



**CITY OF SOUTHPORT
BOARD OF ALDERMEN - REGULAR MEETING
COMMUNITY BUILDING
223 E BAY ST, SOUTHPORT NC 28461**

March 12, 2026 | 6:00 PM

Present Members:

Joseph Hatem, M.D., Paul Gross, Rebecca Kelley, Lowe Davis, Robert Carroll, Karen Mosteller

Absent Members:

Marc Spencer

Staff Present:

City Manager Noah Saldo, Clerk Tori Deviney, Public Information Officer ChyAnn Ketchum, Police Chief Todd Coring, Fire Chief Charles Drew, Battalion Chief Ralph Treadway, Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Others Present:

City Attorney Brady Herman

A. Call to Order

Mayor Hatem called the meeting to order at 6:05 PM

B. Invocation

Alderman Reverend Lowe Davis delivered the invocation.

C. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Hatem led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

D. Public Comment (3 Minute Time Limit)

Rich Alt - 6165 Cottage Creek Rd

Mr. Alt expressed his support for the new ethics policy and thanked staff.

Larry Ashley - 632 Wild Rose Way

Mr. Ashley spoke regarding Planning Board appointments. He stated that the vacancy had been advertised for a total of 45 days, noting that applications were first due on February 13 and again on February 27. He expressed appreciation for the effort to find the right candidate but emphasized the importance of filling the

seat, which has been vacant for approximately five months, to allow the Planning Board to function more effectively.

He noted that interviews were recently conducted and that the interview committee recommended appointing the current alternate member, Ed Ekert, to the vacant full member position. Mr. Ashley described Mr. Ekert as a productive, dedicated, and engaged member of the Planning Board who has applied for the position multiple times.

Mr. Ashley also highlighted Mr. Ekert's contributions, including his involvement in developing the Planning Board handbook alongside Maria Horton and Doug Luehe, describing it as a valuable resource for new members.

He stated that Mr. Ekert is aware the term will expire in June and that he will need to reapply if appointed. Mr. Ashley emphasized Mr. Ekert's continued interest in serving and requested that the Board of Aldermen support the committee's recommendation and appoint him to the vacancy.

Mr. Ashley concluded by noting the high level of engagement among Planning Board members and expressed appreciation for the support provided by staff, including Planning staff and the Clerk's office.

Holly Segala - 2435 Lake Ridge Dr

Ms. Segala addressed the board and stated that although she had signed up under a different topic, she wished to address multiple issues.

Ms. Segala expressed concern regarding the noise ordinance, noting that early morning dumpster pickups at 6:00 a.m. are disruptive and suggested the Board consider moving the allowable time to 6:30 or 7:00 a.m.

She referenced a prior meeting where a resident spoke about flooding concerns and stated that while the City can do some mitigation, regulations governing construction practices are largely controlled at the state and county levels. She commented on clear-cutting and development practices, stating that developers are operating within existing laws.

Ms. Segala discussed recent legislative actions, including a bill introduced by Representative Charles Miller, which resulted in the removal of the City's extraterritorial jurisdiction (ETJ). She stated that this change reduced the City's control over surrounding areas and resulted in a loss of potential revenue. She also referenced additional ETJ removals affecting specific properties.

She expressed concern about environmental impacts, including flooding, wetlands loss, and deforestation, and stated that these issues are tied to current development practices. Ms. Segala encouraged consideration of policy changes,

including reinstating impact fees for developers, and emphasized the role of elected officials in shaping these outcomes.

Bonnie Bray - 515 Quartermaster Dr

Ms. Bray addressed the Board and stated that she was reacting to the City's recent press release regarding the suspension of Parks and Recreation employees and expressed concern about the lack of information provided to the public.

Ms. Bray noted that in the absence of official information, speculation had increased within the community. She stated that she understood the Board may not have been informed in advance and that the situation may have been developing for some time. She expressed concern about the impact on families, particularly those affected by sudden changes to after-school care programs.

Ms. Bray expressed frustration regarding how the matter was handled and voiced concern about the potential long-term impact on the reputations of the employees involved. She referenced a prior personnel matter in 2023 and noted the effect it had on the community.

She also questioned the continuity of Parks and Recreation operations and referenced the inclusion of a departmental report on the agenda despite the current situation. She expressed concern about reliance on volunteers to fill gaps in programming and emphasized that these services are important to the community.

Ms. Bray stated that residents expect transparency and communication from City leadership and expressed that the community wants to be informed and involved. She concluded by urging the Board to handle the situation differently moving forward and to keep the public better informed.

