CITY OF WILMINGTON
REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JULY 21, 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 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.

Former Mayor Pro-Tem Clifford Barnett Sr., Pastor, Warner Temple AME Zion Church, gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

****

PRESENTATION

Mayor Saffo read the citation detailing Major James Capers, Jr.'s acts of gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty prior to being awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President Donald Trump. Mr. Jack Pollock made brief remarks giving the history of the Medal of Honor and noted that Major Capers is the 3,536th recipient. Mayor Saffo read the Proclamation recognizing Major James Capers, Jr. being awarded the Medal of Honor and presented it to Major Capers along with Councilmembers, former Councilmembers, Mr. Jack Pollock, and other distinguished guests.

Major Capers presented Council, former Councilmembers, and Staff with a Champion Coin. He acknowledged his fellow Veterans in the room and thanked them for their service. Major Capers stated that when he comes to Wilmington it feels like he's home again and knows that many Camp Lejeune feel the same way. He stated that he appreciates the Country giving him the highest honor, and that it is for the men that fought with him and ensured that he came home to be a part of this today.

Mayor Saffo invited everyone for a reception to celebrate and honor Major James Capers, Jr.

****

Council recessed the meeting at 6:51 P.M.

****

Council reconvened the meeting at 7:20 P.M.

****

Ms. Linda Painter, Director of Planning and Development, and Ms. Cathy Formet, President, Guide Studio, gave presentations on Downtown Wayfinding, which is implementation of the Greater Downtown Plan that Council most recently adopted. Ms. Painter reviewed the timeline beginning at the Riverwalk Assessment conducted by the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) in May 2023 which brought forward recommendations to highlight this asset. Most recently Council approved an additional ARPA allocation of just over $58,000 for those enhancements and tonight Staff is presenting the Downtown Gateway and Wayfinding Plan which is one of the items to come out of the Riverwalk Assessment.

Ms. Painter stated that when the assessment was done in 2023, the Convention and Visitors Bureau hired a consultant who came into town and experienced the Riverwalk as our visitors do. She stated that as a result, he came up with ten recommendations of things we could do to improve, and two of them related to how people find the Riverwalk and how people find their way around Downtown. She stated that his findings were something that were echoed by the community as part of the Greater Downtown Plan and that improving signs and maps for parking and getting around is Action 2 for Strategy 3 under Mobility.

Ms. Cathy Formet, President, Guide Studio, stated that they have been working with the Convention and Visitors Bureau and members of City Staff to get a grasp on some of the issues, what needs to be addressed, and how signage and wayfinding can help with improvements. She stated that they set project goals on how they would address this, with the first one being to create a cohesive Downtown Wayfinding System. Ms. Formet stated that they had an interesting and broad view as the Downtown had the core, but there is also a Greater Downtown. Therefore, they had to look at all the ways people were coming into the Downtown area with the intent of putting information at the moments they need it, not all over the place. She stated that one of the challenges that they found was that the Downtown arrival points and Districts were not always clearly recognized. Another one was that there was a lot of parking confusion with it being difficult to identify the areas that are City-owned public parking and the cost. She stated that visitors can often underestimate the Downtown's walkability and they lack some simple tools to understand what is nearby and around them.

Ms. Formet stated that the principles they have been working on are establishing those clear arrival and orientation moments, to simplify parking and decision-making, design for walkability and exploration, and to strengthen connection across barriers. Other principles include reinforcing the Riverwalk as a primary pedestrian spine, integrating multimodal navigation, designing for real-world constraints, and reinforcing Downtown as a unified destination.

Ms. Formet stated that from the design process, they came to the Convention and Visitors Bureau with six different sign concepts, most of which were selected based on what we've seen in the architecture and the make-up of Downtown. She stated that moving forward they are breaking the designs up into a few different sign families to include the gateway family, which will be the ones that people see as they arrive in our community. The next set of signs will be vehicular directionals that move people to the different destinations within Downtown. Ms. Formet stated that the pedestrian level signs are about the exploration within Downtown and giving them the right tools to help them move around while they're on foot. She stated that there are some of these signs located throughout Downtown but they are weathered and this would be a way to update them. She stated that they noticed there are a lot of pedestrian connector alleyways and it is an opportunity to begin telling people the location of the Riverwalk. She stated that there is also a specific set of signs for the Riverwalk as well.

Ms. Formet stated that they were awarded the project in February, did the assessment in March, developed the framework, plan, and conceptual design in March and April, design was selected, and they began developing that sign work in April through May.

A question/answer and discussion period was held.

****

CONSENT AGENDA

Ms. Becky Hawke requested that Council pull **Item C2** (Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into an Agreement with LeadsOnline, LLC for the Purchase of Ballistics IQ Equipment and Software) for an amendment to the memo.

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:

Adopted Resolution Awarding On-Call Contracts to Five Firms for Professional Engineering Design Services.

Adopted Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Execute a Lease Amendment with Tova Wealth Management, LLC for a Portion of the Seventh Floor of the Skyline Center.

