



**CITY OF SOUTHPORT
BOARD OF ALDERMEN – REGULAR MEETING
COMMUNITY BUILDING
223 E BAY STREET, SOUTHPORT NC 28461
JANUARY 8, 2026 | 6:00 PM**

Present Members:

Mayor Joseph P Hatem, Rebecca Kelley, Karen Mosteller, Robert Carroll, Lowe Davis, Marc Spencer, Paul Gross via Zoom

Staff Present:

City Manager Noah Saldo, City Clerk Tori Deviney, Public Information Officer ChyAnn Ketchum, Finance Director Joey Kronenwetter, Deputy Finance Director Jean Davidson, Police Chief Todd Coring, Fire Chief Charles Drew, Battalion Chief Ralph Treadway, Public Works Director Tom Stanley, Parks and Recreation Director Heather Hemphill, Maureen Moore

Other Members:

City Attorney Brady Herman

A. Call to Order

Mayor Hatem called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

The Mayor requested a moment of silence in honor of the passing of former Alderman Tom Lombardi.

B. Invocation

Pastor Larrabee shared personal remarks about moving to Southport after living in Los Angeles and spoke about raising three young children who he described as “locals” to Southport. He described what his children love about Southport—neighbors talking to one another, waving to strangers, and kindness toward others. He also recognized the Parks & Recreation Department and noted it was Maureen Moore (“Cookie’s”) birthday, offering birthday wishes.

Pastor Larrabee stated he would pray “three P’s” over the City: Peace, Protection, and Praise. He spoke about peace as inner wholeness rooted in faith, prayed for protection over the City, and

prayed that the community's worship and praise be directed toward God. He concluded with a prayer for the Mayor, elected officials, department leaders, and residents.

C. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Hatem led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance

D. Public Comment

Mayor Hatem provided opening remarks before public comment, advising that there would be no time limit for public comment at this meeting. He stated the Board had recently passed a policy related to public comment, but additional items may need to be added. He advised the public comment policy would be placed on the February agenda and asked speakers to be respectful of time. Mayor Hatem referenced state statute language allowing councils to adopt reasonable rules governing public comment, including setting a maximum time per speaker and maintaining order and decorum.

Angelo Collins - 1107 N. Caswell Avenue

Mr. Collins addressed ongoing flooding concerns at his property. He stated he had been discussing the issue for nearly two years and returned because the City has a new Board and Mayor. Mr. Collins said he understands coastal living includes rain and storm impacts, but asserted his flooding is caused by stormwater being funneled onto his property due to grading and drainage changes associated with nearby town homes and nearby home construction. He stated he has considered renting an industrial pump during hurricanes to protect his property and offered to provide additional information to staff or Board members.

Mr. Collins also shared that he used an online search tool to read summaries about the Mayor, Aldermen, and City Manager and noted themes such as environmental protection, stormwater improvements, growth management, long-term planning, and civility/transparency. He expressed appreciation for City leadership and emphasized that Southport extends beyond the downtown core and should be protected as a whole. He stated he felt mistreated by the developer/builder and asked that stormwater improvements be prioritized as funding allows.

Tom Gregory – 230 N. Caswell Ave

Mr. Gregory spoke regarding Franklin Square Park, emphasizing the importance of protecting the park's trees. He described two general visions he had heard discussed: maintaining a natural park versus installing more garden-style features such as walkways and a water feature. He asked the Board to make the trees the guiding priority and to follow the experts' recommendations, which he stated supported keeping the park natural. He also expressed concern about misinformation circulating and noted the park's canopy provides significant cooling in summer. He cautioned that more constructed garden features could increase taxpayer burden over time.

Holly Segalla – 5252 Windward Way

Ms. Segala introduced herself as a temporary resident soon to be permanent. She thanked Friends of Franklin Square Park for drawing attention to the park's condition and thanked the City for funding expert evaluation. She urged the Board to follow the experts' and scientists' recommendations for how the park should be treated.

Pete Flint – 6211 Pebble Shore Lane

Mr. Flint stated he previously lived across from Franklin Square Park and has observed park activity over time. He supported the City's decision to hire experts and said their recommendations should guide the City's actions. He referenced the soil conditions and foreign materials introduced over the years and stated that placing additional pathways could disturb the root system. He also raised concerns about the ongoing staffing and cost demands associated with flower beds and garden-style features (watering, pruning, edging). He expressed the view that the park is already beautiful as a natural space.

Hugh Fosbury – 120 W Moore Street

Mr. Fosbury provided an update and "plug" for the Fourth of July Festival, stating the 2026 festival would run June 26 through July 4 and would be structured to avoid being overly overwhelming. He noted the event is tied to the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, described the theme as "bigger, bolder, better," and highlighted educational and colonial-era components being planned. Mr. Fosbury stated the festival is funded through sponsorships and donations, with the City serving as administrator rather than direct funder. He announced a fundraiser, the "Shrimparoo", on April 12 at the American Fish location (Sunday, 4:00–7:00 p.m.), with entertainment by Salty Dogs, and invited volunteers and supporters.

Michael Proctor – 312 N Atlantic Ave

Mr. Proctor described his horticulture background and long experience in nursery/landscape work. He praised Parks & Recreation staff (referencing Michael McGee and crew) and consultants for progress made in improving the park. He urged the City to leave the park alone to heal, noting that tree recovery takes years and decades. He cautioned that disturbing the upper soil/root zone, particularly within the first several inches, can cause long-term damage to mature trees, and that those impacts may not show immediately but can appear years later.

Fred Fiss – 216 N Atlantic Ave

Mr. Fiss stated he was speaking as a citizen (and noted his role as vice-chair of the Forestry Committee). He said the health of the park's aging trees is the primary concern and argued that hardened sidewalks could disrupt water and nutrient flow within the root system. He supported continued mulching and fertilization and expressed concern that accepting outside money for improvements could create conditions affecting future park use. He described the park as a "city gem" and encouraged continued use for recreation and cultural events.

Bonnie Bray – 515 Quarter Master Dr

Ms. Bray expressed support for the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board recommendations and stated the current maintenance plan should be given time to take effect before any deviation from expert guidance. She commented positively on community turnout and shared condolences to the family of former Alderman Tom Lombardi, describing his volunteer service and community involvement.

Christine Wright – 211 N Lord St

Ms. Wright spoke as a citizen and disclosed she is also a Parks & Recreation board member. She thanked Parks & Recreation staff, noting the community's passion for Franklin Square Park, and encouraged the Board not to overlook the City's broader park system, including numerous parks, facilities, and programs. She recognized Parks & Recreation Director Hemphill and staff for their visible presence at community events and noted the department's extensive responsibilities relative to funding.