E. 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.

Mayor Hatem read the ethics statement and asked if any members had a conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest regarding any items on the agenda. Hearing none, he moved forward with the meeting.

F. Approval of Agenda

Mayor Hatem introduced Item F, approval of the agenda. A motion was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Kelley. There was no discussion.

Motion carried unanimously.

G. Approval of the Consent Agenda

Mayor Hatem introduced Item G, approval of the consent agenda. He noted that the consent agenda included a request from the Garrison Long Veterans Memorial Reef, a nonprofit organization based in Carolina Beach, to hold a formal ceremony on May 16, 2026, at the Garrison Lawn at Fort Johnston to honor fallen U.S. Armed Forces veterans.

Alderman Kelley stated that the event was held in Southport for the first time the previous year after a barge previously used for the reef placement was no longer available. He noted that McPherson Marine assisted, which allowed the organization to bring the event to Southport.

Mayor Hatem stated that, per City regulations, use of the Garrison Lawn for events not sponsored by the City requires Board approval. He described the Veterans Memorial Reef as a unique aquatic memorial in which cremated remains of veterans are incorporated into concrete memorial structures and placed on the ocean floor to create artificial reefs. He described it as a worthwhile event.

Mayor Hatem further stated that the consent agenda included a resolution opposing the expansion of the Chemours Fayetteville Works facility. He summarized that the resolution cites concerns regarding PFAS contamination, impacts to the Cape Fear River watershed, and associated risks to public health, drinking water, tourism, fisheries, and economic vitality. The resolution formally opposes the expansion and urges the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to deny any related permits or approvals.

A motion to approve the consent agenda was made by Alderman Gross and seconded by Alderman Mosteller. There was no further discussion. The motion carried unanimously.

1. Approval of Minutes:
 1. June 12, 2025 Board of Aldermen Regular Meeting Minutes
 2. June 23, 2025 Board of Aldermen Special Meeting Minutes
 3. July 7, 2025 Board of Aldermen Regular Meeting Minutes
 4. February 12, 2026 Board of Aldermen Regular Meeting Minutes

2. Veterans Memorial Reef Request - Garrison Lawn

3. Opposition of the Expansion of Chemours' Fayetteville Works Facility

H. Special Recognition

1. Women's History Month Proclamation

Mayor Hatem introduced Item H, Special Recognition - Women's History Month Proclamation. He invited the female members of the Board of Aldermen to join him at the front while he read the proclamation.

Mayor Hatem read a proclamation recognizing March 2026 as Women's History Month in the City of Southport. The proclamation honored the contributions of women throughout the nation's history and specifically recognized the impact of women in shaping the Southport community. It highlighted notable individuals, including Dot Gilbert, the first woman to serve as Mayor of Southport and the first female mayor in North Carolina; Eileen Stidham Lee, the first woman to pastor a church in Southport; Hazel Watts, known for her leadership in senior care initiatives and development of Ocean Trail; Patty Fry Treadway, the first female firefighter of the Southport Fire Department; Gloria Stanley, the first female officer of the Southport Police Department; and Joy Gregory, the first female deputy of the Brunswick County Sheriff's Office.

The proclamation further recognized the contributions of countless women whose service has strengthened the civic, economic, and cultural foundation of the City. Mayor Hatem encouraged residents to celebrate and recognize the role of women in shaping the community.

I. Agenda

1. 2026 Brunswick County Schools Bond Presentation *Board of Education Chairman Steve Gainey, Superintendent Dale Cole*

Mayor Hatem introduced the next agenda item, the 2026 Brunswick County Schools Bond Referendum presentation, and recognized Board of Education Chairman Steve Gainey.

Mr. Gainey thanked the Mayor and Board for the opportunity to present and shared his personal connection to Southport, noting that he grew up in the area and has longstanding ties to the community. He stated that the purpose of his remarks was to provide an overview of the progress within Brunswick County Schools and to explain why the Board of Education is seeking support for the bond referendum.

Mr. Gainey highlighted improvements within the school system, including significant growth in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, noting an increase in job credentials earned by students and a substantial rise in internship opportunities. He also emphasized continued progress in academic performance, including increased participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses and improved rates of students earning college credit.

He further noted that student engagement has improved, citing a reduction in truancy rates by approximately 50 percent over the past three years. Mr. Gainey stated that these improvements reflect the district's commitment to both career-focused and academic pathways. He concluded by expressing that, given the district's progress and ongoing needs, the Board of Education is requesting support for the proposed bond referendum. Mr. Gainey then introduced Superintendent Dale Cole.