Adopted Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into a New Lease on the Fourth Floor of the Skyline Center with The Honorable Ted Budd, United States Senator.

Adopted Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Execute Contract Amendment #4 with LITG, Inc. for Landscape Maintenance of City-Owned Properties.

Adopted Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into a Contract with Brady Trane Service Inc., in the Amount of $168,400 for HVAC Repairs at the Wilmington Convention Center.

Adopted Resolution Providing Approval of a Multifamily Housing Facility in the City of Wilmington, North Carolina, and the Financing Thereof with Multifamily Housing Revenue Bonds in an Amount Not to Exceed $20,000,000.

Adopted Approval of the Minutes of Council's Budget Work Session from May 15, 2026, and May 29, 2026, Agenda Briefing Meeting from June 15, 2026, and the Regular Council Meeting on June 16, 2026.

****

Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into an Agreement with LeadsOnline, LLC for the Purchase of Ballistics IQ Equipment and Software was considered.

Ms. Becky Hawke, City Manager, stated that there is a minor edit on the financial impact of this item. It was written in the memo that there would be no funding in the current fiscal year and that funding would not start until FY28. She pointed out that is inaccurate and stated that the funding is for FY27, FY28, and FY29. The dollar amounts do not change, and there is already funding in the budget for this purpose.

Councilmember Joyner stated that we already have the software in some capacity but the vendor has been bought out by a different software company. He inquired as to whether we are getting new software that we are not already using in addition to what we're presently using. Chief Ryan Zuidema, WPD, responded that the software is going to be in essence the same software WPD is currently using so there's not any added features to it or different operational issues that WPD is dealing with. He stated that a different vendor bought out the previous vendor that the City had contracted with.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Lyle made a motion to approve the Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Enter into an Agreement with LeadsOnline, LLC for the Purchase of Ballistics IQ Equipment and Software. The motion was seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Spears and carried unanimously.

****

PUBLIC INFORMATION

Mr. Malik Shabazz spoke to Council regarding youth development. He stated that he is the father of two daughters, a resident of Wilmington's Northside, and also the executive director of Navigational Studios, a grassroots organization. He stated his concern and desire is for City Council to support his non-profit and other non-profits and grassroots organizations. He stated his concern is with the splashpad on the Northside of town that has been closed for weeks. Also, he expressed concern as to why more community events aren't hosted on the Northside of town, or why we haven't partnered with more organizations like Voyage. He stated that he wants to be part of the solution and asked for Council to partner with him and his organization to help create more opportunities, more exposure, and more hope for our children.

Ms. Cheyenne Woods was scheduled to speak to Council regarding crisis de-escalation protocol but did not appear.

Ms. Joan Keston spoke to Council regarding the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. She stated that she is a member of the Historic Preservation Commission and is here tonight representing the Historic Preservation Commission and the bridge replacement project. She stated that the Commission is very concerned about the adverse effects on the Wilmington Historic District caused by the proposals for the replacement of the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. Ms. Keston stated that the Commission finds that the lift bridge is the option that will do minimal harm to Historic Districts while the fixed bridge will do substantial harm. Therefore, the Commission is recommending that the lift bridge option be chosen and gave the reasons why they reached this recommendation for the bridge replacement project. She stated that the Commission is recommending no tolls as they will cause severe traffic issues in Historic Downtown as folks try using alternative bridges. They will also affect the Central Business District as folks cross the bridge daily for recreational and professional purposes, which are important economic drivers for the City. She stated that the Commission is proposing resolutions based on their recommendations and hopes that Council will pass the resolutions they are requesting and protect Historic Wilmington.

Mr. Ian Cassidy spoke to Council regarding A.I. Flock Surveillance & Violation of 4th Amendment. He stated that he is a North Carolinian and a son and grandson of four American veterans. He stated that flock cameras, automated license plate readers, and other types of AI powered mass surveillance tools are a symptom of our Community in decline. He stated that mass surveillance has but one goal which is fear and that history may forget the names of the people in this room, but history will remember the choices that we make in the face of authoritarianism. He stated that history will remember what we do here today, tomorrow, and come November. He stated that in the 18^{th} Century, being American meant defying the power of tyranny and today that spirit lives on in true patriots, those that do not bow to power out of fear. He asked Council to think about our forefathers and the ultimate sacrifices that they made to protect our liberties across the world and here at home.

Dr. Katie Randall spoke to Council regarding support for Resolution addressing City compliance with Federal Immigration Law. She stated that she is a member of the Immigrant Allies Forum in Wilmington and she has worked in immigration for the last ten years. She stated that she would like to encourage Council to reintroduce this Resolution for discussion and eventual adoption as our City has many people affected physically and emotionally by the aggressive overreach of Federal agents that we have seen creep into Cities across our State. She stated that since the increase in reckless immigration enforcement last year, she has heard from immigrants in Wilmington that they are afraid to interact with schools, go to the hospital, drive to work, or speak with local Police due to fears of racial profiling and detention. Dr. Randall stated that I.C.E. detained over 170 U.S. citizens in the first nine months of 2025 and that number has only been increasing. She stated that making clear to City Residents that the Wilmington Police Department does not have the authority to enforce immigration law or collect immigration data, is even more important than it was before. She stated that a Resolution can affirm a City’s character as a place that honors Constitutional rights and civil liberties for all its residents.

