

**Town of Camden
Regular Town Council Meeting
Camden Municipal Building
July 7, 2025**

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Dougherty called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and noticed that this regular Council Meeting was being held in compliance with the Delaware Open Public Meeting Act by posting the agenda on June 30, 2025, in the following manner:

- a. The electronic sign,
- b. The official bulletin board, and
- c. The official Town of Camden website.

Vice Mayor Rhodes led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

Council Attending: Mayor Dougherty, Vice Mayor Rhodes, Councilwoman Sturgeon, and Councilman Ridgely

Council Absent: Councilman Woodall

Staff Attending: Town Manager Harold Scott Jr., Town Clerk Lynda Huizinga, Account Specialist Malori Lewis, Administrative Assistant Diane Mosby, CFO Tom Josiah, Town Solicitor Greg Morris, and Police Chief Marcus Whitney

AMENDMENTS

Councilman Ridgely would like to add welcoming the new Town Clerk under New Business (a).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Pending approval of the FY26 budget, tax bills for tax year 2025 will be mailed out this week.

MINUTES

A motion was made by Councilman Ridgely, seconded by Councilwoman Sturgeon, to approve the June 2, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes. All in favor; none opposed.

FINANCE REPORT

Ms. Lewis stated that the delinquent tax amount is down to \$17,200.45. She added that we received \$116,262.94 in RETT funds in June.

Councilwoman Sturgeon added that the total revenue that came in was \$3.2M, which exceeded the revenue budget by \$125,000, and expenditures came in at \$2.9M, which is \$93,000 under the expenditure budget.

CAMDEN WYOMING FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fire Chief Phillip Lewis gave a report that included, but was not limited to, fire and EMS calls. He added that the Annual Crab Feast is on August 23rd and tickets are available online or at the station. He stated that the ambulances are finally done and should be up here within the next few weeks. They will be stocked and serviced once they're inspected.

CAMDEN WYOMING SEWER & WATER AUTHORITY

Councilman Ridgely advised that their next meeting is on July 8th and their budget meeting will be on October 14th.

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC CAMDEN

Gale Christensen advised that they were approved for a \$5,000 grant and they would like to donate funds for two benches on the West Street property, and they are in the process of partnering with the Town and working on a grant for sidewalks. She added that they are building their website to coincide with the ongoing flag program.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Whitney gave a report that included, but was not limited to, traffic arrests and criminal activity. He stated they had 65.5 hours of paid overtime and 6 hours of court overtime. He added that they have had a total of 466 calls for this period, compared to 521 for this period last year.

Councilman Ridgely asked for an update on hiring new Police Officers.

Chief Whitney advised that a certified Officer was just hired and will begin his rotation on Wednesday.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked if there is a trend for calls because the winter months appear to be much lower than the summer months.

Chief Whitney explained that weather is a big factor for calls for service.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Scott stated that he did 20 inspections in June. Walmart should be done with their renovations by September 1st, Popeye's is on schedule to be completed around the second week of September, and Savannah Farms is anticipating breaking ground in October. He added that the barricades have been placed between Newell's Creek and Tidbury Crossing and the development should be turned over to us soon. He reminded everyone that yard waste pickup is every other Tuesday, and limbs must be cut down and bundled up and bulk pickup in the last Friday of the month; they will not take toilets, sinks, cabinets or anything else that appears to be construction debris.

Councilman Ridgely asked for an update on hiring a Code Enforcement Officer.

Mr. Scott advised that a Code Enforcement Officer has been hired, and she has written 40 code violations already.

MAYOR

Mayor Dougherty thanked Councilwoman Sturgeon for working meeting with him regarding the budget and tax rates, thanked everyone for attending, and welcomed the new employees.

PUBLIC HEARING

FY26 Budget/COLA – Final Reading

A motion was made by Councilwoman Sturgeon, seconded by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, to enter a Public Hearing. All in favor; none opposed.

Councilwoman Sturgeon advised that they are considering a 3-year step increase, which is included in the handouts available on the check-in table. She reminded everyone that based on the new assessed property values, we first had to find revenue neutral rates per \$100 of the assessed value. This decreases the residential tax rate from \$1.42 to \$0.19, the senior rate from \$0.96 to \$0.23, and the commercial rate from \$1.59 to \$0.39. From there, we calculate what the tax rate increase is going to be. We came up with a 15% tax increase for residential, which will produce an 11% increase in revenue, a reduction in the senior discount rate, which decreases by 8% and results in a 7% decrease in the revenue, and a 10% tax increase for commercial, which will produce a 27% increase in revenue. This is an overall reduction in tax rates compared to the last few budget meetings and, based on our anticipated expenditures, leaves a funding gap of approximately \$455,000, which will be pulled from our reserves. The significant increase in expenditures comes from a 16% operational increase, with a majority of the increase coming from Public Works and the Police Department, which includes 3 new Officers with 2 of these openings carrying over from FY25. We came up with tax rates that should be less painful for everyone and variable income may come in slightly higher, depending on what happens, like building or movement within the Town of Camden, which would lower our funding gap and the amount we will be required to pull from our reserves. Councilwoman Sturgeon added that this is a conservative budget that we should be able to work with these numbers for the next two budget years, unless anything major comes up, and she would like to work with the Town Manager on contracts up for bid and any kind of savings opportunities.

Mayor Dougherty added that he would like to increase the interest income to \$200,000 and that it is possible the funding gap will be less than expected if building permit revenue exceeds what we anticipate to receive.

