

**TOWN OF SOUTH BETHANY  
TOWN COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
MARCH 13, 2026  
9:00 A.M.**

**Meeting Called to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Mayor Dondero called the March 13, 2026, Town Council meeting to order at 9:00 a.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Attendance and Absences**

In attendance were Mayor Edie Dondero and Councilmembers Randy Bartholomew, Bob Biciocchi, Mark Giler, Chris Keefe, Bob Shields and Cindy Van Horn; Chief Jason Lovins, and Town Finance Director Renee McDorman. Town Manager Maureen Hartman was absent. Public attendees: 12. Virtual attendees: 16.

**Adoption of Minutes**

Councilwoman Cindy Van Horn stated on page two in the first full paragraph, there is a reference to removing and returning bids, but it should be bins. Councilwoman Chris Keefe motioned to approve the February 13, 2026, Town Council meeting minutes with amendment, seconded by Councilman Bob Shields. Motion carried 7-0.

Councilman Bob Biciocchi motioned to approve the February 13, 2026, Town Council Executive Session meeting minutes, seconded by Councilman Shields. Motion carried 7-0.

Councilman Biciocchi motioned to approve the February 27, 2026, Town Council Budget Workshop meeting minutes, seconded by Councilwoman Keefe. Motion carried 7-0.

**Presentation by Kayla Clausen, DNREC, and Brittany Haywood, DE Sea Grant, discussing Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) and the water quality of the canals**

The presentation on submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) detailed ongoing research on water quality and SAV growth in South Bethany canals, including data collection methods, light availability studies, and monitoring efforts. Key findings included the relationship between light availability and SAV growth, with April to June being optimal growth periods. Ms. Haywood and Ms. Clausen discussed their seed collection efforts and restoration activities, noting a significant decrease in production from 2024 to 2025. The presentation will be posted on the website under the March 13 Council meeting event page.

**Public Presentation of the FY2027 draft budget (Bartholomew)**

Councilman Bartholomew gave a budget presentation which outlined total revenue of \$3,542,750 with a 1% increase over the existing year budget, broken down into revenue from operations (\$2,961,130), police grants (\$139,540), and town services (\$442,080). The main budgeted revenue items are property tax income, which is \$850,000, realty transfer tax is \$695,000, gross rental taxes is \$680,000, and building permit revenue is \$400,000, all of which make up 88.7% of the total revenue. The major expense categories include G&A (\$883,000), Code Enforcement (\$184,000), Public Works (\$555,000), Public Safety (\$954,000), and Beach Patrol (\$369,000), with notable increases in salary and benefits due to health benefits and pension funds. Capital expenditure included asset replacement items totaling \$368,230, plus new capital of \$65,000. The allocation for the operating reserve, which is the emergency money the Town might need in the face of

emergencies, is just over one million dollars, the ARM balance is 2.2 million dollars, the infrastructure reserve is about \$2.6 million, and some of the other restricted accounts are about \$400,000, which all adds up to \$6.2 million dollars. Councilman Bartholomew thanked the Town staff as well as the Budget & Finance Committee (B&F) members for pulling this budget together.

### **Public Comment**

Nancy Maher, 30 S. Anchorage Drive, thanked Mayor Dondero and the South Bethany Police Department for their assistance during the recent snowstorm. Ms. Maher stated, in light of there being a little less beach this year and no beach replenishment, she would like Council to consider placing a brief moratorium on the use of big beach canopies and pop-up tents this summer.

Russ Beland, 108 Elizabeth Way, stated he wanted to present the potential impact of changing the Town's investment policy. If the Town had put one million dollars of its reserves into an index fund a year ago, it would have approximately \$150,000 more than we have right now. If we put one million dollars in 3 years ago, we'd have approximately \$675,000 more than we have right now, and if the Town put \$3 million in 3 years ago, we'd have an extra \$2 million right now. Mr. Beland stated it doesn't pay for everything, but this is not a trivial policy decision and there's a lot of potential revenue the Town has been leaving behind.

Chris Carlyle, 138 Bayshore Drive, stated his concern about the canals becoming too shallow due to settlements, rainwater runoff, algae bloom decomposition, or seagrass proliferation, boats not being able to run, and the canal's purpose shift from boating to simply a science experiment where all the Canal Water Quality Committee (CWQ) does is collect data in an endless monitoring exercise. Mr. Carlyle requested the Town invite representatives of the Woods Hole Group to present to Council an update of their 2018 report with an expanded data report which would provide the current status of submerged aquatic vegetation, an updated bathroom metric survey, water depths, and solutions and recommendations to maintain water quality and navigation.

Council agreed to swap the order of discussion items 6 and 7 on the agenda.

