

*March 3, 2025*  
**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

**CITY OF SOUTHPORT  
BOARD OF ALDERMEN  
223 E. BAY STREET  
9:00 A.M.**

**PRESENT:** Mayor Richard Alt  
Mayor Pro-Tem Rebecca Kelley  
Aldermen Marc Spencer, Robert Carroll, Frank Lai, Lowe Davis, Karen Mosteller

**STAFF:** Noah Saldo, Interim City Manager  
Tori Deviney, Deputy City Clerk  
Joey Kronemwetter, Finance Director  
Charles Drew, Fire Chief  
Todd Coring, Police Chief  
Tom Stanley, Public Services Director  
ChyAnn Ketchum, Public Information Officer  
Tom Zilinek, City Engineer

**A. Call to Order**

Mayor Alt called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

Mayor Alt read the Ethics Statement:

*“If any members know of any conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest concerning matters on the agenda, please so state at this time.”*

No conflicts of interest stated.

**B. Invocation**

Alderman, Reverend, Lowe Davis gave the invocation.

**C. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mayor Alt led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**D. Public Comment**

Alderman Spencer moved, second by Alderman Mosteller to open Public Comment.  
**Unanimous vote; motion carried.**

Mayor Alt advised public comment participants to provide contact information to the

Clerk if requesting a response to their comments.

Speaking about the opportunity to see into perpetuity the environmental value of the City owned 427 acres adjacent to Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point (MOTSU), Ms. Carolee Morris, 6497 Walden Pond Lane, asked the Board to extent the purchase contract with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC).

Ms. Alicia Treadway, 6482 Rolling Run Road, echoed the request by Ms. Morris and she stressed the importance of keeping the property in its natural state.

Speaking about the City owned 427 acres under contract to sell, Mr. Terry Duff, 6519 Walden Pond Lane, addressed the Board. He summarized the history of the property since city purchase in 2006, annexation of the property, and past proposed uses. He indicated he had recently walked the property and shared his discovery that the property was the site of a historical Civil War battle in 1865. Mr. Duff repeated the requests by Ms. Morris and Ms. Treadway. Mr. Duff shared his opinion of the lack of transparency by the City, his embarrassment at the public ridicule of Ben Soloman with NCWRC, his recent submittal and response to a Public Records Request, and the need for a wider dissemination of information to the public.

Referencing Agenda Item #2 and Moseley Architects' 2023 Police Department space needs report, Ms. Bonnie Bray, 515 Quartermaster Drive, questioned how the Police Department staffing needs to 2043 were derived. She pointed out that two other studies were performed in 2023 and 2024 with estimated renovation costs of \$3.9M and \$4.2M respectively. She questioned if a public meeting space was included in those estimates and how Moseley Architects has currently estimated renovation costs at \$3.6M.

Alderman Kelley moved to close Public Comment, second by Alderman Lai.  
**Unanimous vote; motion carried.**

Mayor Alt stated that the postponement of renewing the contract on the 427 acres was to permit research into what other jurisdictions are doing in similar circumstances. He noted that a decision has to be made before the end of March (contract expiration) and the next scheduled meeting of the Board will be March 13.

#### **E. Approval of Agenda**

Alderman Lai made a motion to approve the Agenda, second by Alderman Kelley.  
**Unanimous vote; motion carried.**

#### **F. Agenda**

## **1. Building Resilient Infrastructure in Communities (BRIC) Stormwater Grant (Agenda pages 2-4)**

City Engineer Tom Zilinek provided an update on the BRIC grant and two major points:

### **I.**

- A Letter of Interest was submitted October 2024 for the Bonnet's Creek Stormwater Improvement Plan, Phase I (includes storm drain that goes under hospital emergency room and through rear yards of residences on Fodale Avenue)
- A high priority to get fixed
- \$3.9M is estimated cost for Phase I; City contribution \$1.2M
- February 10 received email from the North Carolina Emergency Management Hazard Mitigation Division inviting City to submit a formal grant application
- Further information regarding submittal anticipated by the end of April
- A fully engineered set of plans must be included in the application
- October 31, 2025 is the deadline for submittal

### **II.**

- Funding is a disaster based mitigation
- Local match, \$1.2M, to be paid by the State
- Must be shovel ready project under design
- Design will cost \$500,000 - \$600,000 (start immediately to meet deadline)

Engineer Zilinek reported that the grant was no longer a competition; it is an allocation. 151 projects were submitted for consideration totaling \$800M. The Federal share of the grant is \$1.5B.

