

BOARD OF ALDERMEN MINUTES

APRIL 14, 2026, 5:30PM

TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 321 CAUSEWAY DRIVE, WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH

The meeting was called to order at 5:30pm by Mayor Dull. After the Pledge of Allegiance, the invocation was provided by Rev. Caroline Jinkins, Little Chapel on the Boardwalk. The following were present:

Board of Aldermen

Ken Dull, Mayor
Jeff DeGroote, Mayor Pro-Tem
Margaret Baggett, Alderman
Vivian (Zeke) Partin, Alderman
Todd Schoen, Alderman

Staff

Haynes Brigman, Town Manager
Lance G. Heater, Town Clerk
Grady Richardson, Town Attorney
Jason Bishop, Police Chief
Matt Holland, Fire Chief
Bailey Hartsell, Communications Manager
Katie Carus-Childers, Parks & Rec. Director
Tony Wilson, Director of Planning
Brian Murray, Finance Director
Robert O'Quinn, Senior Planner

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Rick Liston, 8 Lookout Harbor, representing the Pier to Pier Swim - Stoked to Go Out event, stated that the event traditionally took place on the Saturday preceding the Memorial Day Holiday and that the agenda item wherein the Parks & Recreation Advisory Commission recommends that special events during the period of bridge construction be restricted to only Town events during that time would force the rescheduling of that event. Liston asked that the event be allowed on its normal date as the impact on traffic is minimal.

Sue Bulluck, representing the WB Chamber of Commerce, expressed appreciation to the Town for the use of TDA funds in renovation of the Chamber facility and asked that the issue of the NCDOT Eastwood/Military Cutoff flyover overpass project be added to the responsibilities of the Bridge Replacement Committee.

Nancy Patch, 613B S. Lumina, expressed opposition to the NCDOT project U-5710, the Eastwood/Military Cutoff flyover project, being constructed during the Wrightsville Beach bridge replacement projects and the lack of public interface during project planning. Patch asked that the Board file an NCDOT STIP amendment resolution asking for postponement of the project and reevaluation with current data in the meantime.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon motion by DeGroote, seconded by Partin and carried unanimously, the Consent Agenda was approved. It consisted of: 1) approval of the open session minutes of the 3-12-26 regular meeting and the 3-24-26 budget work session; 2) acknowledgement of previously approved special events for May; and 3) adoption of Resolution (2026) 2370 approving a contract for the FY25-26 audit with Martin Starnes & Associates.

CONSIDER A PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT FY26-27 BUDGET AND SET A PUBLIC HEARING ON THE BUDGET FOR MAY 12, 2026

Brigman stated: 1) the budget development process began in January, with four budget workshops held with the Board of Aldermen; 2) the budget process followed NC General Statutes for preparing budget plans for raising and spending funds for specific programs, services, and capital during a fiscal year; 3) the budget must be balanced – revenues equal expenses; 4) the fiscal year runs from July 1, 2026 to June 30, 2027; and 5) significantly reduced Enterprise Fund budget this year with the merger/elimination of the Water & Sewer Department. Brigman reviewed fund accounting for the Town, noting that there were 3 types of funds – General Fund, enterprise funds (the Stormwater Fund) and restricted funds (Powell Bill Fund and Capital Reserve Fund).

Brigman listed budget priorities as: 1) create a budget that meets the current and future needs of the Town; 2) focus on quality of life factors for residents (public safety concerns, amenity improvements, and aesthetic enhancements); 3) maintain healthy reserve funds (Fund Balance); preparing for future challenges and threats (bridge replacement projects, disaster recovery, and beach renourishment); 4) the budget is balanced, with no use of Fund Balance (reserve fund), and no increase in the property tax rate; 5) research new/enhanced services and facilities for residents through planning and community engagement efforts such as the P&R Master Plan update and Municipal Complex Master Plan; and 6) continue to plan for impacts of the bridge replacement projects.

Brigman stated that the draft FY2027 budget was prepared using a Tax Rate of \$0.0531 per \$100 valuation, which is the same tax rate utilized for the FY2026 budget following the property revaluation process conducted by New Hanover County. The Town experienced limited property value growth (+/- 1%) from the previous year, which is typical for a community with limited development opportunities and following the tax revaluation process, the Town saw a larger than normal reduction in tax values after appeals were completed with a decrease in the tax base of \$138 million.

