarding applicable fines.

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

11. NEW BUSINESS

A. Adoption of Millage Rate

City Manager Steve Davis stated that there will be no millage rate increase for the upcoming year, maintaining the current millage rate of 5.216 mills. He explained that the item would be a simple up-or-down vote, consistent with Council's direction to maintain the existing rate.

Councilman Mark Stephens asked if you compare it to other cities of similar size, is it still a good bargain.

City Manager Davis stated that the City's millage rate remains lower than comparable cities while

maintaining a conservative budget. He highlighted the City's rapid growth, including an 18% year-over-year increase, while continuing to provide and expand essential services, including police, fire, public works, and infrastructure.

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

- B. Adoption of FY 27 Budget- 1st Reading
- Public Hearing

City Manager Steve Davis stated that the current downtown fire station is a three-bay station but is only staffed with one engine. The department's main headquarters is now located at Anchor Park, where additional equipment and personnel are based. He explained that the level of service downtown would remain the same. He explained that the potential sale of the current properties would help offset the cost of a new downtown station and provide opportunities for additional commercial development. He emphasized the need to modernize City facilities, including improvements for the Police Department.

Councilwoman Cone asked about the possibility of using the current downtown fire station and renovating or expanding the facility to include the Police Department.

City Manager Davis stated that using the current fire station for the Police Department is only one option being considered. Other options include the community house and additional locations that are currently being evaluated. He explained that any renovations or reuse of existing buildings would be completed in compliance with building codes, safety standards, and public health requirements. He stated that if a building cannot be safely renovated, other options, including demolition and rebuilding, would be considered. He explained that the proposed downtown redevelopment plan focuses on creating opportunities around the city festival site, commercial areas, and the Main Street corridor, which were identified as key areas for future redevelopment.

- C. Budget Amendment For The Years Ending 6/30/2025

- Public Hearing
- Action

City Manager Steve Davis stated that presented a FY25 budget transfer to correct a departmental coding error. He stated that the funds were placed under the incorrect department number but were already included in the budget. The transfer simply moves the funds to the correct department and has no impact on overall funding or costs.

- D. Fee Schedule Amendment

City Manager Davis explained that the fee schedule amendment will create a uniform sewer rate across the City. Previously, rates varied depending on which wastewater treatment system served the area, as some residents were connected to the City's wastewater treatment plant and others to the Savannah wastewater system, which resulted in different costs. He stated that the City is moving to a single sewer billing structure, similar to the unified water rate previously implemented. He explained that enterprise funds, including sanitation, water, and sewer services, are structured to break even, with revenues covering operating costs.

City Manager Davis stated that the sanitation fee adjustment is due to the contractual 2.5% annual increase from the City's sanitation provider, which will be passed along to residents. He

explained that water and sewer rates will increase from \$1.94 to \$2.00 per 100 cubic feet, representing a six-cent increase. Residential sanitation rates will increase from \$26.92 to \$30.00 per month due to the contractual rate adjustment with the provider.

Councilman Thomas Barbee asked if the updated fees would go into effect on July 15th and apply to the applicable existing and future customers?

City Manager Davis stated it will apply to everyone.

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

E.

Ordinance to Revise Portions of Chapter 11, Licenses and Taxation, of the City of Port Wentworth Code of Ordinances, Regarding Lodging Excise Tax Rate- 1st Reading

- Public Hearing

City Attorney Scott Robichaux explained that the State previously authorized the city to increase the hotel/motel tax rate up to 8%, and the city has adopted the 8% rate in recent budgets. He stated that an older ordinance still reflected the previous 6% rate, and this amendment simply updates the ordinance to match the current rate.

F. Resolution Extending a Moratorium on the Re-Zoning of Any Property to a Residential Classification or District

City Manager Davis stated that the moratorium has previously been extended for two six-month periods, and this request would add another six months. He explained that there is still a significant amount of approved residential inventory that has not yet been fully constructed, with multiple developments remaining in the pipeline. He stated that, due to the City's rapid growth and the need to ensure infrastructure and wastewater capacity are prepared, an additional six-month extension is recommended.

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

G. Community Relations and Marketing Agreement

City Manager Davis stated that the goal is to better share the City's progress, highlight ongoing projects, and provide a more polished presentation of the work being done. He explained that, after reviewing several options, a local partner was identified that has experience working with the City and hosting community events. He stated that the proposed contract is for one year with two optional renewal years and that the initial year's cost is not an increase from the previous provider. Future years would include scheduled contract increases if renewed. He expressed confidence that this partnership would enhance the City's communication efforts.

Councilman Barbee asked if Live Like Locals is a one-year contract?

City Manager Davis stated it is a one-year contract, two-year renewal.

Councilwoman Cone asked if there will be an evaluation form?

City Manager Davis stated that there will be more consistent updates to the public through monthly or quarterly communications, highlighting ongoing projects and sharing the progress being made throughout the city.

Mayor Pro-Tem Nelson asked what other agencies were contacted?

City Manager Davis stated that they looked into three options. Which included the current agency, Live Like Locals, and bringing it in house.

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

- H. Alcoholic Beverage License Application submitted by Keith J. Wilson for Distilled Spirits Consumption on Premises/ Wine Consumption on Premises / Malt Beverage Consumption on Premises Sales License for Ice Cove (18 Anchor Park Boulevard located in a C-2 (General Commercial Zoning District**
- Public Hearing

City Manager Steve Davis stated that all required state approvals and background checks for the management team have been completed. He explained that separate licenses are required because the Ice Cove and amphitheater have different addresses, although both facilities will be operated by the same management company. He stated that the Oak View Group will manage all food and beverage operations at both locations.

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

- I. Alcoholic Beverage License Application submitted by Keith J. Wilson for Distilled Spirits Consumption on Premises/ Wine Consumption on Premises / Malt Beverage Consumption on Premises Sales License for VyStar Pavillion (20 Anchor Park Boulevard) located in a C-2 (General Commercial) Zoning District
- Public Hearing

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

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

Councilman Thomas Barbee made a motion to adjourn to executive session, seconded by Councilman Mark Stephens.

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

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

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

13. ADJOURNMENT

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