Ms. Latonia Johnson spoke to Council regarding Family Childcare Home Ordinance Amendment. She stated that she is the owner of Little Journey’s Childcare Center and she has been speaking with zoning to get 24-hour care. She stated that Sec. R-18, 207 states that within the City no such childcare should operate for more than twelve hours per day. However, the County doesn’t have that rule, but the City does and she is trying to get 24-hour care for family childcare homes in the City of Wilmington. She stated that she feels that would be helpful for the families and Community for healthcare workers, first responders, shift workers, military personnel, and flexible care in general. She respectfully asked the City to amend this provision to allow licensed family childcare homes to operate 24-hours per day while continuing to comply with all North Carolina licensing.

Mr. Christopher Johnson spoke to Council regarding the Budget Work Session Follow-up Regarding Funding Request for Community Justice Center and the Film Partnership of North Carolina. He stated that he started at Cape Fear Community College in their film and video productions program back in 2021, and he was introduced to the ride program through the Film Partnership with Wilmington. He stated that it helped him foster connections with professionals in the industry and it developed his network, which allowed him to get an internship with Hendy Street Productions. He stated that there have been many great opportunities that have come out of this program, such as, some students recently entered the union and other students just made it on to the new sequel of Superman. Mr. Johnson stated that he has seen many students grow and come back to keep building the program and he wants to see those students have the same opportunities that he has had.

Mr. David Hendrickson spoke to Council regarding the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. He stated that the North Carolina Department of Transportation is preparing an environmental assessment, a second-tier level review. He stated that the mid-level review is not acceptable based on the project at hand and an economic impact statement is what is needed which may take a couple months longer as it is an in-depth rigorous review. Mr. Hendrickson urged Council to highly consider their options to represent the City and the Community to pressure N.C.D.O.T. to perform the proper and appropriate level according to law for this $1.2 - $1.3 billion project.

****

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Public Hearing was held on **Ordinance Amending the Official Zoning Maps of the City of Wilmington to Rezone Property Containing 6.69 Acres Located at 320 Military Cutoff Rd from O&I (CD), Office and Institutional (Conditional District), and RB, Regional Business District, to O&I, Office and Institutional District.**

Ms. Hillary Taylor, Long Range Planner, gave the Staff report and reviewed the timeline of the application which began in April 2026. The site is currently split-zoned O&I (CD), Office and Institutional (Conditional District), and RB, Regional Business. The portion of the site adjacent to Military Cutoff Road zoned O&I (CD) is currently occupied by a church facility and an additional building. The rear portion of the site zoned RB is currently vacant.

Ms. Taylor stated that the proposed zoning is Office and Institutional District and the allowable applicable uses in the O&I District include professional and medical offices, institutions of various sizes, and places of assembly. She stated that the maximum height is 45ft. with an optional setback of 90ft.

Ms. Taylor stated that the site is located on Military Cutoff Road between Arboretum Drive and Atrium Court and consists of approximately 6.69 acres or 291,416 sq.ft.

Ms. Taylor stated that Staff has reviewed this application’s alignment with the relevant adopted plans. The Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan is the only adopted plan that applies to the site. She stated that the site is located within a high-density transition area of opportunity and along a high-capacity transit corridor and existing green connection. She stated that the Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan also offers broader policy guidance to shape new development throughout the City. She stated that key policies in support of rezoning the site at 320 Military Cutoff Road from O&I (CD) and RB to O&I, promote compatible infill, commercial development, and a mix of uses along major corridors that will improve access to goods, services, amenities, and housing options. Ms. Taylor stated that Staff did not receive any comments in support or opposition to this application.

Ms. Taylor added that Staff finds the request to be reasonable, in the public interest, and consistent with the relevant policies in the Create Wilmington Comprehensive Plan and recommends approval.

Ms. Cindy Wolf, representing the applicant, Peace Baptist Church, spoke to Council and stated that as they started this process there were two parcels that were split-zoned. They have combined the parcels to now be a single parcel and they are seeking the single zoning overlay for it.

Mrs. Penelope Spicer-Sidbury, City Clerk, advised Council that she did not receive any additional comments.

There being no one to speak in favor or opposition of the Ordinance, the Public Hearing was closed.

Councilmember Joyner made a motion to approve the Ordinance Amending the Official Zoning Maps of the City of Wilmington to Rezone Property Containing 6.69 Acres Located at 320 Military Cutoff Rd from O&I (CD), Office and Institutional (Conditional District), and RB, Regional Business District, to O&I, Office and Institutional District and read the consistency statement as follows:

> I move to approve the proposed amendment to rezone property located at 320 Military Cutoff Road from O&I (CD), Office and Institutional (Conditional District) and RB, Regional Business to O&I, Office and Institutional district and find it to be consistent with the relevant policies in the Comprehensive Plan, based on the application materials, and the information provided at the public hearing and in the staff report, and to find approval of the rezoning

request is reasonable and in the public interest for the following reason(s): The proposed rezoning is compatible with the surrounding area and will apply a consistent zoning designation across the property.

