

CAROLINA BEACH

Town Council Workshop

Tuesday, April 28, 2026 - 9:00 AM

Council Chambers, 1121 N. Lake Park Boulevard, Carolina Beach, NC



MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Barbee called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM.

PRESENT

Mayor Lynn Barbee

Mayor Pro Tem Deb LeCompte

Council Member Jay Healy

Council Member Wayne Rouse

Council Member Vince Losito

ALSO PRESENT

Town Manager Bruce Oakley

Deputy Town Manager Ed Parvin

Finance Director Debbie Hall

Town Clerk Kim Ward

DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. Employee Recognition

Public Utilities Director Mark Meyer recognized Alvin Blanks for 10 years of service, noting his reliability during after-hours calls and consistent professionalism with coworkers and the public.

Public Works Director Brian Stanberry recognized Tony Burnett-Millage for 15 years of service, highlighting his versatility, steady leadership as Public Works Manager, and positive, solutions-oriented approach.

2. Presentation by Officer Paige Hulgin and Chief Ward with the Police Department

Police Chief Vic Ward and Officer Paige Hulgin gave a presentation on Officer Hulgin's experience at the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP)/United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Interior Police Academy Exchange Program. Officer Hulgin was selected for the highly competitive experience at the Abu Dhabi Police College, which brought together 52 international participants representing 44 agencies from 35 countries, plus 162 local graduates.

Chief Ward reviewed the nomination process and gave a program overview. Officer Hulgin discussed her accommodations, a typical day, and courses of study.

Officer Hulgin finished 1st among women and 9th overall; she was selected as a platoon leader and received recognition during graduation. The program lasted almost six months.

Police Chief Ward, Council Members, and Mr. Oakley praised Officer Hulgin for this accomplishment. Police Chief Ward added that Officer Hulgin participated in this program at no cost to the Town.

3. Budget Discussion

Mr. Oakley held a discussion on the FY26/27 budget.

He reported that the \$487,000 cyber theft is not recoverable. Mr. Oakley said through department-wide cost controls (position freezes, deferred projects, and reduced/re-evaluated spending), the Town expects to close the year with a balanced budget without using fund balance to cover the loss.

Mr. Oakley gave a budget summary and went over the process, which began at a January Council retreat.

He said the Town is proposing to implement a tiered living-wage structure using an estimated \$23/hour living wage for New Hanover County as the floor. Lowest-paid hourly employees would be brought up to that level (about 12% increases for those positions), with proportional increases across pay grades (highest grades about 4-5%).

The currently proposed budget for the General Fund is approximately \$27.5 million, assuming a proposed 3.5-cent tax rate increase.

Mayor Barbee said he wants the Town to create a culture where employees want to stay rather than constantly getting poached by other entities.

Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte said the Town does not want to merely act as a stepping stone for staff.

Council Member Losito said it's better to retain people rather than constantly hiring, training, and losing knowledge as employees leave.

Mr. Oakley noted that the Town's tax rate affects its share of New Hanover County sales tax distribution and said keeping the rate flat while others increase theirs could reduce the Town's sales tax revenue.

Mr. Oakley said he will send out a detailed proposed budget later this week.

The currently proposed budget for the Utilities Fund is approximately \$12.6 million. A 9% rate increase is required by bond covenants tied to recent utility bonds; a modest shortfall is projected, with the gap planned to be covered using available fund balance supported by a current-year surplus tied to project costs rolling forward.

Mayor Barbee said he thinks a 3.5-cent tax increase will be a big pill for property owners to swallow, but he agrees with efforts to retain employees. Mr. Oakley said staff will keep working to minimize this.

Mr. Oakley reviewed the remaining steps in the budget process prior to adoption in June, including more opportunities for public input.

Council Member Rouse said he would like to gain more insight on the true cost of the Town losing employees.

Mayor Pro Tem LeCompte mentioned that the Town often invests in its employees, such as paying for them to receive certifications, but that investment is lost when employees leave.

Council Member Rouse asked Mr. Oakley to do what he can to lessen the 3.5-cent tax increase, but Mayor Barbee reminded him that this should not be done at the expense of employees.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Barbee adjourned the meeting at 9:53 AM.