Mr. Dale Cole, Superintendent of Brunswick County Schools, addressed the Board and also shared his personal connection to Southport. He stated that the purpose of his presentation was to provide an overview of the bond referendum and its necessity.

Mr. Cole highlighted recent district achievements, including an increase in graduation rates, improved attendance, and continued growth in both Career and Technical Education programs and college credit opportunities through partnerships with Brunswick Community College.

He explained that the primary need for the bond referendum is to address student population growth and capacity limitations within the school system. He stated that Brunswick County Schools has experienced steady enrollment increases of approximately three to four percent annually, resulting in the need for additional classroom space.

Mr. Cole noted that the proposed \$349.6 million bond would primarily fund the construction of a new elementary school and a new high school, which account for the majority of the cost. He stated that the new elementary school is anticipated to be located in the northern part of the county, between the Belville and Town Creek areas, and that the new high school is projected to be located off Mako Road in the northern region of the county. He explained that the district has relied on modular classrooms to address growth but described them as a temporary and costly solution. He also discussed infrastructure limitations such as cafeteria capacity, traffic flow, and parking constraints at existing schools.

He provided an overview of projected enrollment growth across the county and explained how the proposed new schools would help address capacity issues over the next decade. Additional proposed improvements include

upgrades to athletic facilities, safety and communication systems, and site access improvements at certain schools.

Mr. Cole also explained that the bond would be distributed over multiple years to lessen the immediate financial impact and provided general information regarding potential tax implications. He encouraged the Board and the public to review additional materials available on the Brunswick County Schools website and stated that he is available to answer questions.

Mayor Hatem thanked the presenters and stated that the Board supports the school system, noting particular pride in Southport Elementary. He indicated that the Board may consider sending a letter of support at a later time.

Alderman Kelley inquired about Southport Elementary School, noting that it was not specifically referenced in the presentation. She stated that, as a representative of Southport, she wanted clarification regarding any proposed improvements affecting that school and its students.

Mr. Cole responded that the bond proposal does not include major projects for Southport Elementary, aside from replacement of the intercom system. He explained that the bond is focused on addressing capacity needs in areas of highest growth and stated that, at this time, Southport Elementary has available capacity.

Alderman Kelley acknowledged the response and reiterated the importance of representing Southport students, including those attending South Brunswick Middle and High Schools. She noted her familiarity with the schools and facilities and requested confirmation regarding planned improvements at South Brunswick Middle School.

Mr. Cole confirmed that the bond includes improvements such as bleacher replacements and upgrades to athletic facilities, including a softball concession stand and related amenities for South Brunswick. He also noted the importance of updating intercom systems across schools.

Alderman Kelley expressed appreciation for the clarification. Mr. Cole asked if there were any additional questions, and hearing none, concluded the presentation.

2. **PUBLIC HEARING:** ZTA-25-05 Vape / Tobacco Shop - Unified Development Ordinance Text Amendment
Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Mayor Hatem introduced the next agenda item, a public hearing regarding a

proposed text amendment to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) concerning vape and tobacco shops. He stated that the process requires a public hearing and the adoption of a statement of consistency prior to Board action. He noted that the issue relates to both public health and aesthetic considerations, including appropriate location standards. Mayor Hatem then called on Planning Director Maureen Meehan and declared the public hearing open.

Planning Director Meehan presented the proposed text amendment, which would add vape and tobacco shops as a defined land use within the Highway Commercial (HC) zoning district. She explained that the use would be permitted by Special Use Permit and subject to specific standards outlined in the UDO.

Director Meehan provided a proposed definition for vape and tobacco shops, clarifying that the use applies to establishments primarily engaged in the retail sale of tobacco, marijuana-related products, CBD, kratom, and associated paraphernalia, and does not include businesses where such sales are incidental or where on-site consumption is permitted.

She outlined the proposed standards, including that such establishments must be located at least 500 feet from schools, daycare facilities, youth facilities, community centers, city parks, hospitals, and places of worship; at least 500 feet from residentially zoned properties; and at least 1,000 feet from another vape or tobacco shop. She noted that these provisions would not apply to legally existing businesses prior to the adoption of the amendment.

Director Meehan stated that the amendment does not constitute down-zoning, as it introduces a new use rather than removing or restricting existing zoning rights. She also explained that the proposed distance standards were developed in consideration of the limited areas zoned Highway Commercial, many of which are adjacent to residential properties.

