

TOWN OF BURGAW BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS REGULAR MEETING

DATE: February 10, 2026
TIME: 4:30 PM
PLACE: Burgaw Town Center, 108 E. Wilmington Street
BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Olivia Dawson, Mayor Pro-tem James Malloy, Commissioners Bill George, William Rivenbark, Michael Pearsall and Myra McDuffie

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 PM.

Invocation

Commissioner Rivenbark led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda

Motion: Commissioner Rivenbark moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Pearsall seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Approval of Consent Agenda

The consent agenda included approval of January 13, 2026 regular and closed session meeting minutes, Resolution 2026-02 adopting the Southeastern North Carolina Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan, Resolution 2026-03 opposing the expansion of the Chemours Fayetteville Works Facility, Ordinance 2026-01 amending the Traffic Ordinance, and Ordinance 2026-02 amending the Beautification Committee ordinance.

Motion: Commissioner McDuffie moved to approve the consent agenda. Motion carried unanimously.

Special Requests/Presentations

Employee Recognitions

Building Inspector Ivey English recognized Adela Matthews from the finance and inspections departments for completing a NC Law and Administration course. This required course for building inspectors will help Matthews in her day-to-day work by providing greater understanding of permitting and inspection laws in the state.

2026 Pender County Reappraisal Presentation

Colby Sawyer, Pender County Manager, presented information about the 2026 reappraisal process on behalf of Vincent Valuations. Sawyer explained that North Carolina General Statute 105-286 requires counties to reappraise at least once every eight years to reset property values to current market value as of January 1st of the reappraisal year.

The county has nearly 55,000 parcels of real property, with Vincent Valuations conducting mass appraisals across approximately 250 tax neighborhoods. Sawyer emphasized that the tax department doesn't set market value - the market does - and their job is to calculate what that real market value is by analyzing trends and qualifying sales.

Sawyer presented numerous examples of property value increases since the 2019 reappraisal, showing residential properties with increases ranging from 82% to over 200%. He noted that the 2019 appraisal was conducted right after Hurricane Florence, and the COVID pandemic significantly changed the housing market between 2019 and now.

Key points about the appeals process were outlined:

- Property owners should review their notices carefully when received (expected last week of March)
- A comparison tool will be available to view qualifying sales of similar properties
- Appeals can be made if there are errors in property characteristics or condition
- The Board of Equalization and Review will convene April 13th through May 15th
- Final appeals can be taken to the state Property Tax Commission

Sawyer stressed that appraised value and tax bills are separate concepts - tax rates are set by governing boards based on budget needs, and property value increases don't necessarily mean proportional tax bill increases.

Commissioner Pearsall asked about requirements for Board of Equalization and Review members, noting concerns about geographic representation. Sawyer confirmed applications were received from districts 1, 3, and 5, providing geographic diversity across the county.

Commissioner Rivenbark inquired about how construction permit values are used in assessments. Sawyer explained that while permit values provide starting points, final assessments consider multiple factors including neighborhood characteristics and property conditions.

The county will hold educational clinics at locations where presentations are given to help residents with the appeals process.

Mayor's Proclamation - Supporting the 250th Anniversary of the United States of America

Mayor Dawson read a proclamation expressing support for America's 250th anniversary commemoration in 2026, encouraging community participation in educational and cultural activities celebrating the nation's history and ideals.

Departmental Items

Building Inspections Department

Building Inspector Ivey English reported on several major commercial projects progressing in town, including a new urgent care facility and dentist office at the intersection of NC

Highway 53 and US Highway 117 Bypass. The hospital continues HVAC improvements for the emergency department and exterior renovations. The new Pender County Law Enforcement Center is nearing completion, with the sheriff's office portion approaching final inspections and the jail section close behind. The Pender Health and Human Services building is essentially complete awaiting final inspections.

Finance Department

Finance Officer Tiffany Byrd reported completion of year-end W-2s and 1099s. Budget meetings were held January 14th and 15th with all departments. The department is actively working with various grants and handling busy end-of-year activities.