Responding to a query by Alderman Mosteller, Mr. Zilinek indicated he had sent an email to the BRIC Grant Administrator asking if the cost for a design plan (\$500,00 - \$600,000) was reimbursable. City Manager Saldo stated the City's Fund Balance is robust and the city would realize a five time return on the investment. He added that with a Board consensus, Finance Department staff could prepare a Budget Amendment for adoption at the Board's March 13 meeting. Engineer Zilinek expressed that knowing a budget amendment is forthcoming, he could start getting proposals together for possible awarding of a contract in April.

Responding to questions from Alderman Spencer, Engineer Zilinek stated the following:

- Entire Bonnets Creek Stormwater Improvement Plan is estimated to cost \$10 - 12M
- An engineered plan is required for each section of the project
- Did not know at submittal that the 30% match would be paid by the State
- Improvement of the Bonnet's Creek Bridge was not included in Phase I
- The Design will look at ways to slow the rate of flow of water
- Location of drains may remain in residential rear yards or moved into the street (under Leonard Street, down Herring Drive and Willis Drive; rendering included in agenda packet)

Engineer Zilinek stated that work would generally start at the River and work inward. He emphasized that the section chosen for Phase I was due to the existence of the system under the hospital and no access to it if something happened.

Referencing the flooding at E. Moore Street, Alderman Kelley asked if additional work could be added to the grant. Engineer Zilinek responded he would be pursuing it.

Echoing Alderman Kelley, Alderman Carroll stressed the importance of prioritizing what funds are dedicated to what projects. City Manager Saldo indicated that documentation would be included in the March 13 meeting agenda listing the Board proposed fund allocations for specific projects.

Mayor Alt shared his experience sitting in as a spectator in meetings with Engineer Zilinek pertaining to Potential Tropical Storm 8 (PTS8) damages and State legislation addressing the repair costs. Mayor Alt pointed out that Senate Bill #382 included verbiage that the State would pay for the “*deductible.*”

## **2. Old City Hall Courthouse (Agenda pages 5-42)**

City Engineer Zilinek spoke to the Board regarding the contract with Moseley Architects for a concept plan of use for the Old City Hall Courthouse by the Southport Police Department. He introduced Josh Bennett, Moseley Architects.

Mr. Bennett apologized for not being present for prior Board meetings. He displayed draft floor plans for use of the building by the Police Department (PD).

Alderman Mosteller and Mr. Bennett discussed the square footage of the building; exterior/interior, gross and net usable. Mr. Bennett qualified the number reached for usable square footage, 7,800; “We were tasked with how can we reuse this building. We looked at how we can reduce or maximize the efficiency of what the Chief was asking for. Ideal scenario, how can we get those same people into this facility, how to be functional in this building? Sergeants may have to share an office, reduced by cutting exercise room, Sally Port and further reduced square footage where we took people out of offices and combined functions.” Mr. Bennett added that the Police Chief made concessions.

Alderman Mosteller expressed her concerns about the layout:

- Entry vestibules (essentially an air lock)
- Interview Room access through Work Room
- Walking through Gun Cleaning Room to get to Shared Office Space and Sergeant Office

Mr. Bennett stated that relocating the Bag & Tag area from the first layout reiteration (near vault) to the current proposed location, while not ideal, is acceptable because it is in a secure part of the building not accessible to the public.

