CITY OF PORT WENTWORTH

CITY COUNCIL

OCTOBER 22, 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
ArtLise Alston-Cone	Council Member	Present
Rufus Bright	Council Member	Present
Shawn Randerwala	Council Member	Present
Thomas Barbee	Council Member	Absent
Mark Stephens	Council Member	Absent

3. PRAYER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Councilman Rufus Bright led the prayer and pledge of allegiance.

4. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Councilwoman Gabrielle Nelson made a motion to approve the agenda with the addition of the Retired Educators Month Proclamation under Item 6 and the addition of Item B, Update on Inmate Labor, under the Consent Agenda. Councilman Rufus Bright seconded the motion.

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

5. RECOGNITION OF SPECIAL GUESTS AND ELECTIONS & APPOINTMENTS

6. COMMUNICATIONS & PETITIONS

A. National Domestic Violence Month Proclamation

B. National Breast Cancer Awareness Month Proclamation
C. National Head Start Awareness Month Proclamation
D. World Habitat Day (1st Monday in October)
E. City Manager Update

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson presented the National Domestic Violence Month Proclamation, the National Breast Cancer Awareness Month Proclamation, the National Head Start Awareness Month Proclamation, the World Habitat Day Proclamation, and the Retired Educators Month Proclamation.

National Domestic Violence Month

Lee Robbins, CEO of Safe Shelter, thanked the Mayor and City Council for the proclamation recognizing Domestic Violence Awareness Month. He stated that Safe Shelter is the second-largest emergency domestic violence shelter in Georgia, with 48 beds, and provides case management, counseling, and other support services to survivors and their children. He stated that the shelter serves more children than parents and emphasized the importance of community support in helping survivors and preventing domestic violence. He also recognized Followers of Christ Baptist Church for supporting Safe Shelter through its annual fashion show for the past 11 years.

National Head Start Awareness Month

A representative from Head Start shared that it has been under the umbrella of Economic Opportunity for Savannah-Chatham County Area, Inc. (EOA) since 1966, serving families for generations. She stated that the program focuses on the development of the whole child by providing educational, nutritional, and health services, along with support for families. She reported that Head Start currently serves 287 students throughout Chatham County at three locations: the Tyler Campus on Anderson Street, Kingdom Life Campus on Savannah's south side, and Cooper Center in Garden City. She also shared that approximately 97% of students transition from Head Start to kindergarten prepared for school.

World Habitat Day

CEO of Habitat for Humanity, Zerrick Samples, introduced his team, including future Port Wentworth homeowners Henry Bryant, Lamanda Thorpe, and Ashley Edwards. Bryant shared information about his work providing prosthetics and his nonprofit organization, Five Toes Down, Inc., which supports amputees through community resources and events. Thorpe shared that she works at Kingdom Life Center, and Edwards stated that she operates a private in-home childcare business. Samples highlighted the partnership between the city, Chatham County, and Habitat for Humanity in developing the Villages of Carter Manor, an 83-home affordable homeownership community. He stated that the development will provide working families with the opportunity to own homes and become part of the Port Wentworth community.

National Retired Educators Month

Dr. Pamela West, President of the Chatham Retired Educators Association, introduced members of the organization and shared their years of service in education. She thanked the Mayor and City Council for the proclamation and stated that retired educators continue to serve the community through volunteering, mentoring, advocacy, and supporting local schools and nonprofit organizations, particularly those serving children.

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

- Line Dancing - Oct 23 & Nov 13
- Haunted Experience - Oct 27 - 29 - 5:30pm -8:30pm
- Trunk or Treat - Oct 31 - City Hall - 6pm
- Prince & Princess Ball - Building Hearts Athletics Nov 6th
- Savannah Tree Foundation Tree Planting - Nov 12 Tiller Way & Nov 14 Community Garden

- Skate Nights - Nov 20, Dec 22& 29 - Day Skate 11am -4:00pm - P.B. Edwards Gym
- Winter Wonderland Christmas Tree Lighting - Dec 4 - 5:30pm -8:30pm
- Christmas Parade - Dec 5 - 10am
- Goodwill Community Drop-Off Day - Dec 16 - Publix -9am - 12pm, Della Steel 12:30pm - 3pm P.B. Edwards Gym & Senior Center 3pm-6pm, Senior Center Bin 9am -6pm
- Veteran's Day - Nov 11 - City Hall Closed
- Council Meeting - Nov 19 - City Hall 7pm
- Thanksgiving Day - Nov 26th-27h - City Hall Closed
- Sports & Fitness-Walking Club - Every Monday
- Dance - Marilyn Jacobs - Every Monday
- Basketball / Cheer - Practices Begin the week of November 2nd
- Senior Center- Coffee, News & Trivia - Every Day 9am
- Blood Pressure Checks - Every Thursday 9:30am
- Cornhole - Every Wednesday 10am
- Spanish Classes - Every Friday 11am
- Painting with a Twist : Pumpkins - Oct 26
- Halloween Party & Costume Contest - Oct 29 10:30am
- October 23-25: Headbangers Adult Hockey Tournament
- October 23-25: Big Bear Youth Tournament
- October 31: Halloween - 2pm, 5pm & 8pm Spooky Skates
- November 6-8: Hockey Time Veterans Day Tournament
- November 20-22: 200x85 Tier 1 Girls Tournament
- December 4-6: Hockey Time Holiday Tournament
- December 11-13: TCS Hockey Tournament