City Clerk Deviney advised she had six emails to read. Summaries included:

Jean Potter - 315 Burrington Ave

A founding member of Friends of Franklin spoke in support of restoring pathways in Franklin Square Park. She referenced the park's historic design, which previously included defined walking paths, and stated that reinstating pathways would improve accessibility and ADA compliance for elderly and disabled residents. She expressed concern about potential liability issues related to uneven walking surfaces and stated that properly designed pathways would not harm trees or interfere with current park activities. She also encouraged the Board to revise event restrictions to prevent large vendor events while preserving eligibility for grant funding opportunities.

Cheryl Daniel - 120 W. Bay St

Ms. Daniel expressed opposition to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee's recommendation against installing pathways. She stated that accessible walking surfaces are necessary for individuals with mobility limitations and wheelchairs. Ms. Daniel emphasized the importance of ADA compliance and noted that many parks prioritize inclusive access. She urged the Board to restore pathways so Franklin Square Park could better serve residents of all abilities.

Robert Palmeter - 308 N. Dry St

Mr. Palmeter spoke in opposition to installing pathways and other structural additions. He stated that adding pathways and irrigation infrastructure could damage tree root systems, alter soil conditions, and increase maintenance costs. He expressed support for maintaining Franklin Square Park in its current natural condition and stated that the existing layout provides greater long-term sustainability and usability.

Allison Fox - West Brown St

Ms. Fox supported the Parks & Recreation advisory committee and staff recommendations, urging no additional pathways/gardens and expressing appreciation for the park's naturalized condition; also suggested exploring a weekly market in the park while maintaining tree health.

Tina Clark - 612 W. Brown St

Ms. Clark thanked Parks and Recreation Director Hemphill, staff, and the advisory committee for the Franklin Square Park report and stated it was thorough and informative. She said Franklin Square Park is valued by the community and highlighted recent successful events, including Shop with a Cop and the Festival of Trees. Ms. Clark referenced information presented by Bartlett Tree Experts regarding tree root systems and soil conditions, noting that oak tree roots extend throughout the park and that feeder roots are close to the surface. She expressed support for the City's decision to follow expert recommendations, including mulching and soil remediation efforts to address alkaline soil conditions. Ms. Clark emphasized that the City has invested significant funds in professional studies and urged the Board to rely on expert guidance and continue implementing the recommended tree and soil care strategies.

Mayor Hatem thanked speakers for thoughtful comments and stated the discussion was constructive. He asked the Clerk, if possible, to time each public comment and determine the median comment length to help inform a future public comment time-limit decision at the February meeting, noting he did not want to interrupt speakers during this meeting.

E. Approval of the Agenda

A motion was made to approve the agenda by Mayor Pro-tem Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Kelley. The motion carried unanimously.

F. Ethics Statement

Mayor Hatem read the ethics/conflict statement and asked if any Board member had a conflict of interest or appearance of conflict regarding agenda items. No conflicts were reported.

G. Consent Agenda

A motion was made and seconded to approve the consent agenda by Alderman Spencer and seconded by Mayor Pro-tem Mosteller. The motion carried unanimously.

1. Minutes of the December 11, 2025 Regular Aldermen Meeting
2. 2026 Paving Contract

H. Special Recognition / Proclamations

Southport Historical Society – 50th Anniversary

Mayor Hatem read a proclamation recognizing the Southport Historical Society on the occasion of its 50th anniversary, noting the Society's history, preservation work, museum support,

educational programs, community events, and scholarship contributions. The Mayor and Board formally honored and commended the Society and encouraged residents to recognize the milestone.

Mary Ellen Poole spoke on behalf of the Historical Society, expressing appreciation for the City's partnership, the Mayor and Board's support, and the assistance of City staff in helping the Society preserve and share Southport's history.

Martin Luther King Jr. Day – January 19, 2026

Mayor Hatem read a proclamation recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. Day and proclaiming Monday, January 19, 2026 as Martin Luther King Jr. Day in the City of Southport. The proclamation highlighted the purpose of the celebration committee, Dr. King's legacy, unity, service, and the City's commitment to equality and respect.

I. Agenda

1. Presentation of FY2025 Audit

Mayor Hatem introduced the next agenda item as the presentation of the FY 2025 Audit, to be presented by Jay Sharpe, CPA with Sharpe Patel, PLLC.

Mr. Sharpe stated that audit fieldwork had been completed, the financial statements had been prepared, and the audit had been submitted to the North Carolina Local Government Commission (LGC) for review.

He noted the City was awaiting final approval from the LGC before the audit could be formally issued. Mr. Sharpe emphasized this marked the first time in several years the audit had been submitted by the required deadline and credited Finance Director Joey Kronenwetter and Deputy Finance Director Jean Davidson for providing timely information that allowed the audit team to meet the submission deadline. He stated he expected approval from the LGC within the week.

Mr. Sharpe explained the auditor's role and audit process, noting that audits involve planning procedures in addition to financial testing. He stated the firm reviews internal control updates and policy changes and performs control testing. For FY 2025, Sharp Patel tested controls related to cash disbursements and payroll. He explained that a risk-based audit approach is used to assess significant financial reporting areas such as cash, revenues, and expenditures, allowing the auditors to focus on higher-risk areas while still reviewing all major financial components. He stated the goal of this process is to obtain sufficient audit evidence to determine whether the City's financial statements are free from material misstatement.

Mr. Sharpe reported that the City received an unmodified audit opinion, also known as a clean audit opinion, which he stated is the desired outcome each year. He further reported that no audit findings were identified for FY 2025. He noted that two findings from FY 2024 were corrected during FY 2025. Mr. Sharpe stated audit adjustments during FY 2025 were minimal and were

primarily related to pension liability updates. He explained that fewer audit adjustments helped streamline the audit process and contributed to timely completion.

Mr. Sharpe reviewed the required auditor communications letter and reported that the City adopted GASB Statement No. 101 regarding compensated absences during FY 2025. He explained that in previous years the City recorded liabilities related to unused vacation leave, but under the updated standard, a portion of accrued sick leave was also required to be included. He stated the auditors reviewed management estimates related to depreciable lives of capital assets and the allowance for doubtful accounts and found them to be reasonable. Mr. Sharpe reported there were no disagreements with management and no difficulties encountered during the audit process. He again recognized City staff for their cooperation and responsiveness throughout the audit.

Mr. Sharpe then reviewed the City's general fund financial performance. He presented trend data showing revenues and expenditures over the past four years and noted that in FY 2025 expenditures exceeded revenues for the first time in four years. However, when accounting for other financing sources and uses, the City experienced a positive change in fund balance. He reported that the general fund balance increased from just under \$5 million in FY 2021 to more than \$14 million at the end of FY 2025, effectively tripling over that period.