Police Chief Todd Coring spoke to the Board; “This proposed layout is a living/breathing document. We went back and forth on the design and this plan flows well, items were sacrificed that do not affect our operational needs into the future.” Alderman Lai asked; “Original design was would like to have and current design is what have to have?” Chief Coring responded; “Yes.” He shared his unique perception of the building and his due diligence:

- Discussion of PD returning to the building started in 2015
- Several studies were reviewed
- 2010 space study determined the Police Department would need 4,000 sq. ft.
- 2010 options were to build stand alone building in Public Services parking lot (estimated at \$680,000) or upfit existing Nash Street Fire Department (\$216,000 estimate)
- September 9, 2013 design under then Chief Dove
- October 11, 2015 design under then Chief Smith
- Spoke with other Police Departments with under utilized Sally Ports
- Low need for evidentiary storage due to low crime rate
- Do not need a workout room; can receive good membership price at area gyms and can utilize Fire Department facility
- Locker room/shower area has been modified
- The flow of rooms works for PD operation
- Staffing is determined in part by call volume data

Chief Coring discussed the multitude of issues he faced when assuming the Chief position. He spoke about a 2018 independent investigation that emphasized critical issues, i.e., space needs and functionality. Chief Coring talked about the number of times the Police Department relocated:

- Out of Old City Hall into Indian Trail Meeting Hall (ITMH, 1,000 sq. ft.)
- Out of ITMH into 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of City Hall, 1029 N. Howe Street  
(Space modified six (6) times to accommodate offices, secured lobby, and evidence vault)

Chief Coring stated there were discussions of relocating other city departments to free up space in City Hall and ultimately the Police Department leased a temporary facility at 1669 N. Howe Street.

Mayor Alt spoke of his experience in a larger police department utilizing shared spaces. He advised the Board that their current action is to make a decision on what is going into that building. He reported that the State legislative session has begun and he and Mayor Pro Tem Kelley, representing the Southport Board of Aldermen, recently attended a session and pitched a request for \$5M for the renovation of the Old City Hall Courthouse. Mayor Alt pointed out that the decision on how to use the building must to determined in order to apply for grants.

Alderman Carroll stated his dedication to seeing the Old City Hall Courthouse renovated. He reviewed the proposed floor plan and stated his opinion from a real estate perspective that the plan, as drawn, would not function. Alderman Carroll pointed out that the access to restrooms on the second floor was behind the Board Diaz. Mr. Bennett indicated public facilities would be located on the first floor and accessible via an elevator. He reminded the Board that the floor plan has not been vetted by Moseley and was drawn “*to be a plan that shows how much square footage could be used. This plan is not here for approval to build.*”

Responding to Alderman Mosteller, Mr. Bennett stating the current seating capacity in the Board Chambers is 98 people and the proposal is for 100 people. He indicated the Diaz is elevated and 30 feet wide. It is proposed to reduce the width of the Diaz to 20 feet. Alderman Mosteller stated her continued struggle with the merging of secure space with public space, doors to offices into the chamber, no IT room, no second floor designated storage. Chief Coring assured Alderman Mosteller that no Police functions would take place while the Board was in session and the largest Police Department Division, Patrol, would not all be in the building at one time.

Responding to a question by Alderman Spencer, Chief Coring stated the Southport Police Department was located at 107 E. Nash Street (current location of public restrooms) with two offices when his father was Chief. In 1989 under Chief Gray the Department moved in space at 201 E. Moore Street, City Hall, where it remained for 36 years.

Alderman Spencer noted that the Police Department was removed from City Hall due to the condition of the building. He emphasized that Southport citizens want the Police Department downtown and to see bicycle and foot patrols. He pointed out that the Community Building now utilized for Board meetings was not a secure location. He stated his support for the Police Department moving into the Old City Hall Courthouse and having a secure City Hall.

