

CITY OF WILMINGTON
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2026

The Council of the City of Wilmington met in regular session on the above date at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, Skyline Center, Council Chambers, 929 North Front Street, Wilmington, North Carolina.

Those present were: Mayor Bill Saffo, presiding; Mayor Pro-Tem Kevin Spears; Councilmembers David Joyner, Salette Andrews, J.C. Lyle, Cassidy Santaguida, and Chakema Clinton-Quintana; City Clerk Penelope Spicer-Sidbury; City Attorney Meredith Everhart; and City Manager Becky Hawke.

Sgt. Ronald Evans, Wilmington Police Department, gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

PRESENTATION

Mayor Saffo read and City Councilmembers assisted with presenting a Proclamation Naming February 2026 as Black History Month to Ms. Evelyn Adger, Chairman, Commission on African American History and the Commission. Ms. Adger made brief some remarks and thanked the Mayor, Council and Staff. She stated that as we honor this month may we commit ourselves to the ongoing work of unity, justice, and progress not only in February, but every single day. She invited everyone to the Commissions' Youth Awards Banquet on Saturday, February 21st to honor and celebrate the next generation of leaders.

Mr. Carson Porter, Executive Director, Wilmington Hammerheads, presented a report on nCino Park Activity. He stated that currently, the park consists of eleven (11) full size soccer fields, which is a significant and large size park. There is one (1) artificial turf field that is easier to play on in inclement weather and has a 12-to-15-year life span. There are five (5) fields with lights as well as award winning building and bathrooms. He noted that tonight there are approximately 1,000 kids out at the park with 500 to 600 vehicles and that it is an active piece of our community.

Mr. Porter advised that the number one priority and service of the park was for the kids in our community, and to make sure that the park was something they could access and that it would relieve pressure off other parks making a positive impact on youth sports in our community. The second priority was the economic impact of the park. He provided the data of the impact of the Elite Clubs National League, a weekend event hosted at the nCino Sports Park, which totaled over \$3 million. This is their largest event, but they have a consistent calendar of events to include an Ultimate Frisbee College event that will be going on this weekend.

Mr. Porter reported that the park has 165,000 unique annual visitors and has hosted five (5) different sports including soccer, football, lacrosse, ultimate frisbee, and rugby but advised that there is no limit and no sport that they would not consider. The facility is something to be proud of and acknowledged ways to improve in the future including paving the gravel road and parking lot and potentially adding a gymnasium to include other sports.

Mr. Landon Vick, PBMares, presented the City's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report. He stated that the audit resulted in an unmodified or clean opinion again this year, and the financial statements as a whole look very similar to those of previous years. There is one additional GASB that was adopted in the current year, which is GASB 101, resulting in a restatement for beginning period balances. He reported that the compliance results also received unmodified opinions.

Mr. Vick advised that the last report was on internal controls over financial reporting, in which there was a weakness identified as a result of a reconciliation between the schedule of expenditures of federal awards and the financial statements. This was not a material error to the financial statements whereby it resulted in an adjustment. It was brought to the attention of the City and a corrective action plan has already been drawn up and will be reviewed again next year as part of the audit.

Mr. Vick reported that there were no audit adjustments, no uncorrected misstatements identified as part of the audit. There were no disagreements with management, no consultation with other accountants, no significant issues discussed with management, and no significant difficulties encountered as part of the audit. He thanked the Finance Staff for their responsiveness in getting the audit completed in a timely manner.

CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Saffo pulled **Item C6** (Resolution Awarding a Construction Contract for the Front Street Bridge Rehabilitation Project to Saffo Contractors, Inc. in the Amount of \$2,449,650) as he requested to be recused from consideration of this item.

Councilmember Joyner pulled **Item C3** (Resolution Authorizing an Interlocal Agreement with New Hanover County for the Operation of the Forensic Lab) for further discussion.

Items on the Consent Agenda were acted upon and unanimously adopted on motion of Councilmember Andrews, seconded by Councilmember Clinton-Quintana as presented as follows:

Approved Minutes of Council's Regular Meeting on February 3, 2026.

Adopted Resolution Accepting the Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Year Ending June 30, 2025 (Continued from Council's February 3, 2026 meeting).

Adopted Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Apply for the North Carolina Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Financial Assistance Program Grant.

Adopted Resolution Awarding On-Call Contracts to Five Firms for Professional Landscape Architecture Design and Planning Services.

Resolution Authorizing an Interlocal Agreement with New Hanover County for the Operation of the Forensic Lab was considered.

Councilmember Joyner inquired if when the City transferred our lab to the Sheriff's Office was it done in perpetuity or was there a window of time. Mrs. Meredith Everhart, City Attorney, responded that the transfer of the lab was intended to be permanent, the Interlocal Agreement is regarding the funding responsibilities and which percentages we are going to pay. The City will pay 40% of the operating cost after the Staff is paid which are on the County payroll. The agreement will automatically renew on an annual basis unless either the County or the City decide to withdraw from it.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Joyner made a motion to approve the Resolution Authorizing an Interlocal Agreement with New Hanover County for the Operation of the Forensic Lab. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Santaguida and it carried unanimously.