John Paradee (Brockstedt Mandalas Federico, LLC) – Expressed that business owners feel that this proposal still places a disproportionate burden on businesses and that the Town should be following the County's rules and only have one tax rate.

Brian Lessard (Lessard Builders) – Expressed his concern with the significant increase in Police expenditures compared to other areas and thanked the Mayor and Council for working to decrease the tax increase proposed previously.

Dave Failing (Wyoming Mill Work) – Expressed his appreciation for a conservative budget, agrees that the residential and commercial rate should match, and that we need to put the brakes on unwarranted or excessive police expenses.

Gale Christensen (Main St.) – Expressed her gratitude for the new Code Enforcement Officer because that should help to keep property values high in her area.

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to exit the Public Hearing. All in favor; none opposed.

OLD BUSINESS

Zoom Discussion

Councilman Ridgely expressed that he would like to have dialogue via Zoom.

Councilwoman Sturgeon expressed that she would like Zoom to be an interactive tool for the public to be able to communicate during the meetings. She volunteered to help structure the protocols via input that she has received from the public.

Vice Mayor Rhodes stated that she does not need a problem with public comments on Zoom, as long as they follow the 3-minute public comment period.

FY26 Budget/COLA – Final Reading / Resolution #2025-R-01 – Adoption of FY26 Budget

Mayor Dougherty mentioned that we are now in a new budget year without an approved budget and, to avoid further delays with paying bills and other expenses, would like to pass the budget as originally suggested and review the information mentioned by Mr. Paradee and see where we go from here for any other changes to the tax rates.

Vice-Mayor Rhodes asked how tax bills would be affected if the pass the budget as is.

Mr. Scott suggested to delay tax billing until August 1st, with a due date of October 31st.

A motion was made by Mayor Dougherty, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to pass the budget as presented in order to move ahead with funding line items and paying bills, and to discuss what needs to be done regarding the tax rates by the next Town Council Meeting. 3 in favor; 1 abstain. Motion carries.

Roll Call:

Councilman Ridgely – Yes

Mayor Dougherty – Yes

Councilwoman Sturgeon – Abstain

Vice Mayor Rhodes – Yes

Resolution #2025-R-02 – Tax Rate

A motion was made by Mayor Dougherty, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to accept this Resolution pending any changes to the tax rates discussed before the next Town Council Meeting. 3 in favor; 1 abstain. Motion carries.

Roll Call:

Councilman Ridgely – Yes

Mayor Dougherty – Yes

Councilwoman Sturgeon – Abstain

Vice Mayor Rhodes – Yes

NEW BUSINESS

Welcoming the new Town Clerk, Code Enforcement Officer and Police Officer

Mayor Dougherty welcomed the new Town Clerk, Code Enforcement Officer and Police Officer to the Town of Camden.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Justin King (109 S. Main St.) – Expressed his respect for the Mayor and Council for volunteering their time and his gratitude for the Police Department for protecting the community and knows Camden is a good place to work, and the budget must make sense fiscally to keep them here long term. He thanked the Mayor and Councilwoman Sturgeon for meeting with him but feels that residents and business owners should not be burdened with a tax increase because the Town has a rainy-day fund to cover the budget deficit.

Carol Milton (305 Meeting House Ln.) – Asked how questions posed during these meetings will be answered and expressed her concern with Town workers parking in the street when they are working on issues in the neighborhood, since there is no street parking.

Justine Zimny (515 W. Lebanon Rd.) – Thanked Councilman Ridgely, Councilwoman Sturgeon, Councilwoman Rhodes and the Mayor for their due diligence and attendance and expressed her concern with the lack of attendance by Councilman Woodall.

Fleur McKendell (E. Fred Cir.) – Thanked Chief Whitney for listening to the community regarding the 287 (g) program and the Mayor and Council for discussing full participation via Zoom, and suggests creating a standard operating procedure about attendance for Council Members.

Gale Christensen (Main St.) – Thanked Councilwoman Sturgeon for making Zoom an agenda item, expressed her feeling of being overlooked for the Board of Adjustment Chairperson seat, and thanked Ms. Lewis for her assistance with a Board of Adjustment email address.

Chief Whitney explained that there is only one Police Officer working per shift, and their workload is comparable to what 15 cops handle at other agencies. He thanked the community members who support the Police Department and who understand that we need more Officers because you cannot put a price on an Officer's life.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Ridgely thanked everyone for their participation, and he is happy to hear that the Police Force is growing. He would like to discuss the Friends of Historic Camden donating funds to the Town to purchase benches at the next meeting.

Vice-Mayor Rhodes thanked everyone for attending, thanked the Police and Fire Departments for everything they do, and thanked the Town Staff, the CFO and the Town Solicitor.

Councilwoman Sturgeon thanked everyone for their feedback and added that this is a fair budget, with a fair tax rate, that gives the Town what we need, including new Police Officers to keep everyone safe.

Mayor Dougherty thanked everyone for attending, thanked the Police Officers for showing up, and thanked the Town employees for running the Town.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

To consider strategy with respect to pending and/or potential litigation and/or with respect to personnel issues and/or collective bargaining.

A motion was made at 8:30 p.m. by Mayor Dougherty, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to enter into Executive Session. All in favor; none opposed.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made at 8:49 p.m. to adjourn the council meeting. All in favor; none opposed.

*Respectfully submitted,
Lynda Huizinga, Town Clerk*