Alderman Lai stated:

*“I make a motion to designate the Old City Hall Courthouse located at 201 E. Moore Street for use as a Southport City Department and Board Chambers. Further, to send to the Planning Board draft designs to review and make recommendations to the Board of Aldermen on the extent, location, design of public structure facility and to instruct the Planning Board to report back the recommendations to the Board of Aldermen the recommendation within 30 days of today as outlined in Section 13-34 Public Facilities of the Southport Code of Ordinances and Section 2-3 Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) provisions.”*

Alderman Spencer seconded the motion.

### Discussion

Alderman Davis stated; “I question why you did not say Police Department in the motion. I am not sold this is the best use of our many government buildings. We own a lot of buildings in Southport and this is not necessarily the best government use of this building. What are the other possibilities? That is why I was suggesting a special called meeting to look at potential best uses of what we currently have, for example, we have an underused building (City Hall) with a great resale value. We have a functional location now where Police Department is. We have a very underused set of buildings on Fodale Avenue, the ITMH for public, Board of Aldermen, and committee meetings that could take place at the Fodale Avenue building freeing up ITMH for something else. Before we commit ourselves let’s talk about all our buildings as a whole and figure out the best uses. For example, if we were to sell the current City Hall, we could provide enough money to do projects and beef up Fund Balance.”

Mayor Alt clarified that the motion made is to send the proposal to the Planning Board for a recommendation per the UDO requirements and the Planning Board will have access to all information, drawings, city staff, etc. He advised that any Board member can go to the Planning Board meeting, speak in Public Comment, and offer suggestions. He repeated that the Planning Board makes a recommendation and the final approval is by the Board.

Mayor Alt said; “I am a kindred spirit with the Police Department and Fire Department. We need to move forward. We have an opportunity to get money from the State. The building has set vacant for years. The Board took action in 2024, the building has been remediated, the HVAC is going in. It’s the natural progression.”

Responding to a query by Alderman Davis, Alderman Kelley stated; “In order to apply for grants, we have to tell them what is going into the building.”

Noting that the original plan called for 34 parking spaces, Alderman Mosteller asked about the required parking for the building use. Mr. Bennett stated the parking poses challenges, especially as an existing building and requirements for a courthouse. It was mentioned that street parking is available.

Per a request by Alderman Carroll, Alderman Lai repeated the Motion.

*“I make a motion to designate the Old City Hall Courthouse located at 201 E. Moore Street for use as a Southport City Department and Board Chambers. Further, to send to the Planning Board draft designs to review and make recommendations to the Board of Aldermen on the extent, location, design of public structure facility and to instruct the Planning Board to report back the recommendations to the Board of Aldermen the recommendation within 30 days of today as outlined in Section 13-34 Public Facilities of the Southport Code of Ordinances and Section 2-3 Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) provisions.”*

### Discussion

Alderman Mosteller and Mr. Bennett discussed the difference between a past cost estimate, \$8.5M, and the current estimate, \$5M.

Alderman Kelley stressed the opportunity to obtain funding from the State during the legislative session.

Alderman Carroll went on the record; “My vote today is not for it to be the Police Department but for it to go to the Planning Board. To Ms. Kelley’s point I want to go on record challenging our State legislators to give us money because I don’t believe it will happen.”

### **Vote**

Aye: Aldermen Lai, Spencer, Kelley, Carroll

Nay: Aldermen David & Mosteller

**4-2 Motion Carried**

## **G. City Manager's Report**

City Manager Saldo reported that staff is working with FEMA on reimbursements for PTC8. Five (5) projects consisting of electrical pole replacement, fire truck maintenance, park building damage, stormwater system damage and payroll costs have been filed with FEMA. He added that the first FY 25/26 budget work session was held and he is working with staff on the budget process and scheduling work sessions with the Board of Aldermen.