Brigman noted that due to New Hanover County's sales tax distribution methodology, and other NHC jurisdictions potentially adopting tax rates higher than their current rates, the Town could see reduced Sales Tax collections, estimated at \$200,000. Another factor in revenue reduction is that the Town previously allocated funds from the Water/Sewer Enterprise Fund to the General Fund to offset administrative expenses resulting in a net reduction of \$230,000 in annual revenue for the General Fund compared to FY2025. Increased operating expenses included health insurance premium increase and benefit improvements and increases in expenses for contracted services.

Brigman provided an overview of General Fund revenues, expenses by department, and the Capital Improvement Plan. In summarizing the General Fund, Brigman noted: 1) no significant service delivery changes expected for FY2027; 2) no new personnel requests; 3) the budget proposed a 3.3% CPI/COLA increase and a 0-5% merit pool, with no health/dental/vision plan changes; 4) no administrative or organizational changes for departments; 5) continued technology advancements across the Town; 6) vehicle and equipment replacements for greater efficiency and operational effectiveness; and 7) significant planning initiatives across the Town for current and future needs. Brigman noted that no changes were proposed to the Town's Fee Schedule and that parking rates were adopted prior to the current parking season. Brigman stated that the Board could consider fee schedule changes throughout the year, such as those currently being considered by advisory boards.

In conclusion, Brigman stated that copies of the draft budget were available upon request and that a public hearing would be held on May 12, with Board consideration of adoption following the public hearing. It was the consensus of the Board that the public hearing be scheduled for May 12. The Mayor and Board members expressed appreciation to the staff for their work on the draft budget.

CONDUCT A PUBLIC HEARING AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF A REQUEST FOR AN AMENDMENT TO AN EXISTING CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT FROM MOSHAKOS BLUEWATER LLC

Richardson explained that this agenda item involved a quasi-judicial hearing and outlined the process whereby the hearing would be conducted. At this point, the Clerk administered the oath to all witnesses who proposed to provide testimony.

Wilson stated that the Petitioner, Jessica Humphries, representing the property owner Moshakos Bluewater LLC, was requesting a Conditional use Permit Amendment to expand the decks on the North Side of the Bluewater Restaurant located at 4 Marina St. The proposed uncovered wooden deck area was approximately 930 Square feet. Wilson explained that there is an existing conditional use permit for the restaurant which was approved on January 10, 2010. Wilson stated that a standard restaurant is permitted as a “C” Conditional Use in the C-3 Commercial District.

Wilson stated that the owner can provide 167 parking spaces in the lot directly across the street from the restaurant along Marina Street. There are 40 Public parking spaces available on Marina Street. The required off-street parking for a standard restaurant is based on occupancy and the number of employees on the largest shift. The applicant proposes a total occupancy of 572 people, which would require 143 spaces. The applicant proposes a total of 30 employees on the largest shift, which would require 15 parking spaces. Based on the proposed occupancy and employees, the total required parking spaces is 158.

Wilson explained that a technical review meeting was held with the Town Manager, Fire Chief, Planning Staff, Police Chief and Public Works Director. During that meeting, the Town Manager stated that he would like to see the conditions applied to the original deck approval be applied in the same manner as the alternate decking request. The Fire Chief had questions about the location of the LP tank and recommended that the decks be constructed with fire retardant treated lumber. The Planning Staff also recommended that the deck material be fire retardant treated lumber.

Wilson reviewed the request’s consistency with the 2018 CAMA Land Use Plan policies and noted the following areas under Section 5: Goals and Implementing Actions: (4) The Town will encourage commercial establishments providing basic goods and service to year-round residents and visitors; (8) The Town encourages the improvement, preservation, and enhancement of the Town's neighborhoods; (99) The Town will work to protect the Town's existing commercial base. This task will be accomplished through implementation of this plan and enforcement of local zoning regulations; and (100) The Town supports redevelopment of the Marina, Causeway, CBD, South End and Johnie Mercer's business districts.

Wilson noted Town Code 155.4.5 Special Use Permits which outlined the processes and criteria for approval of such permits. Wilson stated that public notice of this meeting was published on April 3, 2026, in the Star News. The site was posted on April 2, 2026 and notices to adjacent property owners were mailed. Wilson stated that the request is consistent with the 2018 CAMA Land Use Plan and that provided the applicant meets all local, state and federal requirements, staff requests a favorable recommendation for the requested amendment to the conditional-use permit.