Resolution Awarding a Construction Contract for the Front Street Bridge Rehabilitation Project to Saffo Contractors, Inc. in the Amount of \$2,449,650 was considered.

Mayor Saffo asked to be recused from this item and stated that although he will not derive any benefit from awarding the contract and does not have any personal or financial interest in Saffo Contractors, Inc. the company is owned by a member of his family. In order to prevent any appearance of impropriety Mayor Saffo requested a motion to rescue himself from voting on this particular item.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to recuse Mayor Saffo. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Spears and it carried unanimously.

Mayor Saffo left the dais, and Mayor Pro-Tem Spear presided.

Mr. Kyle Burden, Project Manager, provided Council with project details for the Front Street Bridge noting that it will be a full deck replacement and implement a three-bar metal rail system that complies with current NCDOT standards for pedestrian vehicle safety. The rehabilitation is expected to extend the lifespan of the bridge by about 25 years.

Councilmember Andrews inquired about the history of the bids on the project. Mr. Burden responded that three bids were received and Saffo Contractors was the lowest, responsive, responsible bidder. Mrs. Everhart noted that this is the second time that the project was bid, the first time there were issues with the lowest contractor being qualified under DOT Standards and we were not able to award the contract to them. The other two applicants in that process were significantly over budget and would not have been able to be reconciled down to the project budget. When the project was bid the second time, three bids were received and after the bid opening the lowest bidder withdrew their bid making Saffo Contractors the lowest bidder.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to approve the Resolution Awarding a Construction Contract for the Front Street Bridge Rehabilitation Project to Saffo Contractors, Inc. in the amount of \$2,449,650. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Clinton-Quintana and it carried unanimously.

Note: Mayor Saffo returned to the dais and resumed presiding.

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Ms. Susan Morton was scheduled to speak to Council regarding Azalea Festival Concert/ Musical act replacement, but was unable to appear due to illness.

Ms. E.J. Hanley spoke to Council regarding reserved parking spaces at Thalian Hall for our Mayor, Mayor Pro-Tem and City Council members. She stated that free public parking at Thalian Hall is limited during performances and events and finding spaces for seniors and residents who are there to support the arts of our community. She acknowledged that there may be occasions that require reserved parking for the elected officials but seem to be something more periodic, and not something that requires permanent around-the-clock designation.

Ms. Hanley stated that she respectfully asks that Council consider placing removable parking meter bags over the signage stating, "For Public Use", when the spaces are not needed for official purposes. The small adjustment could make a meaningful difference for seniors and residents while also demonstrating thoughtful stewardship of shared public spaces.

ORDINANCES

Ordinance Making Supplemental Appropriation in the Amount of \$140,300 to Allow for Reallocation of Funding within American Rescue Plan Act Projects; and Resolution Adding \$140,300 in American Rescue Act Plan Funds to the Salvation Army Roadway Reimbursement Contract were considered.

Ms. Kim Gordon, Senior Engineer Project Manager, advised Council that in 2024 the City of Wilmington and the Salvation Army of Wilmington entered into an agreement to provide \$1.3 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funds as a reimbursement for construction of William Booth Drive. The City has paid them these funds, and the total cost of the roadway was \$1,464,757.60 due to unforeseen circumstances. She reported that the City has a surplus of ARPA Funds from other projects that came in under budget, and Staff proposes to reallocate some of those funds to help cover their increased construction cost.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears inquired about the surplus funds coming from the Digital Divide Jobs Program. Ms. Martha Wayne, Finance Director, responded that Staff has worked with the organizations who were having a difficult time getting enough people to attend the cohorts and were not able to spend all the funds by the required deadline. There is restriction on where the money can be spent based on the deadline with the American Rescue Act Funding, and that the projects had to be obligated by a

specific time to now be able to spend any remaining funds from programs that weren't able to utilize the full amount. She stated that it has to be some type of open project that was previously already obligated.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears inquired how long the Digital Divide has been unsuccessful. Ms. Wayne responded that Staff just received the final invoice from them as part of their December reporting. There have been discussions with Step-Up as well as Steigler EdTech which were the ones locating and working with the individual through the cohorts, and the amount of remaining funds came about from them completing their quarterly reporting in December.

Councilmember Joyner inquired about the deadline for shifting money to a preapproved project before we must give the money back to the Federal Government. Ms. Wayne responded that we must have all funds expended by December 31, 2026.

A lengthy question/ answer and discussion period was held.

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana inquired about the \$140,300 and whether the total left is from the program or if there is more. Ms. Wayne responded that this would be the remaining funds left from that particular program because based on conversations with the entities they felt that they spent as much of the funds as they could.

Following further consideration, Mayor Pro-Tem Spears made a motion to continue the Ordinance Making Supplemental Appropriation in the Amount of \$140,300 to Allow for Reallocation of Funding within American Rescue Plan Act Projects; and Resolution Adding \$140,300 in American Rescue Act Plan Funds to the Salvation Army Roadway Reimbursement Contract Property to Council's March 3, 2026 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Andrews and it carried unanimously.