Mr. Sharpe explained the composition of the general fund balance and stated the largest portion was the unassigned fund balance of approximately \$10.7 million, representing funds available for City use. He noted that other portions were restricted or nonspendable, including amounts restricted by statute, receivables such as sales tax not yet received, street-related funds, PAL funds, and prepaid amounts associated with the fire truck purchase. He stated the unassigned fund balance represented approximately 76 percent of FY 2025 expenditures, which exceeded the typical recommended range of 20 to 40 percent and demonstrated strong financial health.

Mr. Sharpe reviewed revenue sources and reported that property taxes accounted for approximately 36 percent of total revenue, followed by intergovernmental revenues such as sales tax and other distributed taxes. He stated total revenues increased from approximately \$13.2 million in FY 2024 to \$14 million in FY 2025, reflecting growth of approximately \$872,000. He noted that property tax revenues accounted for nearly \$600,000 of that increase.

Mr. Sharpe discussed cash reserves and reported the general fund maintained approximately 310 days of cash reserves at the end of FY 2025. He stated that while the recommended range is typically three to six months, this level of reserves demonstrated the City's strong financial position.

Mr. Sharpe reviewed overall cash activity and reported the City's total cash balance increased by approximately \$1.1 million compared to FY 2024. He explained this increase resulted from approximately \$2 million in positive operating cash flow, offset by approximately \$2.8 million in

capital and investing outflows and nearly \$1.9 million in positive financing activity related to leases and debt.

Mr. Sharpe reviewed general fund expenditures and stated public safety accounted for approximately 46 percent of total expenditures, while general government accounted for approximately 35 percent. He reported total expenditures increased from approximately \$11.1 million in FY 2024 to \$14.6 million in FY 2025, primarily due to capital asset purchases and increased spending in public safety and general government.

Mr. Sharpe then reviewed the Electric Fund, reporting operating revenues of approximately \$8.5 million and operating expenses of approximately \$8.1 million, resulting in a positive operating year. He stated the Electric Fund has generated positive results in three of the last four years. He reported net position included approximately \$13.8 million invested in capital assets and approximately \$4.8 million in unrestricted funds.

Mr. Sharpe reported that the Electric Fund maintained approximately 230 days of cash reserves at the end of FY 2025. Although this represented a decrease from the prior year, he stated it remained well above the recommended reserve range and reflected continued financial strength.

Mr. Sharpe concluded by reviewing Electric Fund cash flows and reported operating cash flows remained positive for the fourth consecutive year, with approximately \$816,000 in positive operating cash flow during FY 2025. He summarized the audit by reiterating that the City achieved a clean audit opinion, had no findings, submitted the audit on time, and maintained strong financial health in both the General Fund and Electric Fund.

Mayor Hatem thanked Mr. Sharpe and opened the floor for Board questions.

Alderman Kelley asked whether the Electric Fund's positive operating cash flow included full staffing costs, including retirement and insurance benefits. Mr. Sharpe confirmed that all staffing-related costs were included.

Alderman Kelley also asked whether the City's extensive cash reserves should be spent down or used to reduce costs for citizens, noting the City's coastal location and hurricane exposure while questioning the necessity of maintaining reserve levels significantly higher than the typical two- to three-month recommendation.

Mr. Sharpe responded that while auditors provide opinions on financial statements rather than policy recommendations, Southport's coastal location and hurricane risk justify maintaining higher reserves. He stated reserve levels should be reviewed annually during the budget process and noted that while the City is above recommended reserve thresholds, excess funds could be evaluated for future projects and strategic needs.

Alderman Spencer asked whether the City's revenue increase included approximately \$600,000 from the one-time sale of the 400-acre property. Mr. Sharpe confirmed that it did and noted that

capital asset purchases during FY 2025 were also one-time expenditures, contributing to higher spending totals.

Mayor Hatem invited additional comments and recognized Alderman Gross, who was participating remotely. Alderman Gross apologized for not attending in person due to illness and expressed appreciation for the audit results. He congratulated the Finance Department on achieving a clean audit with no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies and submitting the audit on time. He stated the results reflected strong financial management and thanked Mr. Sharpe for the presentation.

Mayor Hatem thanked Mr. Sharpe again and expressed appreciation for the report.

City Manager Noah Saldo thanked the Finance Department, specifically recognizing Finance Director Kronenwetter and Deputy Finance Director Davidson, for their work and dedication. He stated the City looked forward to carrying strong financial performance into the upcoming budget process.

Mayor Hatem announced that a Board member had requested a brief recess and called for a five-minute break, asking attendees to remain nearby.

Break 7:17 PM - 7:23 PM

Mayor Hatem announced the meeting was back in session and noted the recess lasted exactly five minutes.

2. Franklin Square Park Update

The Mayor congratulated Parks & Recreation Director Heather Hemphill on her 27 years of service with the City, wished “Cookie” a happy birthday, and commented that he was excited the City Gym basketball season was beginning. Mayor Hatem invited Director Hemphill and Parks and Recreation Chair Emma Thomas to come forward to present their report.

Director Hemphill stated she would be summarizing the annual report received from Bartlett Tree Experts regarding the trees and soil conditions in Franklin Square Park and the overall status of the park. She provided background, explaining that the Franklin Square Park project began in spring 2023 and that Parks & Recreation was notified in August 2023. She noted the Forestry Committee had already been notified and collaborative work was underway. Hemphill explained that after Friends of Franklin approached the Forestry Committee, she and Bonnie Bray reached out to Bartlett Tree Experts, who came highly recommended, to conduct an assessment of trees, soil, shrubs, and plantings. That initial assessment was completed in 2023.

Based on the findings, Director Hemphill said there was significant immediate work needed and that six trees ultimately had to be removed. She stated the City contracted with Nelson’s Tree Service to trim dead material from affected trees. Director Hemphill added that during this time,

the Forestry Committee, including Scott Len and other members, conducted initial soil sampling, dividing the park into three zones, and provided related information to the Board for review.

Director Hemphill stated that during summer 2023 the City contracted with Dr. Jim Herstine of the UNC Wilmington Parks and Recreation and Tourism Management program to conduct community meetings, focus groups, and a public survey to determine what residents wanted for Franklin Square Park. She stated the process took approximately four months, and that Dr. Herstine presented his findings at the end of 2024 to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee.

Director Hemphill explained the advisory committee then evaluated the scenarios presented and discussed varying levels of recommended work, prioritizing needs alongside associated costs. She stated that Emma Thomas would address which recommendations the advisory committee selected for implementation and what had been completed to date.