She further noted that the Planning Board reviewed the proposed amendment at multiple meetings and, at its January 15 meeting, found the amendment to be consistent with the 2050 Comprehensive Plan and recommended approval. Director Meehan concluded her presentation.

Mayor Hatem called for public comment on the proposed UDO text amendment regarding vape and tobacco shops..

Betsy Vetter - 6094 Turtlewood Dr

Ms. Betsy Vetter addressed the Board and spoke in support of the amendment. She stated that tobacco and nicotine products are a leading preventable cause of chronic disease and expressed concern about

accessibility to youth. She noted that such products are often marketed toward children and supported the proposed restrictions as a way to promote public health and protect the community.

Mr. Dale Cole, Superintendent of Brunswick County Schools, also spoke in support of the amendment. He emphasized the importance of limiting student access to vape and tobacco products and noted both health concerns and operational impacts within schools.

Mayor Hatem asked if there were additional speakers, and hearing none, closed public comment and opened Board discussion.

Alderman Gross raised a concern regarding the inclusion of the term "drug paraphernalia" in the proposed text and questioned its consistency with existing laws. Director Meehan clarified that the intent was to reference tobacco-related paraphernalia. Alderman Gross suggested removing the term "drug" from the language, and Director Meehan indicated that such a revision could be made at the Board's direction.

Chief Coring provided additional clarification regarding enforcement considerations. He noted that paraphernalia may be lawful or unlawful depending on its intended use, and that similar devices may be used for legal tobacco products.

Alderman Davis questioned whether the Board was required to take action that evening and expressed concern about allowing such uses within the City, citing potential negative impacts.

Alderman Mosteller and Alderman Kelley discussed the importance of defining the use within the UDO to regulate its location, noting that without a defined use, vape and tobacco shops could be permitted under general retail and potentially located in areas such as the central business district. They emphasized that the proposed amendment would allow the City to place reasonable restrictions on where these businesses may operate. Director Meehan and City Attorney Herman explained that, without a defined use, such establishments could be permitted more broadly under general retail classifications.

Alderman Mosteller stated that while the Board does not support youth access to such products, the amendment represents a way to mitigate impacts through zoning while remaining compliant with state law.

Mayor Hatem reiterated that the amendment is not intended to promote such businesses but to restrict their placement to appropriate areas, such as Highway Commercial zoning districts, and away from schools, churches, and the central business district.

Alderman Kelley noted that similar regulatory approaches have been implemented in other municipalities. She stated that she had strongly supported bringing the amendment forward and expressed appreciation to the Planning Board and Planning Department for their work. She noted her personal experience having previously operated a business near a vape shop and emphasized the importance of shaping the character of Southport through appropriate regulation. She stated that, while recognizing that such businesses exist, the proposed amendment would allow the City to guide where they are located and indicated support for moving forward with the amendment, including the suggested revision by Alderman Gross.

Alderman Gross stated that he would support the amendment provided the term "drug paraphernalia" was removed and replaced with more appropriate language related to tobacco or smoking.

Alderman Carroll referenced prior Board practice of not voting on public hearing items the same evening and sought clarification on whether that approach would apply in this instance.

Mayor Hatem questioned whether such a policy was formally established. Alderman Davis stated that the practice had been followed in recent years and could be provided in writing.

Alderman Kelley noted that the public comments received were in favor of the amendment.

Mayor Hatem stated that the amendment was not a complex or controversial issue and emphasized the importance of protecting public health and ensuring appropriate placement of such businesses. He noted the time-sensitive nature of the matter and expressed support for proceeding with action that evening to prevent unregulated establishment of such uses.

Alderman Davis stated that if the Board was entering into discussion, a motion should be placed on the floor.

Alderman Carroll clarified that he was not opposed to the amendment but wanted to acknowledge prior Board practices regarding public hearings.

A motion was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Kelley to close the public hearing. The motion carried unanimously.

Alderman Mosteller then made a motion to add a new land use, Vape and Tobacco Shop with standards to Table 3.1, Section 3.8, and Article 8 of the Unified Development Ordinance, with the amendment to take out the word "drug" and keep "Tobacco" paraphernalia. The motion included adoption of

the required consistency statement. The motion was seconded by Alderman Kelley.

The motion carried unanimously.

3. **PUBLIC HEARING:** ZTA-26-01 Updates per changes to G.S. 106D - Unified Development Ordinance Text Amendment
Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Mayor Hatem introduced the next agenda item, a public hearing regarding proposed text amendments to the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) to comply with changes to North Carolina General Statute 160D. He called on Planning Director Maureen Meehan and declared the public hearing open.