### **Discussion and possible action to award Comprehensive Plan RFP (Dondero)**

Council discussed awarding a contract for updating the comprehensive plan, with four proposals received ranging from \$55,000 to \$115,884. After reviewing qualifications and public engagement strategies, they recommended awarding the contract to Rossi Group for \$61,278, with a start date in May. Councilwoman Van Horn motioned to approve awarding the contract to the Rossi Group for \$61,278, seconded by Councilman Biciocchi. Motion carried 6-1 (with Councilman Shields voting no).

### **Discussion and possible action to award York Road Phase II Mitigation project RFP (Dondero)**

Mayor Dondero stated the York Road Phase 2 Mitigation Project aims to address flooding issues on secondary streets feeding into York Road. Six engineering firms submitted proposals ranging from \$110,000 to \$285,000, and these proposals were reviewed by the Resiliency Committee chair, one committee member, and the Town Manager. Mayor Dondero explained that four proposals were evaluated, with AECOM being selected for its reasonable cost, comprehensive scope of work, and experience with the project area. The study will have a 9-month timeline with work concluding by the end of the year. During the discussion, council members clarified that this was a best-value selection rather than a lowest-bid process, and that the final mitigation decisions would still require future council approval after receiving recommendations from the selected firm. Councilman Bartholomew motioned to approve awarding the contract to AECOM, seconded by Councilman Biciocchi. Motion carried 7-0.

### **Discussion and possible action to award Coastal Analysis RFP (Dondero)**

Council discussed responses to a Coastal Analysis RFP to determine the feasibility of raising bulkhead heights without adverse floodplain impacts. Three proposals were received with costs ranging from \$119,700 to \$147,922, and Verdantas was recommended as the most favorable option due to their clear methodology and experience with local agencies. The study would take approximately four months to complete and could potentially run concurrently with other projects like the York Road beach mitigation. While Council expressed the importance of addressing community requests to raise bulkheads, Councilman Biciocchi suggested waiting to see what options emerge from the upcoming Phase 2 work with AECOM on the York Road mitigation project before proceeding with the coastal analysis. Councilman Mark Giler motioned to approve awarding the proposal to Verdantas, seconded by Councilman Shields. Motion carried 7-0.

### **Discussion and possible action to award Bid 26-01, Beach Concession**

Councilman Shields stated he would like the vendor to service all the way up to Sandpiper Village as he has been getting complaints that they turn around at North 6<sup>th</sup> Street. Mayor Dondero stated the Town would inform the vendor that they have to service the Seaside Drive beach. Councilman Bartholomew motioned award Bid 26-01 to Jay Vending, seconded by Councilman Biciocchi. Motion carried 7-0.

### **Discussion and possible action to award Bid 26-02, Exercise Concession**

Councilman Shields motioned to award Bid 26-02 to both ECE Yoga and Murray Oltman Yoga, seconded by Councilwoman Keefe. Motion carried 6-0-1 with an abstention by Mayor Dondero.

### **Discussion, review and possible action regarding revisions to the current investment policy and review of an investment strategy for the Town Finances (Bartholomew)**

Councilman Bartholomew discussed potentially modifying the Town's investment policy to include not only cash equivalents, but also an equity fund. Councilman Bartholomew stated he would like Council to approve the conceptual diversification strategies being discussed and then to authorize the Budget and Finance Committee to move forward in seeking an outside investment advisor, who will present a proposed change to the investment policy to Council for final approval. Council expressed concerns about proposed equity investments and thinking it is not the right time to take such a risk with Town monies, ultimately deciding not to move forward with the diversification strategy at this time.

### **Leadership Reports**

Mayor's Report – Report submitted. DNREC has advised that there is a possibility the Town will not have the ADA ramp back in place before the start of the summer season.

Town Manager Report – Report submitted.

Police Chief Report – Report submitted.

Treasurer Report – Report submitted.

### **Committee and Commission Reports**

Bicycle & Pedestrian Safety Committee – Report submitted. The committee is planning its next bike rodeo event for Saturday, July 11, and is looking into possible other pedestrian safety measures.

Budget and Finance Committee – Report submitted.

Canal Water Quality Committee – Report submitted.

Charter and Code Committee – No report submitted. The committee had a meeting to discuss an ordinance for nuisance lighting/exterior lighting.

Community Relations Committee – No report submitted.


Planning Commission – No report submitted.

Resiliency Committee – Report submitted.

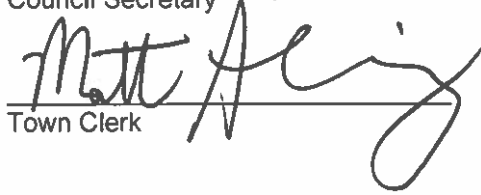
**Adjournment**

Motion by Councilman Biciocchi, seconded by Councilman Giler, to adjourn the March 13, 2026, Town Council Regular Meeting at 11:29 a.m. Motion carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Council Secretary

  
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Town Clerk

  
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Date of Approval