

**TOWN OF SOUTH BETHANY  
TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES  
FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026  
9:00 a.m.**

**Meeting Called to Order**

Mayor Dondero called the March 27, 2026, Town Council Budget Workshop to order at 9:00 a.m.

**Attendance and Absences**

In attendance were Mayor Edie Dondero and Councilmembers Randy Bartholomew, Chris Keefe, Bob Shields, and Cindy Van Horn; and Town Manager Maureen Hartman, Town Finance Director Renee McDorman, Chief Jason Lovins, Town Code Enforcement Officer Joe Hinks, and Town Clerk Matt Amerling. Councilmembers Bob Biciocchi and Mark Giler were absent. Public attendees: 6; virtual attendees: 7.

**Public Comment**

Simon Moore, 309 West 6<sup>th</sup> Street, stated, regarding the Town's investment strategy, the need for a more balanced discussion on both the risks and rewards of investing in equities, highlighting that while there could be potential losses, the impact would not be financially disastrous. Mr. Moore also pointed out that the proposed investment structure could lead to significant long-term benefits, potentially generating an additional \$2.8 million in 15 years, and urged the Council to consider a more comprehensive discussion on both risk and reward, with an opportunity to certainly consider adjusting some of the parameters, not just pushing back and rejecting any changes.

**Presentation by Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company – President Michael Suit**

Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company (BBVFC) President Michael Suit presented an overview of the fire company's history, operations, and current challenges. Mr. Suit highlighted the increase in fire calls over the past five years, particularly water rescues and gas leaks, and discussed the fire district's coverage area, population, and mutual aid partners. Mr. Suit also explained the role of career staff and volunteers, noting that career staff now exceed volunteers in response numbers. The presentation included information about the fire company's stations, paramedic units, and emergency medical services in the area. He reported a 99.1% success rate in the BBVFC handling calls, with only nine calls requiring outside agency assistance last year. The department's total budget is \$2.9 million, with \$1.6 million allocated for fire operations and \$1.2 million for EMS. Mr. Suit announced that Phil Brackin, the assistant chief and supervisor for EMS, is stepping down on May 1st, and the department is seeking a replacement. He also covered current personnel, including 16 career staff and 45 volunteers, and discussed the cost of equipment, including ambulances, fire engines, and a tower truck expected to be replaced in 2032.

Mr. Suit explained that it costs \$4,500 to provide one firefighter the necessary gear, with potential replacement costs if damaged or worn out within 10 years, and explained the funding sources, noting that 62% comes from the State of Delaware, 8% from Sussex County, and 7% from annual and capital fund drives. He also discussed the EMS funding structure, where the state handles fire services while counties manage EMS, and explained the ambulance subscription system, which covers 43% of funding from various communities including Bethany, Fenwick, and South Bethany. Mr. Suit mentioned that a new contract negotiation meeting would be scheduled in June or July, with South Bethany leading the committee this year. The BBVFC is seeking additional funding, including potentially a fire fund tax in 2027, to address rising costs and equipment replacement needs. With volunteer numbers declining due to high housing costs and other factors, the fire company is working to recruit new volunteers and is considering additional career staff. Key upcoming needs include a new ambulance (\$475,000), a new quint truck (\$1.6 million), and potential additional staffing (\$80,000-\$100,000 per person), with total additional funding needs of approximately \$5.2 million over the next 10 years.

Councilwoman Chris Keefe asked about potential synergies between local departments to form one county fire company, but Mr. Suit explained that consolidating services would be too costly for taxpayers, estimating it would require approximately \$40 million in Sussex County alone. Council presented Mr. Suit with a donation for the BBVFC, thanking them for their support and all they do.

**Final Review, discussion and possible action on FY2027 draft budget items (Bartholomew)**

Councilman Randy Bartholomew reviewed the FY2027 draft budget, which included updates to incorporate the final cost of the Comprehensive Plan preparation (which increased by \$21,275) and various adjustments to offset these costs. The council discussed potential increases to contributions, from \$3,000 to \$5,000, including a proposed increase to the annual fire company donation. Councilwoman Keefe proposed a new Community Relations Committee budget with a \$3,700 overage from the previous year and discussed two main items: the 250th anniversary event in June and a request for age-appropriate exercise equipment. Council agreed to remove the exercise equipment from the current budget and pursue it through a budget amendment in the fall after further planning and potential grant applications. Council also agreed to move forward with capital purchases, including a police vehicle.

After a lengthy discussion, Councilman Bartholomew stated the budget updates would be presented for final vote at the April 10 meeting.

**Schedule of fees – review and possible action regarding increase to the visitor parking permits purchased at the kiosk (Bartholomew)**

Councilman Bartholomew motioned to increase the visitor kiosk daily parking permit fee from \$20 to \$30, seconded by Councilwoman Cindy Van Horn. Motion carried 5-0.

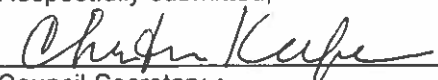
**Discussion of two recommendations from the Resiliency Planning Report: A) To amend impervious coverage definition in the Town Code & B) Possible amendment to Ch. 145-14.3A related to pervious coverage in setback**

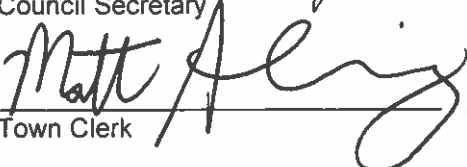
Mayor Dondero discussed two recommendations from a resiliency planning report prepared by the University of Delaware's Institute of Public Administration (IPA) program. The first recommendation focused on amending the definitions of impervious and pervious coverage in the town code to provide more specific examples of materials that qualify under each category. The second recommendation addressed a potential amendment to Chapter 145-14.3A regarding impervious coverage in setbacks, specifically proposing to change the current requirement from 55% pervious coverage of the total setback area to 55% pervious coverage in each individual setback area. Town Code Enforcement Officer Joe Hinks expressed support for both changes, particularly the second recommendation which he noted would help enhance the Town's resiliency by preventing the paving of entire backyard areas. After a lengthy discussion, Council agreed to give the go-ahead to modify the wording of the Code, with the changes to be brought back for a formal ordinance reading.

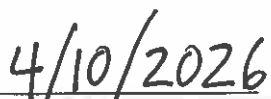
**Adjournment**

Motion by Councilwoman Keefe, seconded by Councilman Bob Shields to adjourn the March 27, 2026, Town Council Budget Workshop meeting at 10:22 a.m. Motion carried 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Council Secretary

  
Town Clerk

  
Date of Approval