Director Hemphill stated Bartlett returned as part of the City's annual service agreement to reassess the park each year and help determine whether prior actions were working or whether the City needed to adjust its approach. She said the park had reached a stage where soil care would be the most important focus moving forward and noted that prescribed soil care would be a key component of upcoming work, particularly during the summer.

Director Hemphill reviewed the Forestry Committee's soil sampling, explaining that the testing measured a variety of factors, with the most basic being soil pH, which indicates acidity or alkalinity. She stated soil pH is crucial to plant health because it affects nutrient availability, microbial activity, and overall soil chemistry.

Director Hemphill reported that of 23 test locations, 11 were not acidic and were instead highly alkaline, with some readings as high as 7.9. She stated the results became clearer once mapped and related this condition to historical use of crushed oyster shells in the park, explaining oyster shells are highly alkaline due to calcium content.

Director Hemphill stated this was significant to the discussion because material selection for any pathway surface could impact soil conditions. She explained alkaline soils reduce the availability of micronutrients such as iron, magnesium, and zinc and may contribute to poor growth, restricted root expansion, and reduced water uptake. She stated this was the situation staff was trying to correct through application of organic material and prescribed fertilizer.

Director Hemphill noted that soil samples had been taken in 2023, again in April 2024, and again in December 2025. She stated the City had not yet received the December 2025 results due to state processing timelines, but that the Board would be provided the information once received. She stated staff was hopeful to see whether the remedies implemented were improving conditions and said if not, the City would adjust next steps with Bartlett's guidance.

Alderman Kelley asked about two maps provided, one showing acidic lime and one not, and asked whether the maps represented different years. Director Hemphill confirmed they did. She pointed out that since 2023 Parks & Recreation had worked collaboratively with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, the Beautification Committee, and the Southport Forestry Committee, and that recommendations discussed had been reviewed across these groups.

Director Hemphill then turned to the Bartlett report's executive summary and described the report as focusing on a tree risk assessment conducted on 17 trees where defects or concerns were identified. She stated recommendations complied with current ANSI A300 standards. She explained that while prior City soil sampling was basic and largely focused on pH and composition, Bartlett could provide more detailed analysis showing nutrient levels and deficiencies and could develop a zone-by-zone fertilization "prescription" tailored to park conditions.

Director Hemphill stated this approach was important because it would move the City beyond simply adding mulch and would support a targeted plan for soil improvement and tree health. Director Hemphill stated the report also addressed bulk density sampling to evaluate compaction and recommended root invigoration on six trees to improve aeration and promote efficient root growth, particularly for high-value trees. She noted the report assigned values to individual trees.

Director Hemphill stated the report continued to emphasize mulching standards, recommending two to four inches of mulch wherever possible within root zones to moderate soil temperatures, reduce moisture loss, reduce compaction, and improve soil structure. She emphasized that the major focus moving into the next phase was soil care, noting that emergency tree work had largely been addressed in prior years and the park was now at a point where corrective soil work was critical.

Director Hemphill stated that Bartlett's recommendations included soil care, root collar excavation, plant health care, tree pruning, structural support systems, lightning protection, and limited removals. She noted that after removal of six trees the prior year, Bartlett recommended only one tree removal for the coming year, a cherry tree. Hemphill reviewed root collar excavation as a necessary treatment when buttress roots are buried by excessive soil, mud, or mulch and noted the report included photos and charts identifying trees requiring that treatment.

Director Hemphill stated Bartlett identified limited pest and disease concerns, including the cherry tree slated for removal and another tree identified in the report. Hemphill explained the pruning recommendations were primarily maintenance-level pruning rather than emergency pruning and stated Bartlett advised that ten trees had Phase One pruning recommendations but did not consider those actions urgent for 2026, recommending instead that funds be prioritized toward soil improvement.

Alderman Davis asked that staff describe where the identified trees were located in the park because most attendees would not know the numbers. Director Hemphill stated the trees

referenced were located on the back side of the park near the old fire station structure. Mayor Pro-tem Mosteller stated she noticed the estimate did not include treatment for the tree identified as having borers and suggested that removal be considered to address pest concerns. She also asked whether Bartlett could provide the cost of the Phase One pruning recommendations for the ten trees so that amount could be considered in budgeting.

Director Hemphill stated she could request that information.

Alderman Davis asked about timing and how long the recommended work would take. Director Hemphill stated the proposed work would depend on the FY 2026–2027 budget and that Bartlett indicated they could begin in July if the budget was approved with the recommended funding. She noted that the City had already spent the \$50,000 allocated in the current year's budget for Franklin Square Park.

Alderman Gross then stated he was concerned that misinformation about Franklin Square Park was dividing the community. He stated the park should remain a multi-use space and noted that in 2025 the primary event that had been omitted was the large marketplace event with extensive tents and heavy use, which he said had relocated and was thriving. He stated he supported music and community events in the park and referenced several events he attended, including concerts and the Christmas tree decorating contest.

Alderman Gross stated that the American Society of Landscape Architects recommends certain environmentally friendly pathway options, including pervious pavers and decomposed granite. He stated he personally favored decomposed granite, asserting it allows water and oxygen through when properly installed, is pH neutral, and is a cost-effective, sustainable material. He suggested that if paths were considered, installation should avoid areas close to tree base flares.

Alderman Gross noted his educational background at NC State and stated he had reviewed the reports and found them comprehensive. He requested additional research on decomposed granite as a possible future option, emphasizing ADA accessibility and inclusivity.

Alderman Carroll asked that the Parks & Recreation recommendation be read into the record. He also asked how many entrances to Franklin Square Park are currently ADA compliant, if any.

Director Hemphill responded that, under the 2010 ADA Accessibility Guidelines currently in effect, the park entrances are technically ADA compliant. She explained that ADA accessibility standards require that a person have access to the park, but do not require that there be an accessible route through the interior of the park from one side to the other. She described access as being available through what she referred to as a shared pathway system using surrounding sidewalks, such as traveling from the parking area near the Franklin Square Art Gallery along sidewalks and approaching the park from adjacent streets. Hemphill stated that while the park meets ADA requirements, she does not believe the current condition achieves full inclusivity, noting that inclusivity and accessibility are not the same standard.

Director Hemphill added that if the City chose to install interior pathways, those pathways would need to comply fully with ADA requirements, and she described the concept of a circulation pathway system as a network of paths that helps guide movement through an open space. Director Hemphill stated she believed one area that still needed attention was an accessible connection from the sidewalk near the art gallery to the ramp at the stage.

Alderman Davis asked for clarification on what was meant by a circulation pathway system. Director Hemphill explained that it refers to a set of connected paths that guide circulation and movement between features, though not as a one-way system. Alderman Carroll remarked that paths influence where people choose to walk. Alderman Davis commented that ADA standards can seem discouraging regarding some items. Director Hemphill reiterated that accessibility and inclusion are different and expressed hope that inclusion becomes the standard in the future.