Planning Director Meehan presented the proposed amendments, stating that the updates are required to align the City's UDO with recent changes enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly. She outlined several key updates, including provisions related to split jurisdiction determinations, limitations on down-zoning, clarification of vested rights and permit choice, removal of waiting periods for resubmittal of applications, and updates to infrastructure and roadway standards to align with state requirements.

Director Meehan noted that the Planning Board reviewed the proposed amendments at its February 19 meeting, found them consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, and recommended approval. She further stated that the amendments are required to comply with state law.

Mayor Hatem commented on the statutory changes and their impact on municipal authority. He then called for public comment. Hearing none, he requested a motion to close the public hearing.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Kelley. The motion carried unanimously.

Alderman Mosteller then made a motion to adopt the proposed UDO text amendments to incorporate changes to NCGS 160D and adopt the associated consistency statement. The motion was seconded by Alderman Kelley.

Alderman Mosteller requested clarification regarding the application of down-zoning provisions, and Director Meehan confirmed that the statutory language applies to commercial properties.

Alderman Mosteller also inquired about the duration of permit choice and vested rights. Director Meehan explained that the timeframe varies depending on the type of approval and project, and City Attorney Herman provided additional clarification, noting that permit choice may expire if an application is inactive or not pursued for a specified period. Additional discussion followed regarding special use permits and applicable timelines.

Upon a vote, the motion carried unanimously.

4. Final Plat - Jonas Creek Phase 3
Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Mayor Hatem introduced the next agenda item, consideration of the final plat for Jonas Creek Phase 3, and recognized Planning Director Meehan.

Director Meehan stated that the request is for approval of the final plat for Lots 24 through 57 of the Jonas Creek Phase 3 subdivision, a Planned Unit Development. She explained that final plat approval is an administrative process, and that all required infrastructure has been installed and inspected. She noted that staff recommends approval with the condition that the developer request acceptance of infrastructure for public dedication upon reaching 80% build-out or when a specified number of lots, 27, have been conveyed and infrastructure is complete and approved.

A motion to approve the final plat of Jonas Creek phase three subdivision based on conformance with the previously approved preliminary plat and with the available applicable standards of the City of Southport's unified development ordinance, with the following conditions: the applicant will request acceptance, and the city will accept the required infrastructure to be dedicated to the public, At the time 80% or 27 of the lots have been conveyed to individual ownership and the infrastructure is inspected and approved by public works was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Gross. There was no further discussion.

The motion carried unanimously.

5. Southeastern North Carolina Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan - Local Adoption
Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Mayor Hatem introduced Item Five, the Southeastern North Carolina Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan. He stated that state and federal regulations require local governments to adopt a hazard mitigation plan in order to

remain eligible for disaster-related assistance. He then recognized Planning Director Maureen Meehan.

Director Meehan presented the 2026 Southeastern North Carolina Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, stating that the plan is updated on a five-year cycle as required by state and federal agencies. She explained that the plan identifies current risks, tracks progress, and promotes public awareness and mitigation efforts. She noted that adoption of the plan is necessary to maintain eligibility for state and federal grant funding, as well as to meet requirements for the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) Community Rating System.

Director Meehan stated that the plan was developed in coordination with North Carolina Emergency Management, FEMA, and Brunswick County, with work beginning in May 2025. She noted that the plan must be locally adopted prior to its expiration on April 16 to ensure continued compliance and funding eligibility. Staff recommended adoption of the plan by resolution.

Mayor Hatem asked if there were any questions, and hearing none, called for a motion.

A motion was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Davis to adopt the Southeastern North Carolina Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan and associated resolution. There was no further discussion. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Consideration of Revisions to Noise Ordinance
Planning Services Director Maureen Meehan

Mayor Hatem introduced Item Six, consideration of revisions to the noise ordinance, and noted that the item had been presented at the previous meeting. He called on Planning Director Maureen Meehan for an overview.

Director Meehan summarized the previously adopted amendment, which limits the operation of heavy equipment when located within 500 feet of residentially zoned property. She stated that heavy equipment is defined as earthmoving, construction, or industrial equipment weighing more than 6,000 pounds and not designed for highway use. She explained that the original proposal limited such activity to Monday through Friday between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., and that the item was brought back for further discussion.

Alderman Mosteller stated that she requested the item be reconsidered and expressed support for limiting heavy equipment operation to Monday through Friday within 500 feet of residential properties. She emphasized that the

intent is to reduce noise and vibration impacts on nearby residents while allowing such activity outside of that radius.