7. PUBLIC COMMENTS - REGISTERED SPEAKERS

8. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

A. Regular Council Meeting Minutes- September 17, 2026

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

9. CONSENT AGENDA

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

A. Certified City of Civility Renewal

City Manager Steve Davis stated that the City is renewing its designation as a City of Civility through the Georgia Municipal Association. He reviewed the nine pillars of civility, which include being considerate, managing emotions, being kind, actively listening, showing empathy, and thinking about one's impact on others.

9.B) Update on Inmate Labor

City Manager Steve Davis explained that this is an additional one-year extension of the existing contract, with no additional costs. He stated that the extension is already included in the budget and does not require any additional funding.

Councilwoman ArtLise Alston-Cone asked to explain why the extension of the contract is cost effective.

City Manager Davis explained that renewing the inmate labor agreement is a cost-effective option for the City, providing eight to ten inmates daily to assist with ditch cleaning, grass cutting, weed eating, and park maintenance. He stated that the $90,000 annual contract is significantly less than the estimated $600,000 to $700,000 it would cost to hire additional Public Works employees to perform the same work. He also noted that the program benefits participating inmates by allowing them to earn time off their sentences.

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. The City of Port Wentworth proposes to amend the City of Port Wentworth Code of Ordinances, Zoning Ordinances. 2nd Reading

City Attorney Scott Robichaux stated that the amendment updates the Zoning Ordinance to address land uses related to wireless telecommunication towers, private detention centers, and mobile homes, as outlined in the ordinance.

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

11. NEW BUSINESS

A. Adoption of the Interagency Council on Homelessness Five-Year Strategic Plan to End Homelessness.
City Manager Steve Davis emphasized the importance of working with Garden City, Pooler, and

neighboring communities to address homelessness through a collaborative regional effort.

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

B. An application for approval of a Special Use Permit, for a drive-through bank, has been submitted by Gaskins and LeCraw as Agent for WMG Development, for "Fifth Third Bank". PIN # 70906 04044, located in the 4th Council District on Highway 21 and Market Blvd, zoned PUD (Rice Hope - Commercial).

City Planner Katie Dunnigan explained that a bank with a drive-through requires a special use permit under the C-2 zoning guidelines. She also introduced the request for approval of a concept site plan and noted that staff had worked with the applicant to maximize the use of the property.

City Manager Steve Davis stated that there have been meetings with school staff to discuss any necessary changes.

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

C. A request for approval of a Concept Site Plan has been submitted by Gaskins and LeCraw as Agent for WMG Development, for "Fifth Third Bank". PIN # 70906 04044, located in the 4th Council District on Highway 21 and Market Blvd, zoned PUD (Rice Hope - Commercial).

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

D. GMEBS Retirement Plan Amendments Employee Retirement Benefit Enhancement
- Defined Benefit (DB) (Vote 1)
- Defined Contribution (DC) (Vote 2)

City Manager Steve Davis explained that the item was for first reading, with a second reading and

adoption planned for the following month. He stated that the proposed retirement plan changes would increase the employee retirement multiplier to a flat 2%, replacing the current tiered system. The changes were based on a GMA survey and actuarial study and were intended to improve employee recruitment and retention. He also explained that the proposal would provide executive staff with the option of participating in either the defined benefit or defined contribution plan and would adjust compensation for members of the governing body. The estimated cost is $258,000, which would be funded through annual accruals or reserves if needed.

Councilwoman Cone asked why it has to be an amendment as an ordinance?

City Manager Davis explained that the retirement plan changes require a formal ordinance amendment and an actuarial study to determine the cost and ensure the City's contributions are sufficient to cover future retirement benefits and prevent funding deficiencies.

12. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Litigation
B. Personnel
C. Real Estate

Councilman Rufus Bright made a motion to adjourn to executive session, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson.

Mayor Pro-Tem Gabrielle Nelson made a motion to reconvene, seconded by Rufus Bright.

City Attorney Scott Robichaux presented Resolution 26-01-01, which would ratify a real estate transaction previously approved in the City's budget and coordinated with the Port Wentworth Downtown Development Authority.

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

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

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

13. ADJOURNMENT

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

_____
Mayor Tracy Saunder

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

ATTEST:

_____
Zahnay Smoak, Clerk of Council