Wilson outlined the Board’s options as follows: 1) approve as presented; 2) approve with additional conditions; 3) deny as presented; and 4) continuance of the hearing. Wilson listed the attachments presented in the agenda packet for the Board’s consideration as: 1) conditional-use permit application and supporting documents; 2) 2010 Conditional -Use Permit; 3) Zoning Map 4 Marina Street; 4) proposed deck area; 5) letters to adjacent property owners; and 6) architect's comments on staff questions.

In response to a question from Baggett regarding parking spaces, Wilson responded that no additional parking spaces would be required, as the amendment does not increase the total occupancy of the facility or the number of employees. Richardson clarified that the current proposal is the same square footage as that which was approved in 2010 but not actually built but is in a slightly different configuration.

In response to a question from Richardson, Wilson stated that he had received no comments from adjacent property owners who were notified. Richardson moved that the staff summary contained in the agenda packet be accepted into evidence as Exhibit 1, to which the applicant's attorney had no objection.

Jessica Humphries, attorney for the applicant, stated that Wilson had done an excellent job of explaining the request and stated that the amendment involved a minor design change to that which was approved in 2010 involving the deck on the north side of the building. Humphries reiterated that there was no change in the square footage, no increase in the decking, no increase in the impervious area, no increase in the number of seats and no increase in parking needs. Humphries stated there was no greater impact on any environmental aspects to the surrounding properties. Humphries stated that the applicant was prepared to accept the conditions proposed by the staff if these are included in the approval.

Frank Smith, architect for the applicant, displayed a PowerPoint presentation in which the project was detailed. Smith stated that the LP tanks would be moved in accordance with the Town's request. It was agreed that Smith's PowerPoint would be accepted into evidence as Exhibit 2.

Sue Bulluck, representing the Chamber of Commerce, expressed support for the request.

Upon motion by DeGroot, seconded by Partin and carried unanimously, the public hearing was closed at 6:30pm.

Upon motion by Partin, seconded by Baggett and carried unanimously, the Board approved the conditional use permit amendment as proposed with the conditions added by staff.

CONDUCT A PUBLIC HEARING AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF ORDINANCE (2026) 1870 AMENDING SECTION 155 OF THE TOWN CODE REGARDING LIGHTING

O'Quinn stated that the proposed draft was more than a reorganization of the current ordinance and included several substantive policy changes. O'Quinn reported that the draft expands the purpose section, adds more detailed commercial lighting standards, creates a separate section for commercial dock and pier lighting, revises residential lighting regulations, and imposes more restrictive standards for private docks and piers. The draft also shortens the compliance period for lawful nonconforming lighting from three years to two years and revises the maximum illumination table by narrowing the listed land use categories and removing roadway standards from the section.

O'Quinn said the draft further removes the current exemption for certain town-owned up-lighting and security lighting on public property. In addition, the draft clarifies that uniformity ratio is measured using an average-to-minimum method in the illumination table. The draft also adds new definitions and illustrative materials intended to improve interpretation and enforcement.

O'Quinn then detailed the proposed new ordinance, noting: 1) Section 155.9.7, "Need and Purpose"; 2) parking lot pole height is reduced from 30 feet to 18 feet; 3) the reworking of all definitions related to lighting; 4) photometric plans required of all new commercial parking lots; 5) technical terms throughout the ordinance have been updated to reflect current technology (lumens and foot candles vs. wattage, for example); 6) exterior lighting must be reviewed prior to issuance of a certificate of occupancy; 7) separation of docks and piers from other structures; 8) maximum mounting height for commercial docks and piers reduced from 25 feet to 15 feet above the lowest platform; 9) holiday lights allowed from Nov. 15 to Jan. 15; 10) underwater decorative and fishing lights prohibited; 11) existing non-conformities must be remedied within 90 days; 12) mounting height for residential docks and piers shall not exceed 10 feet above the point where the dock or pier adjoins the mainland; 13) nonconformities which were made so by the new ordinance shall be removed or rendered in compliance within 2 years; and 14) the addition of illustrations for compliant and noncompliant lighting.

O'Quinn stated that he had been working on a new lighting ordinance for approximately 6.5 years in some capacity. The new ordinance had been developed with the Ad Hoc Lighting Committee and had been through the Planning Board at 12 meetings over 2 years. O'Quinn characterized the new ordinance as a more commonplace reorganization and modernization. O'Quinn stated that he did not believe that the new ordinance would result in a large number of noncompliance cases. Rather, there were more cases of noncompliance with the existing ordinance which would need to be addressed.