Fire Department

Fire Chief Johnathan Prevatte reported responding to approximately 70 calls in January and conducting about 420 hours of in-house fire training. Several personnel attended Weekend Fire College at Cape Fear Community College. The Plymovent System from the AFG grant is awaiting contractor completion in the coming weeks.

The new SAFER grant positions have been on shift for approximately a month, proving tremendously beneficial during recent weather events when Pender EMS requested 4-wheel drive apparatus response for all EMS calls. The additional staffing allowed the department to have three 4-wheel drive vehicles available simultaneously.

Chief Prevatte spoke about the department's new station dog, Halligan (nicknamed "Hal"), found by Officer Rossi and officially adopted after the 72-hour hold period with the Pender County Animal Shelter. The dog has received tremendous community support and positive feedback, with other agencies already inquiring about utilizing Hal's services for emotional support.

Information Technology Department

IT Director Dustin McCullen reported completing 65 IT support requests in January. Major projects included replacing the time clock system with new software and hardware that integrates with the town's financial software, providing faster and more user-friendly operation at lower cost.

The department is implementing a new mass notification system allowing notifications to both public and staff, with social media integration for faster deployment. A "click fix" system is being developed for resident service requests through the website.

McCullen noted new federal requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act requiring municipal websites serving under 50,000 residents to comply with accessibility guidelines by April 2027. The town will work to ensure all current and future website content meets these standards.

Parks, Recreation & Tourism Department

Recreation Supervisor Jayna Augst reported that the annual Daddy-Daughter and Mother-Son dances were sold out, with consideration being given to increasing capacity in the future. March programming includes Arbor Day events and the Mayor's Gala.

The Blueberry Festival pancake breakfast will be held February 21st at the fire department. A mural project is planned for Hankins Park with design presentation at the next meeting.

Westside Trail updates included completion of all encroachments with residents, NCDOT approval of Penderlea Highway and Bridgers Street encroachments, sidewalk work completion, and scheduling of rapid flashing beacon installations. Landscaping concerns on Hayes Street that were spoken about at the last meeting have been resolved with items to be replaced in May, when the plants are seasonally available.

Planning Department

Planning Director Ron Meredith reported ongoing work on the wayfinding project, currently handling challenging NCDOT encroachment agreements. The UDO rewrite continues, with the planning board meeting cancelled this month due to chamber meeting conflicts, allowing more focus on the rewrite project.

Meredith explained the comprehensive UDO rewrite creates a more user-friendly document compared to the current ordinance, which contains difficult statutory language. The new version provides better guidance for property owners and developers while maintaining appropriate development standards.

Town Attorney Norwood Blanchard clarified important legislative constraints affecting local development decisions. He explained that House Bill 765 and Senate Bill 205 prevent municipalities from downzoning properties, meaning the town cannot reduce development density even if desired. These laws, passed in late 2024, tie municipal hands regarding development control, as developers contribute significantly to political campaigns influencing these decisions.

The Board requested that Planning Staff publish information explaining planning and zoning regulations and how, in certain situations, the Town's authority is limited—such as in the recent matter involving the DR Horton project. Ms. Wells will see this information gets published in the town's newsletter and website.

Police Department

Police Chief James Rowell reported sending sergeants to training classes including "weathering the storm" for officer mental health and background investigations training. Chief Rowell noted several staff members worked many consecutive days alongside other town departments during the recent ice and snow storms. He praised the collaborative effort during the town's first major weather event under his leadership.

The Pender County Sheriff's Office will host an urban tracking K-9 training February 23-25 with nearly 50 K-9 teams utilizing Burgaw as a hub for training scenarios involving lost persons and cognitive impairment cases.

Public Services Department

Public Services Director Chris Medlin reported repairing three water leaks, replacing two problematic sewer taps, installing two water taps, and upgrading entrances to the police department and inspections office. Hometown hero banners installation is underway.