The motion was seconded by Councilmember Andrews and carried unanimously. A second reading of the Ordinance was waived on motion of Councilmember Clinton-Quintana, seconded by Councilmember Andrews and carried unanimously.

****

Ordinance Granting a Modification to the Special Use Permit for a Private Recreation Facility Located at 4950 Holly Tree Road & 304 Westchester Road (SUP-CC-2026-0002) was considered

Ms. Becky Hawke, City Manager, stated that Staff received a request for a continuance. She noted that that we did hear from the Community today, and because they thought it was going to be continued some of them were no longer planning to attend, but certainly the request to continue is up to Council.

Mr. Brian Chambers, Assistant Planning and Development Director, added that Staff received a number of calls from folks who were planning not to show up because they heard it was going to be continued. Councilmember Joyner inquired as to the reason the petitioner gave in asking for a continuance. Mr. Chambers responded that he was told that the applicant's expert witness would not be present this evening.

Ms. Corrie Faith Lee, Attorney for the Applicant, stated that one of their witnesses could not be present this evening. She stated that she does not have the details of what his conflict specifically was but he is their sound expert and the modification is relating to changing several of the existing proposed pickleball courts to Padel which has a different soundwave frequency than pickleball does. She stated that they felt that was a critical aspect for Council to consider and they also have a second basis for the request as they do have on-going discussions with Staff that they're undertaking regarding some of the proposed modifications to the conditions allocated to the special use permit which could have impacts to site design. She stated that they do have a meeting scheduled with Staff on Friday to continue those collaborative discussions to ensure that the final proposal is aligned with the goals. Councilmember Joyner inquired if Ms. Faith Lee represented the applicant at their last special use permit hearing. She responded that she did not and that they were represented by the managing partner Samual Potter, of Equitas Law Partners LLP. Councilmember Joyner explained why he is hesitant to grant the continuation of the hearing.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to continue the Ordinance Granting a Modification to the Special Use Permit for a Private Recreation Facility Located at 4950 Holly Tree Road & 304 Westchester Road (SUP-CC-2026-0002) to Council's August 4, 2026 meeting. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Lyle and carried 5 – 2 (Councilmembers Joyner and Clinton-Quintana voted "No").

****

ORDINANCES

Ordinance Making a Supplemental Appropriation in the Amount of $1,837 to the Special Purpose Fund for the River to Sea Bike Ride and Brunswick Heritage Riverside Bike Ride was considered.

Ms. Carolyn Caggia, Associate Planner, WMPO, spoke to Council and stated that the source of the funding proposed to be appropriated is from the sale of 2026 River to Sea merchandise as well as sponsorships. The money will be used for costs associated in planning future rides.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Andrews made a motion to approve the Ordinance Making a Supplemental Appropriation in the Amount of $1,837 to the Special Purpose Fund for the River to Sea Bike Ride and Brunswick Heritage Riverside Bike Ride. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Santaguida and carried unanimously. A second reading of the Ordinance was waived on motion of

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana, seconded by Mayor Pro-Tem Spears and carried unanimously.

****

RESOLUTIONS

Resolution Establishing the Northern Riverfront Development District Committee was considered.

Ms. Hawke stated that when the City acquired the Skyline property in 2023, the area was assigned particular rights, title, and interest under declaration of easements, covenants, conditions, and restrictions. She stated that in order to fulfill all the obligations under that process, it is now time to create the committee that will need to be put together so that when there are proposals for development within any of the identified properties that are outlined in red, then that committee is able to meet to review those, to make sure they are in alignment with all the covenants and restrictions, and be able to provide that feedback or confirmation that everything is in fact in alignment. She stated that the proposed Committee membership would be made up of all members of Council including the Mayor as voting members and two non-City district property owners. Ms. Hawke stated that the request before Council tonight is the authorization of establishing that Committee to fulfill this process.

A question/answer and discussion period was held.

Following further consideration, Councilmember Lyle made a motion to approve the Resolution Establishing the Northern Riverfront Development District Committee. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Clinton-Quintana and it carried unanimously.

****

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

Ms. Hawke gave a Budget Work Session follow-up presentation regarding Funding Request for the Community Justice Center and the Film Partnership of North Carolina**.**

Ms. Hawke noted that when Council discussed these two funding requests at the Budget Work Sessions no decision on funding was made. She stated that in the Spring of 2026, the City did receive unsolicited funding requests from both the Community Justice Center and the Film Partnership of North Carolina for $100,000 each.

Ms. Hawke stated that the Community Justice Center (C.J.C.) has not received any prior funding from the City of Wilmington but the FY27 request is for $100,000 recurring for the next three years. She stated that in the FY27 budget year, New Hanover County has committed to providing the C.J.C. with $300,000 from their budget and they do expect that to be recurring funding. Ms. Hawke stated that the C.J.C has received formal communication informing them there was no direct funding opportunity as part of the budget approval process.