Director Hemphill stated that after the recommendation was read, it would be the recommendation she supported. Mayor Hatem recognized Emma Thomas, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee.

Ms. Thomas stated she did not intend to read the full multi-page document included in the Board's packet and on the City website, but wanted to highlight several items completed in 2025. She stated Franklin Square Park had reopened for residents and that repair work on the stage and well house had been completed, including pressure washing and staining, which she stated had improved the appearance significantly.

Ms. Thomas stated a long list of activities had been approved and held in the park. She highlighted the May through September concerts, noting strong attendance and minimal cancellations due to weather. She stated the park had hosted weddings, religious services (including a Christmas Eve service), school graduations, recitals, plays, small rental events, and the Easter egg hunt. She highlighted the Plein Air event and described the opportunity for public interaction with artists. She stated Shop with a Cop was successful and described the Festival of Trees as turning Franklin Square Park into a "magical wonderland," stating it remained well attended throughout the period it was on display and that the park remained a center of activity during Winterfest.

Ms. Thomas stated that in 2025 the park received substantial mulching, including reuse of mulch from trees removed and additional donated mulch from Bianchi Brick. She stated Parks & Recreation organized mulch distribution and that the Beautification Committee coordinated volunteer assistance, including high school students working as part of a senior project, along with Beautification volunteers and Parks & Recreation staff. She stated the Bartlett report emphasized the importance of mulch in adding nutrients, holding moisture, reducing soil compaction, and protecting roots.

Ms. Thomas stated ballast stone walls were repaired and that the Bartlett report recommended planting young trees to plan for the future as older trees decline. She stated Parks & Recreation

worked closely with the Forestry Committee to plan winter tree planting and with the Beautification Committee on shrub and plantings at the park's main entrance. She stated a protective fence was installed around the "Four Sisters" trees and that Parks & Recreation was working with Public Works regarding crosswalk repainting near the park. Ms. Thomas also highlighted repair work and repainting of the outdoor basketball court.

Ms. Thomas then read the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee recommendations for FY 2026–2027 for Franklin Square Park. She stated the primary focus was continued maintenance and care of the park, the trees, and the soil, including continued yearly soil sampling for data comparison and continued annual tree assessments with Bartlett Tree Experts. She stated the committee recommended following Bartlett's 2026–2027 recommendations, including root invigoration, soil care, and fertilization. She stated the committee recommended continued mulching as needed to improve soil conditions and reduce compaction and recommended ongoing collaboration with the Forestry and Beautification committees for replanting live oaks, shrubs, and appropriate plantings. She also recommended using mulch for the golf cart parking area on East West Street and adding signage identifying the area for golf cart parking, and defining a handicap parking access area in Franklin Square Park from the paved parking area along East West Street by the art gallery, including additional marked handicap spaces and signage. She stated the committee recommended installing post and rope fencing along the corner of East West Street and Atlantic Avenue to prevent parking in the median and protect trees. She stated the committee recommended continuing to offer events and activities for residents, citizens, and visitors to enjoy.

Ms. Thomas stated that all recommendations were made following careful review of the Bartlett annual tree assessment and the Southport Forestry Committee soil testing. She stated the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee does not recommend the inclusion of pathways in future planning for Franklin Square Park, stating that such additions would have detrimental impacts on the park's natural environment, particularly the health of the soil and existing trees, and would compromise the overall condition of the park.

Ms. Thomas concluded by stating the committee strongly recommends continuing maintenance and care for the soil and trees and allowing the community to continue enjoying the park as a natural and open space.

Alderman Carroll stated there was an additional topic to discuss and asked whether the Board could adopt the plan as a future plan to assist the City Manager during FY 2026–2027 budgeting. City Manager Saldo stated the overall plan was adopted in January 2025 and that the recommendations presented fell under that plan, so no formal action was required for staff to continue implementation. He stated that staff would return during the budget process with financing to enact the recommendations. City Manager Saldo stated that if the Board wished to deviate from the adopted plan to pursue other actions, then formal action would be needed to change the overall plan and direction.

City Manager Saldo then reported the City had received a \$10,000 grant from the Orton Foundation. He explained that as a condition of accepting the funds, the foundation requested that the Board amend the adopted plan by adding language stating the City will not host large-scale events requiring temporary structures, commercial vendors, or heavy equipment in the park that may reasonably cause damage to park grounds, facilities, vegetation, wildlife, infrastructure, or otherwise create environmental degradation or excessive wear.

City Manager Saldo stated that upon receiving the proposed language, he advised the foundation that the City had already addressed event restrictions through the adopted policy. He stated the foundation felt the existing policy was not restrictive enough and therefore provided the additional language. City Manager Saldo stated he had not deposited the check and was holding it pending Board direction. He stated that if the Board accepted the language, he did not believe it would change current operations, but he also acknowledged concerns that accepting grant funds with restrictions may not be desirable. He stated that either way, he did not believe the decision would be detrimental to what the City had been doing.

Alderman Carroll made a motion that the City return the grant funds and “mail them their check back.” Mayor Pro-tem Mosteller seconded the motion.

Alderman Gross stated he wanted to make a motion to accept the check. Mayor Hatem stated there was a motion and a second and identified that a motion had been made by Alderman Carroll, with a second by Alderman Mosteller.

Alderman Carroll stated he did not believe the City should be at the mercy of outside entities dictating terms for how money is accepted or used. He stated the language proposed was subjective and could be interpreted differently, raising questions such as how “large-scale events” would be defined. He stated that while \$10,000 is meaningful, in his view it was not a significant amount relative to the source and the conditions being imposed. He added that if the City already has adequate restriction language in place, then he questioned why the foundation was demanding additional language.

Alderman Davis stated she agreed with the City Manager’s observation that the operational intent of the proposed language was already in effect, noting that vendor events were no longer held in the park and that the marketplace had moved successfully. She stated the proposed language would create restrictions that could limit future choices about where events such as a market might be located. She stated that while \$10,000 has value, she favored maintaining the City’s flexibility.

Alderman Davis asked whether the City Manager could pursue additional clarification from the foundation about the intent and whether there was a way to adjust the language so the City could accept the funds without creating unnecessary restrictions.

Mayor Hatem stated there was a motion and a second on the floor and asked if there was any further discussion.

Alderman Kelley asked for further discussion and expressed concern that the proposed Orton Foundation language could be interpreted to prohibit even small, community-oriented activity during events. She offered an example that during Festival of Trees the City might want a hot chocolate stand or a local business table (without tents or stakes), and questioned whether the proposed restriction would prevent that.