The Fremont Street water main project has installed over 1,000 feet of pipe despite weather delays. Courthouse Avenue sidewalk work should resume this week with completion expected by week's end.

Commissioner Pearsall raised concerns about washout issues at West Bridgers and North McCullen Street intersection. Medlin explained that work during trail construction included installing an interference box to address drainage problems where a sewer line crossed the road. The contractor will return to dress up and stabilize the area.

Commissioner Pearsall also commented on the low-hanging utility line along Courthouse Square near the intersection of Wilmington and Walker Streets. Mr. Gantt noted utility companies have been made aware of same, but will reach back out.

Prior to Public Forum, Mayor Dawson declared a break between 5:26 PM and 5:38 PM.

Public Forum

Thomas Brown, 1881 Henry Brown Road, addressed the board expressing concerns about the planning department's failure to protect citizens and agricultural properties. He criticized the town's definition of rural agriculture, arguing it favors development and threatens agricultural properties within Burgaw's zoning district. Brown warned that allowing such development invites predatory developers and could change the community's character and politics, potentially making Burgaw like Leland or Hampstead.

John Westbrook, 410 E. Fremont Street, congratulated the board for working out the DR Horton subdivision issues, stating his initial opposition to the 500-unit proposal but support for the reduced 250-unit version. As a downtown business owner, Westbrook emphasized the importance of growing the tax base to prevent town deterioration. He noted that while his taxes increased 300% in the last reappraisal (reduced to 200% on appeal), maintaining and growing the tax base through new development will help keep tax rates manageable for existing property owners.

Public Hearing

Rezoning Request

Mayor Dawson declared the public hearing open at 5:44 PM.

Planning Director Meredith presented a request to rezone approximately 3.7 acres along NC Highway 53 from R20 Residential District to B2 Highway Business District. The property is owned by Mount Calvary Leadership Development and represented by Henry Nadeau.

The site currently has R20 zoning with conservation preservation overlay, which will remain in place. The B2 district is intended for highway-oriented commercial uses and is consistent with surrounding zoning patterns, being adjacent to existing B2 commercial land including Walmart.

Although slightly under the 4-acre minimum, the parcel is part of a larger contiguous B2 area meeting the ordinance's intent. Development will be subject to flood regulations, UDO standards, technical review, and NCDOT access requirements.

Henry Nadeau, representing Creative Commercial Properties, explained his clients are Mount Calvary Leadership Development Corporation, a local nonprofit providing career training for at-risk youth in western Pender County. The lots have 200 feet of Highway 53 frontage in the area's highest traffic corridor near major retailers.

Commissioner McDuffie inquired about potential commercial candidates, but Mayor Dawson redirected focus to the rezoning decision rather than specific development plans.

There being no further questions or concerns voiced by the board, Mayor Dawson declared the public hearing closed at 5:51 PM.

Motion: Mayor Pro-tem Malloy moved to approve Resolution 2026-04 adopting a statement of consistency regarding the zoning map amendment. Commissioner Rivenbark seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Mayor Pro-tem Malloy moved to approve Ordinance 2026-03 for the map amendment rezoning the property from R20 to B2. Commissioner Rivenbark seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Items from Manager

Town Manager James Gantt provided updates on several projects and initiatives:

Storm Response: Town staff performed excellently during recent ice and snow storms, with extensive positive feedback from the community about cleanup efforts.

Speed Limit Reductions: The board's approved recommendations for West Bridgers Street extension and West Bridgers Street have been submitted to NCDOT, which will conduct traffic studies to determine if reductions are warranted.

Stop Sign Intersections: The approved ordinance removing certain 3-way and 4-way stop signs is being implemented, with public works handling removal and education efforts.

Budget Process: The budget retreat is scheduled for March 2-3, beginning the intensive budget development process. March 2nd includes department heads and commissioners, while March 3rd focuses on finance staff and commissioners for goal-setting and prioritization.

Nonprofit Funding: Applications are due March 1st for organizations seeking town funding consideration in the upcoming budget year.