Ms. Hawke stated that there are a couple pathways to consider providing funding to the C.J.C. if Council chooses to do so. The first one would be to direct them to apply to our Human Services Grant program. She stated there is $783,000 set aside in the FY27 budget for this grant program, but it is a competitive process as we do typically get more requests for dollars than dollars available, so there are no guarantees. She stated that depending on how the eligibility criteria is determined, they may or may not even be eligible to apply. Ms. Hawke stated that is consistent with how other non-profits are treated. She stated that a second option is to consider a lease agreement to account for the space that is occupied by the Police Department within the C.J.C. She stated that when you compute the numbers that does create an equivalent rent amount of about $8,540 annually for space we are using. She stated that if the City wanted to provide an equivalent portion of the administrative overhead that they also have in their annual budget based on the space that is used, Council could get another $4845 annually. We would be looking at a maximum of $13,385 in equivalent lease funding if they were to strictly divide out the numbers like that. She stated that would be the most equitable approach from the sense that it does account for the City's actual use of space that right now we are not paying for. She pointed out that it is a much lower funding amount than the $100,000 that was requested by the C.J.C. and if there were desires to see that funding through future fiscal years, those would be new dollars we would be looking for as part of the FY28 budget. She stated that the third option is to consider use of City Council's contingency funds, which has $100,000 in available funds that could be used for direct funding or to fund a lease agreement. She stated that on the positive side, using the contingency fund for a lease agreement does create a clear differentiator from other funding requests we might get from non-profits as far as why we might be looking to do something like this out of cycle. She stated that the C.J.C. does appear to have a sustainable funding source that is coming from the County to ensure they are able to cover most of their operating costs through other funding sources. Ms. Hawke stated that on the negative side, early usage of that fund can go really quick, and we are only halfway through the first month of the new fiscal year. She stated that if we were to not make that part of a lease agreement, then that would be out of alignment with the typical process that we follow and then we would need to find funding again in future fiscal years if Council wanted to do this.

Ms. Hawke stated that in regard to the Film Partnership of North Carolina, the City of Wilmington has provided $400,000 total in the past that were non-recurring ARPA funds. She stated that the last round of funding that was made to them was in May of last year for $113,096 of the $400,000 total funding from the City. Their FY27 funding request is $100,000 and they are set to receive $100,000 from New Hanover County, but it is unknown if it will be recurring. She stated that the State budget did not have any approved funding for the Film Partnership included in it. Ms. Hawke stated that the last formal communications was when they were notified that the ARPA funding was ending, and at Council's request, the Film Partnership provided performance metrics to Council in May. She stated that if Council is interested in considering funding for the Film Partnership, similar to the C.J.C. but a different pot of money, they can be directed to apply for a Civic Development Partner Agencies Development Program Grant in FY29. Unfortunately, those are three-year funding cycles so new dollars wouldn't be available until FY29. The second option for available funds for FY27 is to consider use of City Council's contingency funds or economic development contingency funds. She stated that the available City contingency funds is $100,000 and the separate economic development contingency fund that has $135,000. Ms. Hawke stated that if we were to fund up to $50,000 of their request, that would be in alignment with the ratios of how the City and the County previously funded the Film Partnership. Ms. Hawke pointed out that it is early usage of that limited funding and is out of alignment with ARPA recipients and non-profit funding requests that the City receives. She stated that at this time, she is not aware of any clear source of sustainable funding for the Film Partnership beyond the $100,000 that they are receiving from the County.

Ms. Hawke stated that the next steps are Council's discussion and feedback and if there is consensus from at least four members of Council on how you would like to proceed and the funding source you would be interested in using, then Staff would prepare a Resolution to consider at your next meeting for one or both of these organizations.

Mayor Saffo acknowledged Ms. Susi Hamilton, Former House Representative, representing the Film Partnership, and Mr. Tim Merrick, New Hanover County School Board member.

Councilmember Andrews stated that she would not support using contingency funds for any of these requests because it should be reserved for unforeseen or one-time needs, not the on-going operating expenses. She stated that with regard to the Film Partnership, she does recognize the value that the film industry brings to Wilmington but if the organization is seeking funding for economic development she thinks it should submit a detailed proposal. She stated that for the Community Justice Center she would consider doing a lease agreement to help them recoup some of those costs for the space and she thinks the estimates are quite reasonable. She stated that she would support the Film Partnership to use the economic development funding process and would support the C.J.C. to use our community funding process.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears inquired if either organization is prepared to make a presentation or provide data to Council tonight. Ms. Hawke responded that Staff didn't ask them to prepare anything. He stated that is going to be something he is looking for and the desire to see them go through the proper process. Ms. Hawke asked Mayor Pro-Tem Spears to clarify if he was suggesting that it would be part of the grant program that exists for both economic development and community non-profits. Mayor Pro-Tem Spears responded yes.