Alderman Davis responded that the City's existing "no vendor events" intent was focused on big markets such as Spring Fest or Winterfest-type setups with well over 100 vendors in the park. Alderman Kelley agreed the intent of the current restriction was to prevent large-scale events, but stated the new Orton language appeared broader and could prohibit any vendors at all, including small fundraising tables such as the Fire Department selling shirts. Alderman Kelley said she did not want to exclude those kinds of activities. She stated she liked the \$10,000 but did not support accepting ambiguous restrictions, and she thanked the City Manager for holding the check until the Board had consensus.

Alderman Davis stated that she had confidence in the City Manager's ability to negotiate.

Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller stated she could speak to the motion and said that, in her view, the Orton language was unnecessary and vague. She said the City's current policy is much clearer for enforcement, and staff has been doing an excellent job implementing the existing policy. She stated the Orton language would prevent large-scale events, but that it also defines the issue through "temporary structures," which could be interpreted to mean canopies could not be used. She noted that the Police and Fire Departments use canopies in the park for tables at events such as Shop with a Cop and other activities. She also referenced the "heavy equipment" language, noting the City already has restrictions in place regarding vehicles in the park and limits that access to park vehicles. She said the Orton language would be difficult to commit to and difficult to interpret, and she stated she would not support accepting the grant as written.

Alderman Gross stated he wanted the City Manager to have the opportunity to go back to the Orton to seek clarification. He stated he did not believe the language would change the City's current plan and noted that \$10,000 is still \$10,000 more than the City has now. He said he had confidence in the City Manager and preferred staff attempt to negotiate language. He stated he didn't see the language changing from what the City was doing now.

Alderman Carroll stated the City Manager had already done a good job going back to the foundation multiple times. City Manager Saldo referenced an email from the foundation stating they believed the Board's adopted proposal was too vague saying "we are requiring that this document be fleshed out to make limitations for each permitted and non-permitted event." He stated he could go back and ask them to define each event, but he was unsure whether the foundation would be willing to do so.

Alderman Carroll stated that accepting money with conditions raises a broader concern about donors dictating City decisions and asked where the line is drawn. He gave an example that if

someone donated funds for a larger project, such as a courthouse conversion to a police station, would the City allow the donor to dictate specifics such as how the money is spent or even the “color of the walls.” He stated the Board must stand for something, and he believed the City had adopted strong language and a great plan. Alderman Carroll acknowledged he was not initially in favor of the adopted plan, but stated that the City Manager had already attempted negotiations and emphasized that the Board did not want donors telling the City how to spend donated money.

Alderman Davis asked whether the Board could avoid making a decision and instead have staff approach the foundation to see whether alternative language could be developed. She suggested asking the foundation for examples of what they specifically do not want to see in the park and whether wording could be developed that works for both the City and the foundation.

Alderman Carroll suggested the better option would be to tell the foundation the City would accept the money only if the foundation accepted the City’s existing language.

Mayor Hatem stated that if the Board wished to change direction, the motion would need to be revised or modified.

Alderman Gross said he would like to see the policy sent to Orton to see if that was acceptable. Mayor Hatem explained that had already been done.

Alderman Davis asked whether a decision was required that night and reiterated she did not want to lose the funding. Mayor Hatem explained that a motion and second were currently on the floor and that the Board would need to revise or withdraw the motion to pursue a different approach.

Alderman Kelley stated she wanted the City to keep the money but also wanted to avoid creating conflict with the foundation such that future support would be discouraged. She said she agreed the additional restrictions were not acceptable, but believed there may be a middle ground. She suggested the City could consider directing the money to a specific purpose the foundation supports, such as trees or another agreed-upon item, rather than placing overall restrictions in place.

Alderman Carroll withdrew his motion.

Alderman Spencer made a motion that the City continue discussions with the Orton Foundation and keep communication channels open.

Alderman Spencer stated that while he appreciated the foundation’s interest in assisting the City, he did not support accepting funds that would impose long-term restrictions or conditions on City operations. He emphasized that Southport was not for sale and stated the City should engage in further conversation to determine whether a mutually acceptable arrangement could be reached.

Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller expressed support for the approach suggested by Alderman Kelley to explore earmarking the donation for a specific purpose, such as tree-related improvements. She

stated she supported directing funds toward a defined project rather than accepting long-term operational encumbrances.

Alderman Kelley stated that Alderman Spencer's comments reflected the spirit of the opening prayer regarding kindness and constructive dialogue with neighbors. She noted the discussion represented an opportunity to approach the matter collaboratively and respectfully.

Alderman Gross stated his agreement with Alderman Kelley's recommendation and supported returning to the Orton Foundation to explore the possibility of earmarking the donation for a purpose mutually agreed upon by the City and the foundation.

Mayor Hatem stated it would be prudent to amend the motion to pursue a constructive resolution and emphasized the importance of maintaining cooperation and goodwill. He noted that the Orton Foundation had benevolent intentions and meant no harm to the City of Southport.

Mayor Hatem then called for a vote on the amended motion to direct staff to return to the Orton Foundation to pursue an earmarked use of the donation, potentially for tree-related improvements or another mutually agreeable purpose. The motion was seconded by Alderman Carroll. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Southport Specialty License Plate and City Website Update

Public Information Officer Ketchum displayed the selected specialty license plate design and explained that state statute requires a minimum of 500 pre-orders before the City can submit the application package and collected funds to the North Carolina General Assembly. Ms. Ketchum reported that as of that afternoon, the City had received 172 pre-orders, representing approximately 34 percent of the required total.

Ms. Ketchum explained the approval process, noting that once the 500 minimum is reached, the application and funds are sent to the General Assembly for inclusion in the state budget. Once approved, the application is forwarded to the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles for final authorization and production. She stated that once production begins, the first 500 pre-ordered plates will be manufactured and shipped directly to the addresses listed on the applications. After that initial production run is completed, the plate will become available for standard purchase through local license plate agencies during vehicle renewals.

Ms. Ketchum reported that the City adjusted its outreach strategy after feedback indicated many residents were unaware of the program. She stated the campaign now includes weekly social media posts, a sponsored Facebook post to increase visibility, presentation slides displayed during public meetings and meeting replays on YouTube and Facebook, and regular progress updates showing the current number of pre-orders. She noted that five new applications had been received during the current week and stated that incremental progress continues to move the City closer to the required threshold.

Ms. Ketchum explained that proceeds from the specialty license plate program will support emergency management initiatives. She stated the first planned use of funds would be to purchase disaster preparedness kits for distribution at the City's Hurricane Expo. She noted that reaching the minimum 500 pre-orders would generate approximately \$10,000, which could fund roughly 40 preparedness kits. Ms. Ketchum added that her long-term goal is to eventually provide a preparedness kit for every Southport household.