The Mayor declared the public hearing open at 6:48pm.

Neal Briggi, 4 W. Henderson St., noting that he had worked as a member of the Ad Hoc Committee for over two years on this issue, stated that there was a significant amount of noncompliance with the existing ordinance which could be easily fixed. Briggi stated that the type of housing and lighting installations had changed over the years to include a great deal of demonstrative lighting which violates both the existing and new ordinance.

Jim Smith, 54 Pelican Dr., also noted that he had served on the Ad Hoc Committee and Planning Board, stated that the Town had become "Las Vegas" with its lighting. Smith said the Town should correct any instances of noncompliance for its own properties first.

There being no other persons present who wished to speak, the Mayor declared the public hearing closed at 6:54pm.

Schoen expressed concern regarding uplighting, stating that he did not personally find it particularly offensive. Brigman emphasized that the Town's enforcement efforts would remain complaint-driven, as the Town does not have the staff to go out and look for instances of noncompliance. Brigman stated the Town had corrected instances of its own noncompliance and would continue to do so.

Partin thanked the members of the Ad Hoc Lighting Committee, which she chaired, stating that the effort to develop the new ordinance was an arduous task. Partin noted that the next lighting-related ordinance proposal would involve beachfront lighting which affects wildlife such as birds and sea turtles.

DeGroote expressed support for the ordinance, stating that it cleaned up the language and made it easier for people to understand.

Dull stated that the new ordinance allowed the Town to be clearer in what the requirements are, noting that the existing ordinance was not as clear. Dull expressed the hope that citizens could read it for themselves and bring their properties into compliance. Dull expressed appreciation to the Ad Hoc Committee, staff and Planning Board for their work on the ordinance.

Upon motion by Partin, seconded by Baggett and carried unanimously, the Board adopted Ordinance (2026) 1870.

CONSIDER A RECOMMENDATION FROM THE PARKS & RECREATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE REGARDING SPECIAL EVENTS DURING THE PERIOD OF BRIDGE REPLACEMENTS

Carus-Childers stated that numerous events occur each year with little or no impact to the community and traffic flow while others cause significant disruption to parking and vehicle movement. Organizers of some events require facility reservations and other logistical considerations years in advance of their scheduled events. Carus-Childers stated that these organizers need to know whether or not Wrightsville Beach will allow special events during the bridge replacement projects.

Carus-Childers reported that at the 4-2-26 meeting, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee discussed the future of special events and filming during the upcoming bridge replacement projects.

The committee discussed the current impact of these activities on the town's residents and businesses as well as the likelihood of an increased impact during the bridge replacement projects. After review, the committee voted unanimously to recommend that during the bridge replacement projects only Town-sponsored events should occur between May 15 through September 15. All other special events and filming requests from May 15 through September 15 should be denied.

Brigman suggested that, as the intent of the Parks & Rec. Adv. Comm. was to disallow events from Memorial Day through Labor Day, that the language of the recommendation be changed to reflect that rather than reference specific dates. Brigman also noted that the Board could change and adapt in accordance with actual needs during bridge replacements.

Schoen noted that there were three existing recurring events which were surf competitions during the Memorial Day to Labor Day period and expressed concern over cancelling them, as they involved less than 200 people.

Partin voiced support for accepting the recommendation of the Parks & Rec. Adv. Comm. with the language suggested by Brigman tying it to the period between the holidays. DeGroote expressed support for tabling the issue until the next meeting so that it could be examined further.

Dull made a motion to continue to allow events in the off season (following Labor Day and prior to Memorial Day) but to table the consideration of events between those holidays until the next meeting. The motion was seconded by DeGroote and carried unanimously.

CONSIDER AMENDING THE PUBLIC COMMENT POLICY FOR BOARD OF ALDERMEN MEETINGS THROUGH ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION (2026) 2369

Brigman explained that the proposed policy, which had not been updated since 2005, would specify that individuals would have a maximum time of three (3) minutes each to speak and that the total period allowed for public comment would be thirty (30) minutes. Upon motion by DeGroote, seconded by Partin and carried unanimously, the Resolution was adopted.