A motion was made by Alderman Mosteller and seconded by Alderman Carroll to amend the ordinance to limit heavy equipment operation to Monday through Friday.

Alderman Kelley expressed concern that prohibiting such work on Saturdays could delay construction timelines for property owners, noting that contractors may have limited availability and that restricting Saturdays could create additional burdens.

Alderman Davis stated that the Board must balance construction needs with the rights of residents to quiet enjoyment of their homes, and expressed support for limiting heavy equipment use on weekends.

Alderman Gross noted that the 500-foot limitation provides a reasonable buffer and initially expressed concern about restricting work opportunities on Saturdays, but later indicated support for the amendment after considering impacts to nearby residential areas.

Alderman Carroll acknowledged both perspectives and noted that increased development activity may result in additional concerns from residents in the future.

Mayor Hatem reiterated that the amendment applies only to heavy equipment and is intended to reduce significant noise and vibration impacts near residential areas.

Following discussion, the motion was put to a vote.

Aye - Alderman Gross
Aye - Alderman Davis
Aye - Alderman Carroll
Aye - Alderman Mosteller
Nay - Alderman Kelley

The motion carried, with one opposing vote.

7. Board of Aldermen Ethics Policy Discussion
City Manager Noah Sa/do

Mayor Hatem introduced Item Seven, the Board of Aldermen Ethics Policy, and provided an overview of ethics as the moral principles and standards guiding behavior and distinguishing between right and wrong. He noted that

such values are shaped by influences including family, teachers, and community leaders. He further stated that, based on discussions at a recent mayor's meeting, other municipalities have their ethics policies reviewed annually by their city attorney, with updates brought forward as needed.

Mayor Hatem noted that the current policy was adopted in 2010 and that the proposed update includes additional language related to civility. He then called on City Manager Noah Saldo and City Attorney Herman for further input.

City Manager Saldo explained that, at the request of the Board, he reviewed the 2010 policy and compared it with policies from other municipalities, including Brunswick County. He stated that the proposed revisions expand upon the existing policy while maintaining its overall intent, and incorporate civility language from the North Carolina League of Municipalities. He noted that the updated policy strengthens the Board's code of conduct and modernizes the document.

City Attorney Herman stated that he had reviewed the proposed policy and found it to be consistent with the existing policy, particularly with respect to procedural provisions for addressing potential violations.

Alderman Gross expressed support for the updated policy, stating that one of the reasons he was excited to serve on the Board was the commitment to civility and professionalism. He noted that the policy had not been updated since 2010 and stated his support for adoption. He also suggested that, in the future, the City consider expanding similar standards to staff and appointed boards and committees.

Alderman Mosteller stated that the proposed policy largely reflects the 2010 version, with three primary additions: language referencing First Amendment protections and robust debate, a civility pledge, and a revised threshold for censure. She expressed concern with lowering the censure threshold to a simple majority and stated her preference to retain a two-thirds requirement. She also noted interest in potentially addressing social media conduct in the future and emphasized the importance of elected officials maintaining ethical standards at all times.

Alderman Davis suggested that the Board proceed with adoption and consider additional amendments at a later time. She also inquired about the applicability of similar standards to City staff.

City Attorney Herman explained that staff conduct is generally governed through the personnel policy, and City Manager Saldo confirmed that updates to the personnel policy are currently underway and would include review of related standards.

Alderman Mosteller made a motion to adopt the updated ethics policy with an amendment to maintain the censure majority being two-thirds. The motion was seconded by Alderman Carroll.

Mayor Hatem stated that the proposed policy reflects the same values as the 2010 version while strengthening civility provisions and maintaining the two-thirds censure threshold.

Upon a vote, the motion carried unanimously.

8. Planning Board Appointments

Mayor Hatem introduced Item Eight regarding Planning Board appointments and called on Alderman Kelley to present the recommendation.

Alderman Kelley stated that the Board had one vacant full-term seat, which had remained unfilled for approximately five months. She noted that two rounds of interviews had been conducted and that the interview committee unanimously recommended appointing Ed Eckert, who had been serving as the alternate member, to the full position for the remainder of the term.

A motion was made by Alderman Kelley and seconded by Alderman Mosteller to appoint Ed Eckert to the Planning Board.

The motion carried unanimously.

Alderman Mosteller then requested that staff advertise the now-vacant alternate position and consider the current applicant pool for that role without requiring additional interviews, noting that some candidates had already participated in multiple interview rounds.

Alderman Davis expressed concern that the process could become confusing to the public, given the timing of multiple appointments and upcoming vacancies.

