

**Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
November 26, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes**

In attendance: Mayor John Davis, Mayor Pro Tem William Justice, Commissioner Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Pat Turner, Commissioner Joseph Brown, and Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf.

Call to Order/Opening Prayer/Pledge

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm. Mayor Davis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Rob Johnson, 109 Woodleaf Lane in Jacksonville and a member of the Onslow County Soil & Water Conservation Board of Supervisors, addressed the board about water management and infrastructure, emphasizing the need for effective resource use to support growth and attract industry. He noted that the Richlands wastewater facility isn't reclaiming water as intended and highlighted local challenges with wells and the exploration of costly reverse osmosis systems. Mr. Johnson encouraged the board to consider alternative measures and offered to share his expertise on water and wastewater operations.

Adoption of Agenda and Consent Items

On a motion by Commissioner Turner, seconded by Commissioner Conaway, the agenda along with the below consent items was adopted unanimously.

- September 10, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes
- September 10, 2024, Closed Session Minutes
- September 24, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes
- October 5, 2024, Special Meeting Minutes
- October 22, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes
- October 22, 2024, Closed Session Minutes

Appointments/Recognitions/Presentations

Recognition of John Davis, Mayor

Manager Barlow acknowledged Mayor John Davis for his leadership and service to Swansboro from 2017 to 2024. He reflected on their effective working relationship despite differing personalities and presented Davis with a swan statue as a token of appreciation to mark his contributions as mayor.

The board members expressed their appreciation for Mayor John Davis, highlighting his leadership, dedication, and ability to inspire others. They recalled shared experiences, his behind-the-scenes efforts during challenges like hurricanes, and his role in encouraging and supporting new board members. While they acknowledged occasional

disagreements, they emphasized his focus on serving the community and fostering collaboration. Each member shared personal gratitude for his impact and contributions to the town.

Mayor John Davis thanked the board and staff for their teamwork and efforts. He acknowledged disagreements but noted progress made together. He expressed appreciation to the Town Manager Jon Barlow for returning and recognized the contributions of everyone involved. More detailed comments will be made at the next meeting, which will be the last meeting he will participate in officially.

New River YMCA – Serving all of Onslow County and Beyond

Charlie Myers, CEO of New River YMCA, outlined the organization's growth and plans. The YMCA, currently serving 15 schools and running programs like summer camps and after-school care, is expanding with a new \$22 million facility at Gum Branch. This facility will feature a gym, an aquatic center with an eight-lane pool, fitness areas, and spaces for group exercise classes. The project is expected to open in early 2026, with no debt upon completion. Myers highlighted the YMCA's community-focused mission, including financial assistance for families who need it. The presentation he reviewed is attached herein with the PowerPoint presentation of the meeting.

In response to inquiries from the board, Mr. Myers provided the following details.

- The YMCA is willing to assist in establishing facilities or partnerships in areas like Swansboro and Sneads Ferry to address community needs. Initial steps include conducting a community needs assessment and a feasibility study to determine viability and specific requirements.
- Initial funding requires support from key community members, government officials, and grants. Partnerships with local organizations, such as schools and parks and recreation, could help expand programs like after-school care and summer camps without duplicating existing services.
- The YMCA's national office evaluates factors like population density and location feasibility (e.g., a 15-20 minute drive radius) to assess potential sites. An exploratory committee can help evaluate costs, identify donors, and plan the next steps.
- A branch could start small, using an existing building or a donated facility, and expand as the community's interest and resources grow.
- The YMCA believes the greater Swansboro area could support a facility, considering the population of surrounding communities and regional growth.
- The "C" in YMCA does stand for "Christian" and some YMCAs offering more spiritual education depending on the community's preferences.

While on the subject of recreational facilities, Mayor Davis spoke about the town's hope to rebuild and reopen the skate park. He shared that the legal cases involving the former park have been resolved. He proposed the idea of reallocating \$150,000 from pickleball courts and raising additional funds to create a cement-based park as part of a larger recreational complex, and in turn use the existing skatepark location for Pickelball Courts. Davis emphasized the importance of providing a safe space for kids and reaffirmed the board's commitment to reopening the skatepark.

Business Non-Consent

Appointment of Representative to ONWASA

Town Clerk Fender reviewed that the ONWASA's Board of Directors were appointed to three-year terms by the local governments in the service area. The Board was composed of eight members whose regular meetings are held bi-monthly at Jacksonville City Hall, 815 New Bridge Street, Jacksonville, NC. Mayor Davis currently served as the Swansboro representative, with his recent election to the county, another board member needed to be appointed to fill his term through December 2027.