Courthouse Avenue Project: MasTec continues underground utility work, including boring under courthouse grounds and replacing the pole at Wright Street and Wilmington Street. Power line removal will proceed once pole work is complete, followed by final sidewalk installation.

Master Plans: Meetings are scheduled with McKim and Creed regarding the water and sewer master plan progress. The stormwater master plan is nearing completion with the final product expected within weeks, allowing the GIS system to go online.

Items from Attorney

Town Attorney Blanchard stated he only had items for closed session.

Items from Mayor and Board of Commissioners

Resolution 2026-05 Amending the Suggested Rules of Procedure for the Town of Burgaw Board of Commissioners

The board briefly discussed the proposed amendments to the rules of procedure document. Commissioner Pearsall had previously identified changes, and the board agreed to compile all suggested revisions and send them to Town Clerk Wells for preparation to consider adopting at the March meeting. *No action was taken on this item.*

Consideration of appointing two (2) members to the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Three applications were received for two openings: Mary Kate Lanier, Shaina Kennedy, and Amy Jones. The board discussed that while one applicant lives outside the ETJ, the rules allow residents of zip code 28425.

Recreation Supervisor Augst noted that staff believes all three applicants would be beneficial additions to the advisory board and requested consideration of expanding the board to eight members. Increasing the board's membership would provide greater flexibility when members are unable to attend meetings and help ensure consistent participation.

Motion: Commissioner George moved to amend the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board rules to allow eight members. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Commissioner George moved to approve all three applicants named above to serve on the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board. Commissioner Rivenbark seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Consideration of appointing one (1) member to the Beautification Committee

One application was received from Eric Kozen, a resident in zip code 28425 but outside the town limits/ETJ. Current Beautification Committee rules only allow town limits or ETJ residents, unlike the Parks & Recreation Advisory Board which allows the broader zip code area. Mayor Dawson advised there is an additional resident member that has expressed interest in serving as well.

The board discussed expanding both the membership and geographic eligibility to provide consistency and accommodate interested residents.

Motion: Commissioner Pearsall moved to amend the Beautification Committee rules to allow four resident members and expand eligibility to zip code 28425. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Commissioner Rivenbark moved to approve Eric Kozen to serve on the Beautification Committee. Motion carried unanimously.

Other items to be announced

Mayor Dawson and the board thanked town staff for their dedication during recent weather events. Commissioner Rivenbark provided updates on Verizon tower negotiations in reference to poor cellular service in town. He advised that Pender County is in contract negotiations with Verizon for antenna installation on a tower located at the Pender County Sheriff's Department on Fremont Street, with some delays due to required tower reinforcement work.

Closed Session

Motion: Commissioner McDuffie moved to enter closed session at 6:37 PM, pursuant to NC GS 143-318.11(a)(3) Attorney/Client Privilege. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Mayor Pro-tem Malloy moved to enter back into open session at 7:25 PM. Motion carried unanimously.

Prior to adjournment, Mayor Dawson stated that the Board needed to reconsider the vote regarding the allocation of funding for the Chamber of Commerce Executive Director position, which had been discussed during the February 9, 2026 Special Board of Commissioners Meeting. It was later recognized that Chamber board member and Town Commissioner Myra McDuffie should have recused herself prior to the motion being made at that meeting. As a result, the Board needed to revisit the motion after Commissioner McDuffie formally recused herself.

Commissioner McDuffie requested the board to recuse her prior to voting due to her currently serving as a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board.

Motion: Commissioner George moved to allow Commissioner McDuffie to recuse herself prior to a motion related to the Chamber of Commerce. Commissioner Rivenbark seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Mayor Dawson called for a new motion regarding the allocation of the funding for the Chamber of Commerce.

Motion: Commissioner Pearsall moved to approve the allocation of \$20,000 towards the funding of the Chamber of Commerce Executive Director position, as discussed during the February 9, 2026 Special Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Rivenbark seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

Motion: Commissioner McDuffie moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:26 PM. Motion carried unanimously.