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF BYLAWS FOR THE PARKING COMMITTEE AND INITIAL APPOINTMENTS TO THE COMMITTEE

Brigman noted that the Board had directed that a Parking Committee be established to advise the Town Manager and Board on matters related to paid parking. A set of bylaws was being proposed and the staff had compiled a list of applications for appointment to the Committee which resulted from the Town's advertisement of vacancies. Brigman stated the Committee would consist of 7 resident members, along with himself and a representative of the Town's parking vendor or other designee of the Town Manager, both of whom would be non-voting. Brigman stated that the Committee had no authority to make independent decisions and would only make recommendations to the Town Manager and Board of Aldermen.

In response to a question from Partin, Brigman stated that meetings of the Committee would be scheduled by the Town Manager but would occur prior to any Board consideration of changes to the paid parking program. Upon motion by Partin, seconded by DeGroote and carried unanimously, the Board approved the proposed set of bylaws.

Using ballots, the Board made the following appointments to the Parking Committee for terms ending in April 2028: Jason Adams, 112 Live Oak Dr., Len Anthony, 812 Schloss St., Bill King, 406 S. Lumina Ave., Karen King, 32 W. Henderson St., Brandon Lisk, 202 S. Channel Dr., Paul Loukas, 608 Coburn Ave., and Hank Miller, 30 W. Greensboro St. Detailed votes were as follows:

PARKING COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS	
APPLICANT	VOTE
Terms ending April 2028	
Jason Adams	Dull, DeGroote, Baggett, Schoen
Len Anthony	Dull, DeGroote, Baggett, Schoen
Bill King	Dull, DeGroote, Baggett, Partin
Karen King	Dull, DeGroote, Baggett, Partin
Brandon Lisk	Dull, DeGroote, Partin
Paul Loukas	Dull, DeGroote, Partin
Hank Miller	Dull, DeGroote, Partin
Neil Briggi	Baggett, Partin
Kelly Fitzpatrick	Schoen
Julie Grimes	Schoen
Hans Pruim	Schoen
Robert Ray	Schoen
Thomas Rosamilia	Baggett, Schoen
Susan Snider	Baggett, Partin

CONSIDER APPROVAL OF SPECIAL EVENT APPLICATIONS BY THE WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH LONGBOARD ASSOCIATION

Carus-Childers reported that the Parks & Rec. Adv. Comm. recommended that the Board deny the following new requests due to their proposed occurrence during the busy season: 1) Surf Festival and Movie Night in the Park (6-20-26); 2) Surf Contest (6-20-26); and 3) Surf Contest (8-15, 26). The Committee recommended approval of: 1) Surf Contest (10-3-26) and 2) Surf Contest (11-28-26) because they are recurring events outside of the busy season.

Partin made a motion to accept the recommendation of the Committee. This motion was seconded by Dull.

Both Schoen and DeGroote expressed reservations regarding voting against surf competitions. In response to a question from Dull, Carus-Childers stated that there would likely be many requests for special events during the busy season if the Board were to consider approval of such events.

The motion was adopted by a vote of 3-2 (DeGroote and Schoen opposed).

OTHER ITEMS & REPORTS:

- A. **Alderman Schoen:** nothing to report
- B. **Alderman Partin:** reported on TDA collections.
- C. **Alderman Baggett:** reported that the Parks & Rec. Adv. Comm. was continuing to work on the survey for the master plan.

- D. **Mayor Pro Tem DeGroote:** expressed appreciation to Liberty Waste Solutions and Public Works for their efforts in keeping the Town clean; expressed appreciation to the Police Dept. for their work managing the Senior Skip Day event.
- E. **Mayor Dull:** reported that the MPO had been informed that NCDOT had received an unsolicited offer from the private sector to replace the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge.
- F. **Town Manager Brigman:** nothing to report.
- G. **Town Attorney Richardson:** expressed appreciation to Town staff for their professionalism in working with he and his staff.
- H. **Town Clerk Heater:** nothing to report.

CLOSED SESSION TO CONSULT WITH AN ATTORNEY EMPLOYED OR RETAINED BY THE PUBLIC BODY IN ORDER TO PRESERVE THE ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE BETWEEN THE ATTORNEY AND THE PUBLIC BODY AS AUTHORIZED BY NCGS 143-318.11(A)(3)

At 8:02pm Dull made a motion to enter into closed session for the purpose of consulting with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body as authorized by NCGS 143-318.11(a)(3). The motion was seconded by DeGroote and carried unanimously.

Upon motion by Partin, seconded by DeGroote and carried unanimously, the Board returned to open session at 8:45pm, with no action being taken as a result of the closed session.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:45pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Lance G. Heater, Town Clerk