City Manager Saldo requested Public Information Officer ChyAnn Ketchum to provide an update on the new audio/visual system and new website provider. Miss Ketchum reported that the project started six (6) months prior had multiple delays (3 tropical storms, holidays, snowstorm). She indicated that everything is finally set up at the ITMH and Community Building exactly the same which will make meeting smoother for staff, the Board and remote participants. She stated the City is on Microsoft Office Suite using Microsoft Teams as its live service. People are joining meetings through a link via text messaging, Facebook and the City's website. She reported she has received e-mails that the audio is significantly better. She explained how remote participants are able to be seen and heard through the system and how they can share documentation in real time with no delay.

Responding to a query by Alderman Davis, Ms. Ketchum stated the system is Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant. Additionally, Ms. Ketchum stated there may be shifting of locations of the podium and seating.

Alderman Spencer asked Ms. Ketchum if she was aware of, and has she used, a program that scans your website to make sure all is compliant. Noting that the City has a large website, Ms. Ketchum responded that she was aware of the program and there are things still digging up on the back end of it. She emphasized the new accessibility tools and features the website did not have before.

Alderman Mosteller asked how the system would work in Closed Session. Ms. Ketchum stated the system would work the same but she recommended calling in separately on a phone if accessing Closed Session remotely.

## **H. Mayor's Comments**

Mayor Alt asked City Manager Saldo about the FEMA threshold of \$1.3M. City Manager Saldo responded that each reimbursement request is classified as its own project and they are under the \$1.3M.

Mayor Alt indicated that the Overlay document provided to the Aldermen is for the March 13 Board of Aldermen meeting.

Responding to a statement by Mayor Alt, City Manager Saldo indicated that each of the projects submitted to FEMA for reimbursement are classified as their own project under the \$1.3M threshold, i.e., electric pole replacement is an individual project.

Mayor Alt said the following:

“We are fortunate to live in a town that has a multitude of activities to broaden and refresh our minds. Last month I had the opportunity to sit in this very room and take in the joys of the annual Black History Gospel Event. The place was packed. Yesterday, again in this room I had the opportunity to enjoy the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) Music Department’s Opera group. Another packed house with an assortment of operatic selections. This was the 22<sup>nd</sup> year UNCW has been coming to Southport for such an occasion and I have to admit, I totally missed for the 21 times, but it is on my calendar now. With March 1<sup>st</sup> the music season is upon us like the coming of Spring and awakening of our favorite waterfront bars with their expert selection of musical groups. The town is coming back to life again.”

Mayor Alt announced the following events:

- March 7 @ 5:00 p.m.; Franklin Square Park Art Gallery Spring Awards
- The City is developing its music program for Franklin Square Park and soliciting for groups
- First Friday Gallery Walks will commence and give one and all the opportunity to go outside and mingle with their neighbors

## **I. Staff Reports**

Mayor Alt pointed out that city staff reports were included in the Agenda packet, pages 43 through 92.

### **1. Finance Department**

City Manager Saldo reported the monthly revenues and expenditures to date were included in the Finance Department report.

## **J. Board Comments**

Alderman Lai stated that while coming into the building (Community Building), he noticed a chasm in the sidewalk. He reported it to Public Services Director Tom Stanley who advised him that the City is in the process of fixing broken sidewalks. Alderman Lai stated his appreciation.

Alderman Spencer reported the Cemetery Committee met, are working on revisions to the Cemetery Ordinance and have found there is no consistent water supply for people to water graves. He indicated the City is working with Brunswick County to get meters on the water system and determine how the usage would be billed. He added that a gentleman is dragging a 300' hose to water his wife’s grave. “We need to get the water back on” said Alderman Spencer. Alderman Spencer questioned whether or not the City should contract to mow the Smithville Burying Grounds and John Smith Cemetery.

Referencing public comments, Alderman Spencer spoke about the sale of the 427 acres. He emphasized the City has a contract with the NCWRC. He stated; “It’s hard when people come in here and tell me what to do when they don’t pay taxes. It gets old. It’s almost like

they are bullying us, threatening us. He recalled an incident when a group put door hangers on citizens' doors to influence elections.