Councilmember Santaguida stated that there are some things she needs to know better before reaching a decision, like what other funding sources are being pursued. She stated that if we are being asked to circumvent our typical process, she would ask these organizations to provide the information they were applying on cycle. She stated that she wants to ensure we make an objective decision.

Ms. Hawke stated that to clarify, because we are changing the process for the Community grants, what is going to be requested may be different for each RFP but that is something Council could delay by a few months.

Councilmember Santaguida stated that she wants to honor what Council said and that they would consider these after the budget for these organizations. So whatever information they can get that will look like the applications we are going to get in the future, she thinks will be the fairest way to consider this.

Councilmember Joyner stated that he would be a yes on both to bring forward a budget amendment allocating discretionary funds that Council purposefully earmarked in the budget for Council to spend at some point in the year on initiatives in our community that we deem worthy. He stated that he would be proud to stand beside the Community Justice Center and the funding there and he feels we could defend that to the community. He stated that he would also be proud to stand beside the Film Partnership of North Carolina when we look at the stated budget and see zero dollars for this initiative and we heard testimonials tonight about people who have been helped by these kinds of programs and a firm belief in this community that film equals jobs. Councilmember Joyner stated that we are in a procedural posture that is completely abnormal for this Council as we don't have general policy discussions at the end of a meeting. He stated that the idea that we have not had opportunities to ask questions of these organizations, to tell them what we need to know, and to get specific benchmarks from them, he disagrees with that assertion. He stated that he would do $100,000 per their request and he would request information regarding their history for the $135,000 economic contingency.

Ms. Hawke added that we have an economic development manager who will be starting at the end of this month who is very experienced and we expect that to be an active position.

Councilmember Lyle stated that she is very familiar with the non-profit sector and this is only going to get harder, because as the funding from other levels of government is drying up it's causing a trickle-down deficit. She stated that she would like to support some funding for the organizations, as well, through a budget amendment for the same amounts as their requests.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears stated that this has been part of the regular process and was brought to us during the Budget Session and he directed Ms. Hamilton to Mr. Thom Moton, Deputy City Manager, to apply. He stated that he doesn't know when someone could come to a governing body and ask for funds and not provide any data. He stated that we are asking them to actively be a part of this process and as this governing body he thinks that's the correct thing to do to ask them to apply.

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana stated that there are a lot of organizations that are needing that funding and she is not against giving them funding, but she would like to see the data so we are not showing, what looks like, favoritism.

Councilmember Andrews stated that we have received other budget requests during and even after the budget process. She stated that contingency is an unforeseen need and what we're being asked for now is really sustained funding and both organizations coming to us are absolutely in need of sustained funding. She stated that when we talk about a contingency, we have the Living Hope Day Center that is literally out on the street right now and that's an emergency to her. She stated that this is not. Councilmember Andrews stated that the infographic that Council got in May regarding the Film Partnership was difficult to understand what we were spending taxpayer money on and what kind of return that we were getting on it. She stated that she would need a lot more information than that.

Mayor Saffo stated that there is consensus that we need to get more information and inquired of Ms. Hawke regarding how many weeks before making a decision. Ms. Hawke responded that Staff will have clarification on the grant program in the next six weeks.

Councilmember Lyle stated that anyone who has applied for and received funding from the City of Wilmington previously would have detailed reporting on file.

A lengthy question/answer and discussion period was held.

Council recognized Mrs. Susie Hamilton, President, Film Partnership of North Carolina.

Mrs. Hamilton spoke to Council and stated that the organization has been in existence since 2021 and has created over 450 jobs Statewide with 239 of them in New Hanover County alone. She stated that 64% of total placement for interns and experienced crew members to train them, is coming into Wilmington. She stated that she doesn't know why it keeps coming up that there aren't any other funding sources as they received half a million dollars from the State of North Carolina in 2023 and they just closed that grant within the last 30 days. She stated that to suggest that this isn't sustainable is unfounded and also incorrect that they haven't done any reporting to the City. She stated that the $400,000 that they got from the City of Wilmington, they were reporting back on a weekly basis, as well as New Hanover County and other sources they have received funding from. Ms. Hamilton stated that the record of reporting is there even if it wasn't provided to Council and also that she went to the City a year ago asking what the process would be for them to apply for additional funding and she was told there wasn't one. She stated that if they have to wait another two years to be in the economic development process, that will be a huge hardship on the organization. She stated that they have a three-year contract with New Hanover County that is exactly the same as what New Hanover County and the City of Wilmington have with the Wilmington Regional Film Commission, as well as Wilmington Business Development and Wilmington Downtown, Inc. Ms. Hamilton stated that New Hanover County gave them $600,000 in funds in the beginning compared to the City's $400,000 so it's not a 50/50 split. She stated that all the funds are spent locally, none of the State funds received over time have been spent in New Hanover County or the City of Wilmington but in other places in the State. The rationale behind that was to show the rest of the State and the General Assembly that they can pull employment opportunities from all over the State of North Carolina and all 100 Counties. They thought that would be something that would help the General Assembly understand what the industry means, not only to Wilmington, but to the State of North Carolina as well. Ms. Hamilton stated that she would hate to leave the meeting believing that the majority of this City Council does not support workforce development for the film industry in this State as we are the hub. She stated that they would like some clear direction but they have reported regardless of whether that information was provided to Council or not, and they were not asked to provide any information for this discussion tonight.