Alderman Mosteller clarified that only one additional vacancy would need to be addressed, as the alternate position extends to 2027 and the recently filled seat expires in June.

Alderman Carroll suggested that staff develop a more clearly defined process to avoid confusion during future appointment cycles.

Alderman Davis noted that while the ordinance provides a structured framework, it does not address all scenarios, such as seat changes or short-

term appointments, and suggested staff review potential improvements, including application timelines.

Alderman Gross sought clarification regarding upcoming term expirations, and City Clerk Deviney confirmed that one seat would be expiring.

Mayor Hatem concluded the discussion by stating that the Planning Board Chair would continue to work with staff regarding board needs and future appointments.

J. Committee Reports

Mayor Hatem introduced Item J, Committee Reports, and recognized Alderman Gross.

Alderman Gross reported that the ABC Board met on March 3. He noted that, at his recommendation, the Board has transitioned from monthly snapshot financial reporting to year-to-date reporting to provide more comprehensive and meaningful data. He reported that fiscal year-to-date sales for 2025 (July through February) totaled \$4,026,675, while fiscal year-to-date sales for 2026 over the same period totaled \$4,194,650, reflecting an increase of \$167,974, or 4.17%. He noted that sales are performing well.

Alderman Kelley reported that preparations for the Fourth of July Festival are underway in anticipation of the America 250 celebration. She announced that the Shrimparoo event will be held on April 12 at American Fish Company, with tickets currently available for purchase. She noted that the event will include food, door prizes, and a 50/50 raffle.

Alderman Davis reported that the Historic Preservation Commission did not meet this month. She stated that the Commission continues to work on refining the design standards, including evaluating provisions that may be redundant with existing UDO and right-of-way regulations.

Alderman Carroll reported that the Forestry Committee has scheduled the 2026 Arbor Day celebration for April 25 at Franklin Square Park. He noted that the agenda is being finalized and encouraged the public to attend.

Alderman Mosteller reported that the Beautification Committee held its March 7 workday with 26 volunteers participating. She noted that cleanup and maintenance activities were completed at multiple locations, including the Jaycee Building, Northwood Cemetery entrance, Fire Department planter boxes, Nash Street circular garden, Moore Street roundabout, Taylor Field, and the Waterfront Park corner garden. She also reported that, in coordination with the Southport Historical Society, volunteers installed 90 commemorative bricks at Fort Johnston.

She announced that the next beautification workday will be held on April 4 at 9:00 a.m., meeting at the jail annex at the corner of Rhett and Nash Streets, and that the next Beautification Committee meeting will be held on March 16 at 5:00 p.m. at City Hall. She noted that the public is welcome to attend.

Alderman Mosteller also provided an update on the Planning Board, stating that the Board is developing a dashboard report to improve transparency and communication regarding development projects. She noted ongoing efforts to coordinate with Brunswick County on digital data collection and to enhance the clarity and detail of UDO text amendment materials. She added that the Planning Board is preparing for upcoming UDO-related work following certification of the Comprehensive Plan and will be voting on updated rules of procedure at its next meeting, which will then be forwarded to the Board of Aldermen. She noted that Planning Board meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m. and are open to the public.

K. Manager's Report

City Manager Saldo reported that, as the City enters the budget season, a City Manager Budget and Services Survey has been launched. He stated that the survey is available on the City's website and social media platforms and encouraged residents to participate in order to provide input for the upcoming budget process.

He reported that the Indian Trail Meeting Hall project has been completed ahead of schedule and under budget and is now open for public use.

City Manager Saldo provided an update on the weather tower project, stating that the site layout survey on the Garrison Lawn has been completed. He noted that installation of the concrete footings is anticipated within the next one to two weeks, weather permitting, with the tower installation expected approximately two weeks thereafter. He stated that the tower will be installed in two sections and assembled on site, with anticipated completion by early April.

He also announced that Chief Coring has been selected to attend the FBI National Command Course at FBI Headquarters, noting that only one chief per state is selected annually and that the program will be fully funded by the FBI.

City Manager Saldo further reported that the Fire Department has achieved an ISO rating improvement to a Class 2 rating. He noted that additional information on this achievement will be shared during the upcoming Citizens Fire Academy, which begins on April 2 and will run for five consecutive Thursdays. He encouraged residents to participate in the program.

L. Mayor's Comments

Mayor Hatem recognized March as Women's History Month and noted that banners honoring Southport women have been displayed along Howe Street. He highlighted the inclusion of Josephine Hickman, the First Lady's grandmother, and expressed appreciation to the Southport Historical Society and its President, Mary Ellen Poole, for their efforts. He also noted that this year marks the 50th anniversary of the initiative.