Recalling that Moore Street is a NCDOT maintained road, was originally the route to Wilmington, was built over estuaries with marl and rock and was not designed to handle the current storm water flow, Alderman Spencer talked about the critical need to replace the bridge at Bonnets Creek to keep the neighborhood from flooding.

Alderman Spencer emphasized the need to keep City employees trained on new technology and using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to be more productive. He stated; "If we don't use it (AI), it will use us. If we don't learn how to use it, it will replace us."

Alderman Spencer stated he has been receiving complaints from residents about receiving violations for having their trash cans in the right-of-way a few days after trash pick up. He asked if the rules about trash cans had been publicized, if residents are notified before getting a violation, and is the City over regulating. "Where will it stop?" City Manager Saldo responded a notice is given before issuance of a violation.

Alderman Spencer proudly shared that his son, Levi, has won four (4) levels of the American Legion Oratory Contest and will be going to the State competition in October. His topic is the Supreme Court, he aspires to be a Supreme Court Justice, and he is pursuing scholarship money. Alderman Spencer stated that young people need to have the opportunity available for internships, competitions, and scholarships.

Alderman Kelley thanked city staff for the new storm water drain at Lord and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets. She stated appreciation to State Legislators for hosting the Mayor and herself in Raleigh recently; "The Mayor and I attended session, were announced in session, stood and applauded while there. The dinner with legislators from across the State was a nice way to interact with other municipalities and those Senators and Representatives from across the State. It was a great way for Southport to be seen and heard on a State level."

Referring to Public Comments, Alderman Davis stated her concerns that the City may be renegeing on the commitment for conservation of the Southport owned property near MOTSU. She stated her vote was based on the realization that the organization was not going to prohibit hunting. She said; "I was hoping we could use a month to seek out other land conservancy organizations whose whole concept is conservation, i.e., a non-government, non-profit organization that functions by acquiring property and then turning it over to a municipality."

Alderman Davis suggested adding Board Comments after Public Comments in order to respond to comments made by the public.

Alderman Carroll pointed out that the Board can research and study something while working on another thing; we can look at unique places to save while we still have a contract. I believe that kind of short sightedness is what has gotten this City to what we are now. The wheels of City government turn quite slow."

Stating appreciation for the collaboration of the City staff and non-profit organizations, Alderman Carroll read a portion of an email he received; “This project was a true collaboration. The City and Southport Historical Society shared the cost evenly of their Womens’ History Month banner. The Southport Historical Society provided historical details and photographs of honorees. The (Southport) Community Relations Department designed the banners helping to bring these womens’ stories to the forefront. The bnners will be installed in early March in celebration of Womens’ History Month and they will remain for several weeks.”

Alderman Carroll spoke about the City’s budget, the many projects proposed, and the need to find ways to increase revenue. He indicated he would provide information he received from SurfCast, the company handling parking management for Oak Island and several over municipalities. He stated; “Now may be the time to think about paid parking, keeping it free for residents, business owners and their employees. I think this is the answer for the long term challenges we face regarding parking and our budget.”

Referencing a previous Board decision not to amend the Lane Use Map associated with Cades Cove, Alderman Carroll encouraged staff to work alongside the Cades Cove HOA to being a conservation about how the City might adopt the streets and possibly invest in their storm water program.


Alderman Mosteller explained the purchase price of the City owner 427 acres adjacent to MOTSU was based on an appraisal of the property. She noted that the conservation easement was recorded February 12, 2025 and the easement states hunting is allowed and it does not state that hunting is restricted to bow hunting.

Alderman Spencer stated his opinion it is a good idea to look at paid parking. He suggested called in “permit” parking instead of “paid” parking. He shared his travel experiences and the various parking fees he had encountered.

**K. Adjourn**

Alderman Kelley made a motion to adjourn, second by Alderman Lai.  
**Unanimous vote; motion carried.**

**Adjourned at 11:24 AM**

  
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Dr. Joseph P Hatem, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
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Tori Deviney, City Clerk