Council recognized Mr. Ben David, CEO, Community Justice Center (C.J.C.).

Mr. David spoke to Council and stated that it was created from a $5.0 million grant from the New Hanover Community Endowment. He stated that they became a 501c3 corporation back on January 9, 2024. Some of the things the C.J.C. has accomplished is giving $2.5 million to expand the District Attorney's office by 20%, or opened up its own courtroom, or provided e-filing remotely for victims of violence and civil applications that he personally argues for on Friday mornings for people who need lawyers. He stated that there is actually a crime victim's Bill of Rights in our North Carolina Constitution that we uphold every day. He stated that he would encourage Council to think about how the County just gave $300,000 in its budget and the State of North Carolina just came in with another $200,000 for this fiscal year. Mr. David stated that what he is asking Council to do is look at whether the Community Justice Center should be funded as a lease agreement. He stated that they have 1,500 sq.ft. immediately across the street from the courthouse and they were out of room over there for the twenty years he was the elected District Attorney. He stated that they have never had a place for victims, but now they have a place for survivors of violence. He stated that if Council wants this to succeed as a place where government comes to synergistically work on behalf of victims, at some point government needs to step up and fund it in a recurring budget. He stated that Council has a standing invitation to come and see the Center and that they bring in established non-profits like the Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Carousel Center, and the Rape Crisis Center through Coastal Horizons, all of which they support. He stated that the last thing he would want to do is take any of the money from them to put into our coffers. He stated that we are talking about being a one stop shop for hope, healing, and justice for people who are the survivors of violence and if you want that work to continue, the grant for the Community Endowment runs out December 31 which is why New Hanover County and the State have stepped up. He stated that this is the right thing by the people of Wilmington and New Hanover County, and the State of North Carolina.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears inquired if Mr. David is asking for the $100,000 as well as the lease agreement. Mr. David responded that he is asking for the pro-rata share as the lease plus the operating budget which is roughly $400,000, and the County has come in for $300,000, so they need another $100,000. He stated that the shared space that they have and the caseloads, they would be in for one-forth of that as the City of Wilmington. He stated that in addition to the $300,000 that New Hanover County came in with in direct funding to the C.J.C., they also funded an additional $430,000 to the eight prosecutor positions that were contemplated under the grant starting January 1st through June 30th.

Councilmember Santaguida stated that it's important for her to see this request in writing, that it's a fair ask. Mr. David stated that he has submitted the request in writing to the City Manager and the numbers on the display are not the numbers he submitted. He stated that he has always submitted a request for $100,000 and the rent is about $280,000 for that 15,000 sq.ft., with the operating budget being about $120,000. Mr. David stated that the $400,000 is really the overhead of the C.J.C. and what we're unlocking is over $3.0 million of taxpayers money to work co-located under one roof, let alone all of the other non-profits that are also working there.

A question/answer and discussion period was held.

Councilmember Lyle stated that we can't depend on the endowment for everything, and City Council can't tell the endowment what to fund and what not to fund. She stated that one of the things she likes about this proposal is that supporting other groups in the Justice Center really helps with leverage so that the non-profits that are there getting the free rent, they can track and leverage it towards some of their other funding. Mr. David stated that the number one recommendation that came out of the strategic planning session is not to rely on a single source and they are actively seeking other grant opportunities as well. He stated that he is very grateful for the support of the endowment but he also agrees that they need to see support for what this is from government as well.

Mr. David stated that the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Prevention of Youth Violence became Voyage and they reduced violent crime by 28% by increasing graduation rates by 25% in the youth enrichment zone over a three-year period. He stated that what they have done, ten years in, all started in the Harrelson Center. He stated that what this grant did was take the abandoned jail tower that's been vacant for twenty years and created the Community Justice Center that is a place for nearly two dozen justice officials to work every day, and also a place for a lot of non-profits to work collaboratively with them. He stated that funding the C.J.C., in effect, you're taking care of a lot of different groups that are all in the fight. He stated that he has never asked the City for money before this year and the reason he is asking for it this year is because it goes into next year when the funding that we've had for the New Hanover Community Endowment runs out December 31st. Mr. David stated that he wants to make sure we are leaving this in a place that there is recurring money.

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana inquired as to what the next steps are if we get this data in order to get an approval for funding. Ms. Hawke responded that every other non-profit request is sent to our grant pots of money so once you get the information that you requested tonight from these entities then we would be looking for direction from you all as far as what dollar amount you would want in a Resolution to come forward to be voted on.

****

Ms. Hawke requested Council's consideration of a Walk On Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Apply for a Department of Homeland Security 2026 Port Security Grant Program Gant in the Amount of $468,758 with a $117,190 Local Match from the Grant Match Fund.