Ms. Ketchum reminded the public that pre-order applications can be submitted with cash or check either in person at City Hall or by mail.

Alderman Davis asked whether purchasers must live in Southport to obtain the specialty plate. Ms. Ketchum responded that residency in Southport is not required and stated that anyone with a non-commercial vehicle registered in North Carolina is eligible. She added that street-legal golf carts that require license plates also qualify.

Alderman Kelley commented that the increased social media outreach and sponsored posts would improve visibility and suggested that the State Port Pilot could potentially feature the initiative, particularly highlighting the emergency preparedness kit goal. She added that the Southport license plate design was visually appealing and expressed support for the initiative.

Ms. Ketchum then transitioned to the City website update. She stated that upgrading the City website had been a long-standing project and thanked the Board for allocating funding in the previous budget cycle to support the redesign. Ms. Ketchum announced that the City is in the process of launching a new website and will be transitioning the public domain from cityofsouthport.com to cityofsouthport.gov. She explained that the existing ".com" address will be redirected to the new ".gov" website to ensure continued public access and compatibility with bookmarked links.

Ms. Ketchum reported that the new website is currently in maintenance mode and may be visible online with a "coming soon" page. She stated that the website is not yet fully functional and that some features may not work during this transitional period. Ms. Ketchum announced the City anticipates a public website launch in February 2026 and stated a full presentation and live demonstration of the new site would be provided at the February Board meeting.

Alderman Kelley commented favorably on the inclusion of a search bar at the top of the website layout. Ms. Ketchum responded that the search function is still under development and will become fully functional once the website officially launches.

Alderman Carroll asked whether City email addresses would change as part of the domain transition. Ms. Ketchum explained that ".gov" email addresses have already been created as aliases and that once the website officially launches, staff email addresses will transition to @cityofsouthport.gov as the primary address, with the existing ".com" addresses remaining as aliases. She stated that emails sent to either address will continue to be delivered to the intended recipients.

Mayor Hatem thanked Ms. Ketchum for the presentation and moved the meeting forward to the next agenda item.

J. Committee Reports

Alderman Spencer stated he was honored to serve on the Cemetery Committee and reported the committee is working diligently on cemetery matters. He said the committee anticipates “exciting opportunities” in the coming year but noted that additional funding will likely be needed to accomplish planned work. Alderman Spencer stated the committee will meet at the end of the month and said one of the largest needs is establishing a perpetual care system that can generate ongoing revenue to support maintenance and expenses. He compared that need to other major City investments and emphasized the importance of ensuring long-term sustainability.

Alderman Kelley reported that Hugh Fosbury had been present earlier representing the Fourth of July Festival Committee and said the committee has “exciting things” planned for the upcoming 250th commemoration. She stated she would share more details as plans develop. Alderman Kelley reported that Planning Board interviews had been held that week and that she and Alderman Mosteller attended alongside the Planning Board Chair and Vice Chair. She stated recommendations from those interviews would be presented on the next month’s agenda. Alderman Kelley also reported there had been no recent County Planning Board or Commissioners meetings due to the holidays, and she expected those meetings to resume the following week.

Alderman Davis reported that the Historic Preservation Commission met that week and clarified she meant “commission,” not “committee.” She stated the public and the Board of Aldermen had been invited to submit ideas and suggestions, and she noted that Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller provided extensive written recommendations. Alderman Davis said the commission’s goal is to develop a historic district framework and accompanying rules that protect Southport’s heritage, architecture, and appearance without being overly invasive. She stated the commission is making significant progress, that public attendance and participation has been strong, and cautioned that any prior drafts or materials should not be assumed to reflect the final proposal. She indicated that what the public and the Board will see in coming months, potentially around March, could be substantially different from earlier versions.

Alderman Carroll reported he had been reassigned to Parks and Recreation and said he attended both a regular meeting and a workshop. He expressed appreciation for the Parks and Recreation staff and volunteers and congratulated Ms. Moore (“Cookie”) on her birthday, noting she shares a birthday with “Reagan Elizabeth.” Alderman Carroll said he was excited to serve in that liaison role and noted his family participates in Parks and Recreation programs, including youth basketball, which he described as a fun community activity. He also highlighted several Parks and Recreation programs and schedules and provided a department phone number for residents seeking more information. Alderman Carroll additionally reported he had been assigned to the

Forestry Committee, which would meet the following week, and stated Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller would sit in on his behalf.

Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller reported that following holiday decorating activities and community events, the Beautification Committee took a brief break from workdays in December but resumed volunteer projects soon after. She stated the sign above Fort Johnston required maintenance, and Brunswick Electric assisted by taking it down so Beautification volunteers could repaint it. She reported volunteers worked over seven days, contributing approximately 45 volunteer hours, and encouraged the public to view the restored sign. Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller invited the public to attend the next Beautification Committee meeting, noting it would be held Monday, January 26 at 5:00 p.m. in the upstairs conference room at City Hall due to ongoing repairs at the Indian Trail Meeting Hall. She also announced the monthly cleanup, rescheduled due to rain, would occur Saturday, January 10 at 9:00 a.m., with volunteers meeting at the jail annex building on Rhett Street across from the Historic Smithville Burying Ground.

K. Manager's Report

City Manager Saldo provided several updates. He reported the 2026 golf cart renewal permit process was underway at Animal Protective Services (APS), located at 111 North Rhett Street, and stated renewals would be processed Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. through January 16. He reported that as of that day, the City had received 330 registrations out of an estimated 992. He added that after January 16, renewals would continue at APS on Wednesdays from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

City Manager Saldo then provided an update requested by Alderman Davis regarding alleyway discussions and withdrawal of dedications. He stated that, following Board direction, he and outside counsel had been in contact with the three identified parties who filed declarations of withdrawal and said they are working toward a resolution. He added that City Attorney Brady Herman identified a method within county records to better track whether any additional declarations have been filed historically or might be filed in the future. City Manager Saldo stated that, at that time, only the three known declarations had been located and he believed those were the only outstanding filings.

City Manager Saldo next updated the Board on the shoreline stabilization project. He referenced the State's June 30 deadline related to encumbrance and stated he believed the City had met the requirement through budget ordinances and funding set aside in a separate account. He said he had contacted the State to confirm the deadline language and reiterated confidence in meeting all requirements. He reported the City had obtained state and federal permits for Phase One (revetment) and was in Phase Two permitting for the breakwaters. He stated the City anticipates bidding Phase One and Phase Two work around April or May and adopting contracts by June in order to proceed with the project and funding timelines.