Mayor Hatem briefly mentioned the ongoing ACC Tournament and the upcoming NCAA Tournament, noting the excitement of March Madness for basketball fans.

He reported that he attended the North Carolina League of Municipalities Town and State Dinner, as well as the annual Cape Fear Council of Governments meeting. He noted that the City was also represented at these events by the City Manager and Aldermen Mosteller, Spencer, Kelley, and Gross. He stated that these events provided valuable opportunities to engage with other elected officials and state representatives.

Mayor Hatem also reported that he attended the monthly Mayor's Meeting with neighboring municipalities, noting that it continues to be a productive forum for sharing information and ideas.

He concluded by wishing everyone a happy St. Patrick's Day and extended well wishes to the community.

M. Staff Reports

Staff reports were included in the agenda packet.

1. Development Services
2. Police
3. Parks & Recreation
4. Permitting & Inspections
5. Community Relations
6. Finance
7. Fire

N. Board Comments

Alderman Gross thanked his fellow Board members for their collaboration regarding the acceptance of a \$10,000 grant from the Moore Charitable Foundation and Orton Plantation. He noted that the Board had engaged in a thorough discussion regarding the grant's terms and intended use and ultimately reached a unanimous agreement. He stated that the funds are anticipated to be used for soil nourishment and plant purchases and expressed appreciation for the Board's ability to work through the matter constructively.

Alderman Kelley shared that her daughter recently celebrated her 13th birthday. She noted that her family celebrated locally at Moore Street Oyster Bar and expressed appreciation for the experience.

Alderman Davis addressed comments made during public comment regarding the Parks and Recreation Department. She stated her support for the City Manager's actions, noting that the situation involves an ongoing investigation and that the City Manager acted appropriately within the constraints of that process. She acknowledged the impact on families affected by the suspension of the before- and after-school program and emphasized that the circumstances were not created by the City Manager but required an appropriate response.

Alderman Carroll acknowledged the public concern surrounding the matter and noted that media coverage had expanded beyond the local level. He expressed concern that the information released may have led to public speculation and sought clarification regarding the scope of the issue.

City Manager Saldo stated that, due to the ongoing investigation, he could not provide additional details beyond what has already been publicly released.

City Attorney Herman advised that further discussion should not occur in open session at this time but could be addressed with the Board at the appropriate time.

Alderman Mosteller stated that she wanted staff to know that they care about them all.

0. Closed Session

1. § 143-318.11.(a)(3)(6) Closed sessions.

(3) To consult with an attorney employed or retained by the public body in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege between the attorney and the public body, which privilege is hereby acknowledged. General policy matters may not be discussed in a closed session and nothing herein shall be construed to permit a public body to close a meeting that otherwise would be open merely

*because an attorney employed or retained by the public body is a participant.
(6) To consider the qualifications, competence, performance, character, fitness, conditions of appointment, or conditions of initial employment of an individual public officer or employee or prospective public officer or employee; or to hear or investigate a complaint, charge, or grievance by or against an individual public officer or employee.*

Mayor Hatem noted the closed session pursuant to North Carolina General Statute §143-318.11(a)(3) and (a)(6) for attorney-client and personnel matters.

A motion was made by Alderman Carroll and seconded by Alderman Kelley to enter into closed session.

The motion carried unanimously.

The Board entered closed session at 8:16 PM

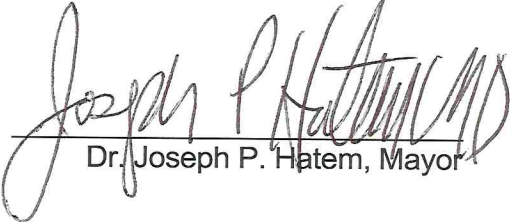
A motion to come out of closed session was made by Alderman Kelley and seconded by Alderman Carroll. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board came out of closed session at 8:54 PM

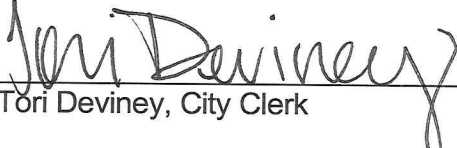
P. Adjourn

A motion to adjourn was made by Alderman Kelley and seconded by Alderman Carroll. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:54 PM.


Dr. Joseph P. Hatem, Mayor

(ATTEST)


Tori Deviney, City Clerk