Following further consideration, Council voted unanimously to Waive Council's Rules of Order in order to consider the Walk On Resolution on motion of Councilmember Andrews, seconded by Councilmember Santaguida.

Ms. Hawke stated that this is a grant application and there is a grant match fund that can cover the $117,190, if we do receive this grant, we will be able to come up with the matching funds. She stated that if we are not successful in receiving this grant then we would be needing to look to tap into some asset forfeiture dollars that we have but this would save us from having to do so. She stated that Staff believes this is a good match for the grant requirements and we want to move forward at this time. Ms. Hawke stated that if the grant is awarded, it would provide a S.W.A.T. robot to replace the old one and also some technology and software for our communications command center.

Following further consideration, Mayor Pro-Tem Spears made a motion to approve the Resolution Authorizing the City Manager to Apply for a Department of Homeland Security 2026 Port Security Grant Program Grant in the Amount of $468,758 with a $117,190 Local Match from the Grant Match Fund. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Clinton-Quintana and it carried unanimously.

****

Councilmember Santaguida stated that it's good to be back. She commented that she hopes everyone enjoyed the break, and it's great to be working with everyone again.

Councilmember Andrews stated that she attended the second "Ask An Arborist" session this morning. It was fabulous, and she wanted to thank Staff for coming up with that. She stated we probably had about 20-25 people there from the neighborhood and that it was good information to help the residents to understand why some trees have to come down.

Mayor Pro-Tem Spears stated that July is a busy month for the Spears household as two of his grandkids had birthdays and today is his son, Asher's, birthday.

Councilmember Clinton-Quintana stated that her birthday is next Monday and she has tried to celebrate all month but due to some family illnesses it has been a bit trying. She stated that she is trying to find the positive in everything.

Councilmember Lyle stated that it's the one-year anniversary of our City Manager, Ms. Becky Hawke, and as a new Councilmember she appreciates how patient she is, and she's learned a lot from her. She stated that she has had dozens of Staff members tell her they love working at the City and that means everything.

Councilmember Joyner stated that he has a litigation updated regarding Cape Fear Public Utility Authority and Chemours which is in a 30-day window to sign a settlement agreement with the United States Environmental Protection Agency through the Department of Justice as well as the State of West Virginia's environmental department. He stated that does not effect CFPUA as we have our own separate lawsuit and we continue to move towards a jury trial, hopefully in the Spring of 2027. Councilmember Joyner stated that the Federal Government and the West Virginia lawsuit does reference Fayetteville Works, New Jersey, and West Virginia, and unfortunately it prioritizes North Carolina last. He stated that he will be submitting a letter of objection to the Department of Justice to weigh-in on that lawsuit saying they should not settle because it doesn't prioritize North Carolina enough, but even if we find out in the next few weeks that it does settle, he wants to make sure people understand CFPUA's lawsuit continues to move forward and we are still going after all the money that Chemours ought to be responsible for in the pollution of our river.

Mayor Saffo inquired about the trees that are coming down around Live Oak Parkway and he inquired if there is any way we can give these trees a reprieve until we have a way to educate the public. He added that he also hopes to get them a clear understanding as to when we cut them and why we are cutting them, because this has become a pretty significant issue all over the community. He stated that there must be a better process for cutting down trees in any neighborhood and how to share with those people why we are cutting them down. Ms. Hawke responded that the Public Health Life Safety is going to be paramount in making that determination and she would not be prepared in this moment to promise that those trees should have a reprieve because she hasn't talked to Staff to know what the risk tolerance level is and how quickly they believe they need to come down. She stated that they do believe that the trees are diseased and that they are at the end of their life. She stated that in terms of the public communication and outreach, there is a robust process that has been brought to life with new signage with the QR code, public communication going out to where we will be working. Also, Staff is working on some additional information to help educate the public about what they are looking for and what goes in to how they make the determination. She added that will be City-wide for all tree work we are looking to do unless it is an emergency. Mayor Saffo added that he would just like a better detailed process in how we engage the neighborhoods and the community. Ms. Hawke stated that Staff will get something put together and get it to Council in the next few days.

****

Following further consideration, Council voted unanimously to enter into a Closed Session pursuant to the provisions of N.C. General Statute §143-318.11 (a)(5) and (a)(6) in order for City Council to instruct Staff regarding the City's negotiating position concerning the possible acquisition of real property; and discuss the qualification, competence, performance, character, and fitness, of public officers and employees on motion of Councilmember Clinton-Quintana, seconded by Councilmember Andrews.

****

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

****

Recessed

****

Reconvened

Council reconvened the meeting with all present as mentioned above.

****

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

****

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 11:59 P.M.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

THE ABOVE MINUTES ARE NOT A VERBATIM RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS. THE ENTIRE PROCEEDINGS ARE RECORDED ON TAPES 1, 2, AND 3, AND ARE INCLUDED AS PART OF THIS OFFICIAL RECORD.