City Manager Saldo also provided an update on the weather tower at the Garrison Lawn, stating the contractor had been fabricating components in their shop and the City anticipated installation in mid to late January. He stated assembly on site would take approximately one week and that the weather tower could be back in place by late January or early February.

City Manager Saldo reported Public Works had begun another stormwater improvement project on East Nash Street near the Post Office and St. Philip's and noted there may be traffic impacts in that area over the coming weeks.

City Manager Saldo announced the City's Martin Luther King Jr. holiday celebration would occur Sunday, January 18, with a 3:00 p.m. march and a 3:45 p.m. program at Fire Headquarters. He stated the City looked forward to celebrating the holiday and community unity.

L. Mayor's Report

Mayor Hatem again offered condolences to the family of former Alderman Tom Lombardi and asked the community to keep the family in their prayers. Mayor Hatem reiterated details for the Martin Luther King Jr. events, stating the march would be Sunday, January 18 at 3:00 p.m., and a breakfast would be held Monday, January 19. He referenced details being available through City communications, including the City website and the State Port Pilot. Mayor Hatem also noted he attended a mayors' meeting with surrounding communities and described it as productive. He stated that the City Manager is now meeting with citizens and encouraged anyone with an issue or concern to contact the City by phone, email, or text to schedule a meeting.

M. Staff Reports

Mayor Hatem referred Board members to the staff reports in the packet, highlighting capital projects as particularly important.

N. Board Comments

Alderman Gross offered brief remarks, thanking staff for the meeting and stating it was well done.

Alderman Kelley thanked staff and the community for Southport's holiday traditions and said Winterfest was "absolutely amazing," noting she repeatedly heard the community describe Southport as a "Hallmark town." She stated she had received multiple requests to extend the length of time the ice skating rink is available and described it as a special addition, even noting unusually warm weather on some skating days. Alderman Kelley then provided an update on dredging discussions, stating she spoke with the Town Manager for Oak Island to share Southport's concerns and the desire for a unified regional approach among municipalities. She said Oak Island expressed willingness to partner as a good neighbor if provided additional information to share with its Board. Alderman Kelley also shared that Oak Island's current beach renourishment dredging project is operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week and is ahead of schedule, and she remarked that large projects can yield positive outcomes. She added that she

had visited the beach to collect shells that have appeared due to the dredging activity and suggested it as a local activity.

Alderman Davis then raised two topics. First, she requested that Mayor Hatem, in his meetings with other mayors, revive prior discussions about a regional inclusive playground. Alderman Davis stated the issue had been a significant topic previously and that the Board had concluded an inclusive playground was a regional need but that Southport alone was not the right location. She asked that the City explore whether other jurisdictions might partner with Southport and whether the County might participate.

Alderman Davis then addressed concerns regarding proposed rule changes related to PFAS monitoring and referenced action taken by the North Carolina Environmental Management Commission. She stated there would be a 60-day public comment period and requested that the City Manager draft a resolution for Board consideration at the February meeting so the City could respond within the window. Alderman Davis also encouraged Board members, individually and collectively, to communicate with legislators and asked that City communications help notify the public so residents could submit comments during the public input period.

Alderman Carroll then spoke and apologized for earlier remarks regarding sending money back, stating he appreciated the combined approach suggested by Alderman Kelley and Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller and acknowledged the work City Manager Saldo had already put into the matter.

Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller followed with several updates. She stated that multiple municipalities had adopted resolutions related to the Cape Fear dredging topic, including Caswell Beach, Bald Head Island, Kure Beach, and Leland, and said efforts were underway to develop a joint regional statement including Brunswick County communities and potentially New Hanover County to coordinate messaging. Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller also reported she attended a Cape Fear River Watch workshop discussing a permit application associated with a proposed withdrawal of approximately six million gallons of water per day from the Cape Fear River for development use, with discharge proposed to the Neuse River. She stated she had concerns about impacts, particularly during drought conditions, and encouraged residents to view the Cape Fear River Watch meeting information online and submit public comments. She noted a deadline of April 1 for comment submission and encouraged community participation and legislative engagement on the issue.

Mayor Pro-Tem Mosteller then offered remarks in remembrance of Tom Lombardi, describing his extensive volunteer work and service in the community, including Beautification Committee leadership, involvement in the community garden, support for local arts, volunteer service at Doshier Hospital, leadership in his neighborhood association, and prior service as a Southport Alderman. She described him as a “Renaissance man” with many talents and expressed personal condolences and remembrance.

Alderman Spencer stated he had been noting community concerns and identified shoreline stabilization and dredging as a primary issue. He said he believed a long-term solution would require significant dredging behind Bald Head Island to create a more direct route and reduce erosion and navigation impacts, but acknowledged that such a solution would be expensive. He then raised concerns about pedestrian safety and connectivity, referencing ongoing City efforts to improve sidewalks and paths and stating continued concern about the lack of a sidewalk to Walmart, which he described as a safety hazard he hoped would be addressed.

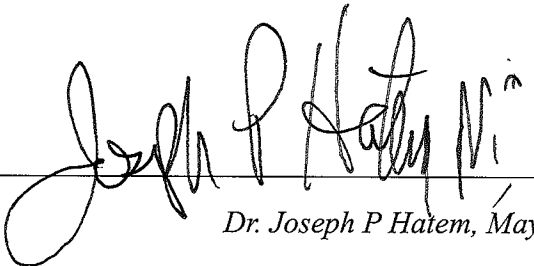
Alderman Spencer also returned to Franklin Square Park, stating the park has differing opinions surrounding it and that the City should focus on preservation rather than immediate gratification. He referenced the need to allow the park to “heal” and emphasized that new improvements must be sustainable and manageable over time. Alderman Spencer also offered condolences to the Lombardi family.

Alderman Spencer then shared personal remarks about his son’s college application process and stated his son had been accepted to UNC-Chapel Hill and East Carolina, with additional decisions pending. He explained his son was preparing a speech focused on relationships and how partisan politics can divide people, and Alderman Spencer stated he appreciated the message that communities have more in common than differences. He encouraged support for young people through internships and opportunities to participate in local government processes, noting those experiences can be valuable and impactful.

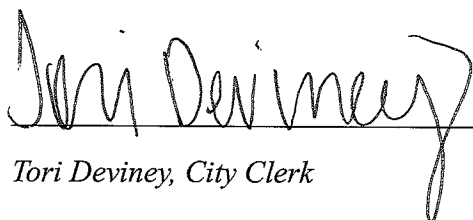
O. Adjourn

Mayor Hatem thanked the Board and attendees and stated the meeting had been productive. A motion to adjourn was made by Alderman Spencer and seconded by Alderman Carroll. The motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:26 PM.


Dr. Joseph P Hatem, Mayor

Attest:


Tori Deviney, City Clerk

