

**TOWN OF SOUTH BETHANY
TOWN COUNCIL WORKSHOP MINUTES
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2026
9:00 a.m.**

Meeting Called to Order

Mayor Dondero called the September 25, 2026, Town Council Workshop to order at 9:00 a.m.

Attendance and Absences

In attendance were Mayor Edie Dondero and Councilmembers Steve Gallagher, Mark Giler, Chris Keefe, Sarah Long, Bob Shields, and Cindy Van Horn; Town Manager Maureen Hartman, SBPD Chief Jason Lovins, and Town Clerk Matt Amerling. Public attendees: 21. Virtual attendees: 19.

Discussion of requests from the community to ban construction during the summer season.

Council discussed the recent requests by residents to limit construction activities during the summer months, following similar restrictions in neighboring communities. Mayor Dondero provided research showing that while neighboring towns like Bethany Beach, Fenwick Island, and Dewey Beach all restrict pile driving during the summer, none of these other communities limit other heavy construction activities. Mayor Dondero reminded Council that current contractor parking restrictions already limit them to two permits each. Neither contractors nor anyone else is permitted to park on Ocean Drive with daily/guest parking permits. Council acknowledged that parking by multiple subcontractor vehicles can still create challenges on main thoroughfares like Ocean Drive and York Road.

Council discussed concerns about construction impacts on residents during the summer months, particularly regarding noise, traffic, and parking issues. Mayor Dondero and other council members expressed concerns about the influx of contractors all starting at the same time when the ban is lifted in early fall, as well as potential financial impacts from limiting construction, as building permits and transfer taxes make up a significant portion of the town's revenue. The loss of this revenue would have to be collected in another way, possibly resulting in a significant rise in property taxes.

Public Comment

Rich Beutel, 1004 South Ocean Drive, stated he still supports a moratorium on construction during the summer months because while he believes most contractors are responsible, subcontractors are generally not responsible and don't "give a hoot" about the residents and the effects of parking limitations as well as noise and traffic. Mr. Beutel stated his belief is that contractors flock to our narrow geographic area to ramrod their work through to keep their crews busy because they can't be busy in other jurisdictions. Mr. Beutel states while he understands building permits are a third of the Town's budget, he would ask this Council to do a study about potential financial impacts, so we have some hard data and not "a bunch of arm-waving."

Michelle Hooper, 7 Logan Street, stated she believes there are some financial implications that Council previously mentioned for the Town and the residents, but there's also the industry – the design industry, the construction industry, trades – that would be impacted by this, thus affecting their livelihood, a good chunk of their time, and the ability to get them is going to be difficult and different. Ms. Hooper stated limiting all construction is not what she's hearing so far as being "on the table," but it sounds more like it's just heavy construction or pile driving. Ms. Hooper further stated she has lived through a lot of pile driving in three years and while it's not great, it is temporary. She could see the prohibition of pile driving in the summer months as something that would be a

good compromise. As for the rest, she has been very hands-on in her own renovations, as she managed the contractor parking situation and she controlled where they parked. Ms. Hooper believes there's an enforcement issue, there's a management issue, and there's an incumbent piece on the homeowners themselves to really be on top of it, as well as the general contractor to some degree.

Jim Fitzpatrick, 125 Canal Drive, stated he's noticed a lot of contractors and especially subcontractors working after the permitted construction work times, and that is ultimately on the contractors to manage.

Steve Walker, 144 Brandywine Drive, stated he owns a construction business, and it usually only takes him seven to eight months to build a house. Regarding pile driving, the guy he uses most times only takes one day, two days at most, to get the piledriving done. Mr. Walker stated he thinks there needs to be more general contractors' eyes on the job to make sure there's no parking problems, littering or anything else going on. Mr. Walker stated if this ban happens and it now takes longer to build a house, he won't take any jobs in South Bethany because if a project has been started and now has to be put on pause for three months, the structure is open to the elements and susceptible to mold and other things, and that's not fair to the customer.

Garth Troescher, of Garth Enterprises, stated most of his points have already been addressed but he will say, as a contractor, he and other workers would suffer if they were shut down completely in the summer. Mr. Troescher echoed Mr. Walker's point about the unfinished house structures developing mold and other issues; as well as if a house is put on hold from starting construction, then it's not just a moratorium for three months, but rather more like six or seven months. There would be problems with employees and what would they do for the minimum three months, as well as subcontractors maybe not being available. Mr. Troescher sympathizes with the homeowners as he lives and works in the area and has had to deal with the same hardships; however, he believes some more strict rules and/or procedures in order to mitigate the construction happening beyond work hours and the parking of contractor vehicles. Mr. Troescher stated while there is an extra day to do construction in the off season, there's still shorter daylight, more rain, wind, cold, storms, freezing temperatures, and weather-related delays which all most likely will delay construction. He is very sympathetic to the noise, the traffic and parking, and while he doesn't know exactly how to resolve that, he, as an individual builder, will respect and do as much as he can.

Sean Cummings, of Miken Builders, stated they do a good bit of work in South Bethany, and the caliber of homes here has definitely reached another level as it's difficult to build these houses in seven or eight months. Mr. Cummings stated one thing that they try to do in South Bethany at the beginning of the job is send out a "pardon our dust mailer" to all the surrounding residents. He said Miken gives the residents their direct phone number and tells them to please call Miken if they have any concerns. Mr. Cummings stated Miken goes directly to the neighbors, hands them their business cards, and really hopes that they reach out to them with any concerns or if they see anything that worries them. Miken has put cameras up on their job sites, so if someone does show up at 5:05pm, they recognize that on the Ring camera, and they call them immediately and ask them to leave. Mr. Cummings further stated he thinks the neighborly thing to do is to reach out and to communicate in both directions, as a lot of times, they don't get calls from the neighbors. Instead, they'll go right to the Town, but Miken wishes they would just call Miken, so they could fix the problem faster. At the end of the day, Mr. Cummings said they just want to be able to work together and continue to build homes here.

Carmine Pilla, 203 Anchorage Drive, stated he agrees there has to be more compromises and specific changes that could be made for this issue but doesn't agree with a moratorium on heavy construction during the summer months, or a ban on pile driving during the summer months. Mr. Pilla stated a reason given for this moratorium is because it disturbs the renters, who are only here for a week, while homeowners have put in a significant financial investment in the community. Mr. Pilla stated he thinks homeowners deserve priority. Mr. Pilla stated another issue to consider is in

how long it may take to get a building permit from the Town and/or County, or, if needed, a variance approved.

Carl Bittenbender, 141 Layton Drive, stated he agrees this is a contractor enforcement issue and he thinks this is another ordinance change that will carry a significant financial impact to the contractors, and those contractor costs will get passed on to the homeowner in the cost of building. Mr. Bittenbender thinks the Town has to really take a good look at the long-term impact as he believes a ban may solve a short-term problem but could create a generational impact. He also stated one last thing to keep in mind is the most likely scenario of starting out with a neighbor dispute right from the beginning because you're mad at your neighbor that your build was delayed for many months.

Council agreed to form a small task force consisting of Council members and Town staff to review existing codes and enforcement practices, with the goal of developing solutions to address valid resident complaints without implementing broad construction bans. The task force will include input from contractors and will report back to the Council with recommendations for improving construction management and enforcement.

Adjournment

Motion by Mayor Dondero, seconded by Councilman Bob Shields to adjourn the September 25, 2026, Town Council Workshop meeting at 10:09 a.m. Motion carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,


Council Secretary


Town Clerk

 10/9/2026
Date of Approval