On a motion by Commissioner Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, and with unanimous approval, Commissioner Brown was appointed to serve on the ONWASA Board of Directors

Public Safety Pay and Classification Study Results

Manager Barlow reviewed the Pay and Classification Study for Public Safety, initiated earlier in the year to address competitive compensation for law enforcement and fire department positions. The study compared Swansboro's salaries with those in similar towns, such as Holden Beach and Oak Island, focusing on 19 positions and 24 individuals. Findings showed that some salaries, particularly starting minimums, needed adjustment. The recommendations include implementing a \$67,000 pay adjustment this fiscal year, with the full impact reflected in the next budget cycle. New minimum salaries will serve as the hiring rate, with potential merit-based increases after probation. Barlow emphasized the importance of competitive pay for recruitment and retention, and board members commended the effort.

Commissioner Eckendorf expressed optimism about Swansboro's growth, highlighting five significant commercial capital improvements that could generate future revenue. He reaffirmed his commitment to strategic budgeting, including a two-cent tax reduction next year, supported by the town's strong financial position. Each tax penny represents \$71,000, and he is confident the necessary funds will be available to prioritize public safety and attract talent. While acknowledging the challenge of retaining all employees, he emphasized the town's role in fostering growth and competitiveness, even if some staff eventually move on.

Mayor Davis shared that he had been trying to accomplish an increase to public safety salaries for seven years and this plan finally gets their salaries closer to what they should be, even though it's still below federal levels. He urged approval of the plan, calling it one of the most important steps during his time as mayor.

On a motion by Commissioner Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Turner, with unanimous approval, the recommended Pay and Classification Plan revisions as presented with full implementation effective the first pay period in January 2025 was approved.

Monthly Financial Report as of October 31, 2024

Finance Director Johnson reviewed details from the monthly financial report, attached herein with the power point presentation of the meeting.

In response to inquiries from the board Mrs. Johnson clarified the following:

- Assured the board that the Emergency Management Department Budget would not go over budget, noting that a budget amendment for hours and reimbursements related to personnel that provided Hurricane relief assistance to Western North Carolina was forthcoming.
- Regarding the American Rescue Plan, she explained that funds must be obligated by December 31, 2026, and she planned to request authority for the town manager to allocate any remaining funds where needed. She clarified that some of the funds were saved for projects like Parks and Recreation and the splash pad, but the exact amount was minimal.
- Regarding the \$40,000 to be distributed to the previously designated 4 agencies to support Hurricane relief efforts, she was waiting on necessary documentation, such as W-9 forms, and would follow up to ensure completion.
- The town earns approximately \$36,000 monthly in interest and the North Carolina Cash Management Trust had earned about \$95,000 in interest to date. Board members suggested that this detail be reported regularly.
- Interest earned from Emergency Operation Center/Public Safety Building SCIF funds must be reinvested into the project.

Future Agenda Topics

Future agenda items were shared for visibility and comments. In addition, an opportunity was provided for the board to introduce items of interest and subsequent direction for placement on future agendas. No additional items were added.

Public Comment

Jamie Cushine Petani, Joyce Johnson, and David Johnson spoke against the future Flybridge development on Highway 24 in Swansboro, citing concerns about rapid growth straining infrastructure, traffic, schools, and emergency services. They

emphasized safety issues, including difficulties accessing emergency services due to understaffing and congestion. Additionally, they highlighted the lack of job opportunities to support the expanding population along with suggesting a moratorium on development.

Board Comments

Board members recognized concerns about fast growth and its impact on roads, schools, and emergency services. They noted that state control makes it hard to make local road improvements and encouraged residents to speak up to county and state officials. The board stressed the need for better planning, teamwork between local governments, and more community involvement to manage future development.

Mayor Davis requested that the Town Planner and Manager create a report for the board that would keep them updated on town news to stay ahead of social media discussions. He stated that the board will be involved in the reviews and approvals needed for apartment projects and emphasized the importance of the public understanding of the process. He reminded the board of their special joint meeting with the TDA and shared his thoughts that tourism funds should be used to support local nonprofits and acknowledged the board's decision to support police and fire services. He also stated his appreciation for the staff, his wife's support during his tenure as Mayor, and others for their contributions to the town's success.

Closed Session

On a motion by Commissioner Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, and with unanimous approval, at 7:56 pm the board entered closed session pursuant to NCGS 143-318.11 (a)(5) to establish, or to instruct the public body's staff or negotiating agents concerning the position to be taken by or on behalf of the public body in negotiating the price and other material terms of a contract or proposed contract for the acquisition of real property by purchase, option, exchange, or lease.

Pursuant to a motion duly made and seconded in closed session the board returned to open session.

Adjournment

On a motion by Commissioner Eckendorf, seconded by Commissioner Conaway, the meeting adjourned at 8:42 pm.