



City Council Worksession

Meeting Minutes – Planning Conference Room – 1st Floor

January 27, 2026

I. CALL TO ORDER

5:00 PM

Philip Cromer, Mayor

Members of Council in attendance - Philip Cromer, Neil Lipsitz, Michael McFee, Mitch Mitchell, Josh Scallate.

II. EMPLOYEE NEW HIRE RECOGNITION

A. Municipal Court.

Dana Wessels, Court Administrator, introduced Paige Summers.

B. Police Department.

Stephanie Price, Police Chief, introduced Ian Tiarks.

III. HISTORIC DISTRICT TASK FORCE COMMITTEE INTERVIEWS

A. Interviews to be conducted by Council for the Historic District Task Force Committee.

Curt Freese, Community Development Director, provided an overview of what the committee's responsibilities will be.

Council held a question and answer session with applicants Stacey Applegate, Scott Gibbs, Jodie Miller, Martin Nash, George Reynolds, Sue Sagui, Margaret Stocks, Marc Sviland and Fred Washington, Jr.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

A. Fiscal Year 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

David Irwin, an Audit Partner with Mauldin and Jenkins, gave a summary of the Financial and Compliance Audit as this is required communication by the external auditors. He stated they are independent from the City as required by Government Auditing Standards. The City received a clean opinion and no audit findings. A clean opinion has been received consistently for the past 18 years.

Alan Eisenman, Finance Director, went over the City's financial position for Fiscal Year 2025 as compared to Fiscal Year 2024. This report will be available for public viewing on the City's website, www.cityofbeaufort.org using Opengov.com, our financial transparency portal.

B. Discussion of establishing a Pilot Social District in Downtown Beaufort.

Linda Roper, Downtown Operations Director, started off by saying City Council previously appointed the Tiger Team to identify strategies to strengthen downtown vitality, support local businesses, and increase economic activity. Through research, stakeholder input, and review of best practices from peer communities, the Tiger Team evaluated opportunities to enhance the downtown experience and encourage longer dwell times.

As part of this work, the Tiger Team recommended exploring the establishment of a downtown social district as one potential tool to increase foot traffic, support existing businesses, and create a more active and connected downtown environment during designated days and times.

City Staff along with our community partners, Beaufort Area Hospitality Association, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce and Greater Beaufort-Port Royal CVB, are exploring the possibility of establishing a pilot Social District in Downtown Beaufort. A pilot approach would allow the City to define district boundaries, operating hours, participation requirements, and safety measures while assessing community response and potential economic impact.

She then went over strengths, challenges and a vision for Downtown. This would be a program to run for 90 days to allow ample time for community feedback. Clear boundaries would be established, and the local businesses will have the option to opt in or out of the program.

The proposed hours would be Wednesday through Saturday from 4:00 pm to 10:00 pm. Beer and wine will be served in designated branded cups. Clear signage will be throughout the district that will outline rules and boundaries.

There was a discussion on the times and days of the week for the pilot program to happen. **Councilman Scallate** feels that 10:00 am - 10:00 pm, 7 days a week, would be a better option as downtown businesses are hurting. He spoke about other places across the United States and what they are doing. **Police Chief, Stephenie Price**, went over some crime statistics from the proposed district. **Councilman Mitchell** is supportive of the program with the suggested limitations. **Mayor Cromer** is supportive as well.

A copy of the proposed Social District Boundaries Map is attached.

C. Discussion on creating a Downtown Advisory Board.

Linda Roper, Downtown Operations Director, stated Council had recommended the formation of a Downtown Advisory Board to provide advisory input on downtown-related policies, programs, and initiatives in support of the City's Strategic Plan. This discussion will determine the Board makeup and focus.

The Downtown Advisory Board will serve as a structured forum for engagement with downtown businesses, property owners, residents, and key partners. The committee will provide recommendations to City Council and staff on matters such as downtown infrastructure improvements, tourism management, parking management, construction impacts, business recruitment and retention, special events, and long-range planning initiatives. This advisory role will strengthen coordination, improve transparency, and support proactive problem-solving.

Scott Marshall, City Manager stated this board would take over the responsibilities of the Tourism Management Advisory Board (TMAC) and this body would be dissolved.

There was a discussion about the membership body composition. This will be a 15 member board.

