

Town of Swansboro
Board of Commissioners
February 7, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes

Board of Commissioners in attendance: Mayor Pro Tem William Justice, Commissioner Jeffrey Conaway, Commissioner Joseph Brown, and Commissioner Douglas Eckendorf. Commissioner Pat Turner was absent. The board had 1 vacancy.

Call to Order/Opening Prayer/Pledge

The meeting was called to order at 1:06 pm. Mayor Pro Tem Justice led the Pledge of Allegiance. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Town of Swansboro's future needs with North Carolina State Representative Wyatt Gable.

Rep. Gable shared he requested this meeting because he understood the need for stronger communication between local, county, and state governments and his goal was to better understand the town's needs ahead of the legislative session. Mr. Gable reaffirmed his commitment to representing local voices but cautioned that much of the state's available funding had already been allocated to Western North Carolina for Hurricane Helene relief, limiting resources for other areas.

Items discussed by the board with Rep Gable were as follows:

SCIF funds for the Town to build a new Emergency Operations Center/Public Safety Building and to complete sidewalks

Commissioner Eckendorf shared that it had been mentioned that the state could request those funds back and wanted Rep. Gable to report that the town was working to get both projects underway. Rep. Gable shared that he firmly believed those funds would not be taken back.

Safety Incident at the Landings

Commissioner Brown shared that a citizen had written the state regarding a facility, the Landings in Swansboro, sharing all the serious concerns she had, and her letters were unanswered. Rep. Gable shared that he had not seen such a letter and without knowing who exactly it was sent to, he could not speak for responses that would come from other representatives.

Legislative Bill Concerns

Commissioner Conaway shared his concern that some recent state laws, like Senate Bill 382, were taking away the ability of local towns and cities to make their own decisions about growth and development. He's worried that lawmakers who didn't live in the area were making choices that could overload local services like police, fire, roads, and water. He feels that local leaders know best what their towns can handle. Rep. Gable responded by explaining that if a

law affects more than 15 counties, it had to go through the full state legislature. If it affects 15 or fewer, it can move forward more easily. He also said he doesn't agree with the way lawmakers sometimes add unrelated items to big bills to get them passed, and he'd rather see one issue voted on at a time.

Infrastructure and Schools

Mayor Pro Tem Justice shared several concerns about local infrastructure, especially roads and schools. Queens Creek Road was a focus due to frequent accidents, three schools at the intersection with Highway 24, numerous housing projects, and the bridge repair that was originally planned for 2025 was now delayed to 2030. The need to prioritize this project for safety reasons was stressed. Main Street Extension was also mentioned, with paving expected to be finished by November. A future light industrial area was also mentioned, and while it wasn't expected to cause major traffic or drainage issues, members agreed it's important to finish road work to prepare for growth.

Board members shared frustration that Swansboro often gets passed over compared to other faster growing towns in the county, which were getting new schools. Although Swansboro wasn't officially overcrowded, the town had grown, and buildings like the middle school were old and in need of replacement. It was noted that school funding comes from the county and pushed for stronger communication with the county to get more support.

Comments/Questions from the Public

Jimmy Williams, of the Tideland Newspaper inquired on where Rep. Gable stood on the recent efforts to move public and legal notices from newspapers to online platforms, expressing concern for those who may not have access to the web. He provided examples, such as notices to creditors, public hearing notices, and notices for the sale of impounded vehicles or unpaid storage contents, which are typically required to be published in a newspaper. Mr. Williams emphasized the importance of keeping these notices in print, as they serve as reminders for people to address important matters. Rep. Gable acknowledged Williams' concerns and expressed support for keeping notices in print, recognizing that not everyone has online access.

John Hunnings of 81 Pickett Way inquired why coastal residents bear higher insurance costs for hurricane damage while other parts of the state, also affected by storms, do not share the financial burden. Rep. Gable acknowledged the issue and asked Mr. Hunnings to email the question so he could follow up with research.

Tim Simpson of 609 Shore Drive, and owner of Lady Swan Boat Tours extended an invitation to Rep. Gable to take a cruise while he was in town.

Commissioner Conaway remembered something he wished to ask which was related to Mr. Simpson, and that was about the process of appointing members to the Marine Fisheries Commission. He inquired if that process could be changed to reduce political influence. Suggesting a more balanced appointment structure similar to other state boards, due to concerns that current restrictions unfairly impact recreational fishermen. Mr. Simpson shared that as a commercial fisherman he was also hurt by the restrictions.

John Davis of 403 Glancy Street thanked Rep. Gable for coming and listening to the Board and public. He emphasized the need for a more integrated county plan that encourages better collaboration between town managers and municipalities. He pointed out that too often, efforts are siloed, which limits efficiency and progress. He supported the idea of improved coordination, especially regarding funding and grants from the state, and highlighted the importance of transparency and teamwork. Additionally, he committed to obtaining a copy of the 10-year plans presented to the Onslow County Board this past week related to Onslow County Schools to share with the board.

Board Comments

The board thanked Rep. Gable for visiting and listening to their concerns, sharing that it meant a lot since past leaders hadn't done the same. They hoped to have similar meetings regularly and asked him to keep local needs like roads, sidewalks, and schools in mind.

Adjournment

On a motion by Commissioner Conaway, seconded by Commissioner Eckendorf, the meeting adjourned at 2:07 pm.