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution Authorizing Amendment to an Installment Financing Contract in an Amount Not to Exceed \$75,000,000 to Finance and Refinance Various City Projects; and Resolution Requesting Local Government Commission Approval of the City of Wilmington's Storm Water Fee Revenue Refunding Bonds and Certain Related Matters were considered.

Ms. Martha Wayne, Finance Director, provided an explanation of Limited Obligation Bonds noting that they do not require voter approval and are not a pledge of the City's property tax, they are secured by City payments and deeds of trust. The proposed Limited Obligation Bonds are not to exceed \$75 million and will include various Capital Projects (\$25 million) and refunding (\$50 million). She highlighted that the expected savings from series 2015 A bonds are approximately \$340,000, and the estimated savings from the 2016 series are approximately \$1.4 million.

Ms. Wayne reviewed the potential timeline of what the debt issuance steps would look like starting with tonight as she is before Council asking for the authorization to take all actions to issue the Limited Obligations Bonds and call for a Public Hearing which will be held at Council's March 24, 2026 meeting. The City will then go to the Local Government Commission for approval; there have already been discussions with them about our plans and pricing and anticipated closing.

Ms. Wayne stated that additionally, we would like to refund our stormwater fee revenue bonds. The debt is repaid solely by revenues generated by stormwater fees and the refunding will not exceed \$15 million, with no new debt being issued. She highlighted that this is an avenue for us to potentially have savings, which is anticipated to be approximately \$750,000. The reason the two transactions have to be treated separately is one is a limited obligation bond which is a secured deed of trust and the other is a revenue bond which is actually secured by specific revenue stream.

Mayor Saffo inquired how much of the \$25 million in new debt is going to the Water Street Park Improvements. Ms. Wayne responded that approximately \$1.5 million, with the total project cost estimated to be \$3.4 million.

Mayor Saffo inquired if there were discussions with Bond Council in respect to this refinancing package. Ms. Wayne responded that Staff has worked with financial advisors, our Bond Council, as well as had conversations with the Local Government Commission Staff.

Mayor Saffo inquired about the timing of the refinancing when rates may continue to come down. Ms. Wayne responded that when you do this type of bond you match the type of borrowings with when the projects are bid as well as when the funds are needed for the project, so it is a timing issue. As part of the financial monitoring for the City, Staff is continuously reviewing a debt model and looking to see what our capital needs might need to be in the future. As well as always looking at the outstanding debt and looking for opportunities to do refundings where we can save money.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to approve the Resolution Authorizing Amendment to an Installment Financing Contract in an Amount Not to Exceed \$75,000,000 to Finance and Refinance Various City Projects. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Santaguida and it carried unanimously.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to approve the Resolution Requesting Local Government Commission Approval of the City of Wilmington's Storm Water Fee Revenue Refunding Bonds and Certain Related Matters. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Joyner and it carried unanimously.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Councilmember Andrews wished a happy Mardi Gras to those who celebrate, and a happy Lunar New Year the year of the horse.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears stated that last Saturday he spoke at a funeral for a young man that was recently killed in the community, and even in the time of despair he witnessed the most amazing thing. He saw fifty (50) young men and women come to the alter and give their life to Christ. He challenged the community that saving one is not enough, and there is more that we can do. He advised that a call was put out to the community for fifty (50) bibles for these young men and women, and the amount of love and support shown has been amazing. Sometimes there is a glimmer of hope in a time of despair.

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana advised everyone to continue to be kind and love one another, that we need more of that in our City and our Country. She reminded everyone not to forget to vote.

Councilmember Lyle encouraged everyone to read a recent op-ed in the Business Journal by Isabell Shepard and Liz Carbone that talk about the tension of housing affordability and tree preservation that is very insightful. She advised that it is something that we are going to be struggling with for a very long time.

Mayor Saffo stated that we lost a sports hero from New Hanover High School, Sonny Jurgenson. He had the honor in 2007 to help rename the field at Legion Stadium after Roman Gabriel and Sonny Jurgenson who both played at New Hanover High School and continued on to the NFL. Sonny made it to the Hall of Fame and went to school with his mother. He was a true character, great human being, and a great ambassador of our community.

Following a brief discussion Council voted unanimously on motion of Councilmember Clinton-Quintana to enter into a Closed Session pursuant to the provisions of N.C. General Statute §143-318.11 (a)(3) and (a)(9) in order for City Council to consult with and provide instruction to the City Attorney regarding a potential legal matter; and instruct Staff regarding the City's position regarding public safety. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Lyle.

Council recessed the meeting and entered into Closed Session in the Charlie Rivenbark Retiring Room.

Council reconvened the meeting with all present as mentioned above.

Mayor Saffo reported that Council provided instructions and guidance to the Staff. No other action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 8:37 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

Penelope Spicer-Sidbury, CMC/MMC/NCCMC
City Clerk