Downtown Business Representatives (3):

- One (1) retail business representative
- One (1) accommodation business representative
- One (1) tour operator representative Appointed by majority vote of City Council

Two (2) Downtown Property Owners/Developers

Neighborhood Representatives (3):

- One (1) representative from The Point Neighborhood
- One (1) representative from the Old Commons Neighborhood
- One (1) representative from the Northwest Quadrant Neighborhood

Organizational Representatives (6):

- Historic Beaufort Foundation
- Beaufort-Port Royal Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce
- Beaufort County Black Chamber of Commerce
- Beaufort Area Hospitality Association
- Freedman Arts District

At-Large Member (1): individual who lives or works downtown.

D. Noise Ordinance.

Stephanie Price, Police Chief, stated over the past years, the noise ordinance has served as guidance for addressing loud and unseemly noise within the city. After a discussion during a recent work session, City Council requested staff work collaboratively with the City Attorney to review the ordinance and suggest potential revisions. The resulting review is intended to ensure the ordinance remains effective, legally sound, and reflective of community expectations.

Mayor Cromer stated he would like to see this ordinance being enforced especially from loud music coming from vehicles.

Councilman Scallate mentioned number 6 under exemptions which speaks to railroad equipment in operation on railroad right of ways, should be removed.

Mayor Pro Tem McFee inquired about number 9 under exemptions about amplified music and stated the hours here should be reflected to match the Music District Ordinance.

There was a discussion about how far 85 decibels carries in distance.

E. Discussion of the merits of adopting a “No Comments” Policy on the City’s Facebook page.

Scott Marshall, City Manager, stated the purpose of this discussion is to provide City Council with an overview of the considerations associated with disabling public commenting on the City of Beaufort’s official Facebook page. The discussion is intended to assist Council in determining whether they would be in support of formal adoption of such a policy.

The City uses its official Facebook page primarily as a means of distributing timely information to residents, businesses, and visitors. When a municipality allows comments on an official social media page, the interactive portion of that page is generally considered a limited public forum, which requires viewpoint-neutral moderation and consistent enforcement of content rules.

In recent months, the volume, tone, and complexity of comment activity has increased, requiring greater staff monitoring, higher potential for allegations of selective moderation, and an elevated risk that misinformation or personal attacks will appear directly beneath official City posts. Several municipalities have addressed these concerns by adopting a “no comments” policy that preserves the informational function of the platform while reducing legal and operational burdens.

After much discussion, the general consensus is we should not turn off the comments section. By doing so would give a negative perception. There are pros and cons to each side. The Social Media policy will be updated that will speak to placing disclaimers on our social media platforms.

The following addressed Council with their comments and concerns on topics discussed:

Kate Gill, 2706 North Street
Rob Cahill, 608 Water Street
Jennifer Mader, 24 Francis Marion Circle
Joe Macdermant, 1809 Boundary Street
Mark Cutter, Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce
Angela Simmons, USCB Vice Chancellor, Student Development
Tim Newman, Telfair
Amanda Patel, 2450 Boundary Street
Peggy Simmer, 915 Port Republic Street
TJ Belasco, 1402 Palmetto Street

V. EXECUTIVE SESSION

- A. Pursuant to Title 30, Chapter 4, Section (70) (a) (2) of the South Carolina Code of Law: Receipt of legal advice and discussion of negotiations incident to proposed contractual arrangements.

Councilman Lipsitz made a motion to go into Executive Session and seconded by Councilman Scallate.

All were in favor, motion carried.

Councilman Lipsitz made a motion to come out of Executive Session and seconded by Councilman Mitchell.

All were in favor, motion carried.

No actions from Executive Session.

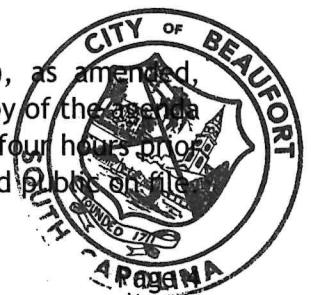
VI. ADJOURN

10:07 PM

Disclaimer: This document is a summary. All City Council Worksessions and Regular Meetings are recorded. Live stream can be found on the City’s website at www.cityofbeaufort.org (Agenda section). Any questions, please contact the City Clerk, Traci Guldner at 843-525-7024 or by email at tguldner@cityofbeaufort.org.

In accordance with South Carolina Code of Laws, 1976, Section 30-4-80 (a)(d)(e), as amended, notification of regular meetings was given at the beginning of the calendar year. A copy of the agenda was posted on the City’s bulletin board and website www.cityofbeaufort.org twenty-four hours prior to the meeting. A copy of the agenda was given to the local news media and requested to be on file.

approved: March 10, 2026
Traci Guldner



Discussion Item B.

