

**Town of Camden
Regular Town Council Meeting
Camden Municipal Building
October 6, 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 September 29, 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, Councilman Woodall, Councilman Ridgely, and Councilwoman Sturgeon

Council Absent: None

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

AMENDMENTS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Town Hall will be closed on Monday, October 13th, in observance of Columbus Day.

MINUTES

Councilman Ridgely pointed out that Councilwoman Sturgeon's name was missing on page three.

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to approve the September 8, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes as amended. All in favor; none opposed.

FINANCE REPORT

Ms. Lewis stated that the delinquent tax amount is now \$14,445.39. She added that we received \$11,293.42 in RETT funds in September. For the most recent tax billing—due October 31st—a total of over \$1.7 million has been collected as of September 30th, with the majority coming from CoreLogic, the main escrow company handling property tax payments.

Councilwoman Sturgeon mentioned that the actual billed property tax came in about \$25,000 higher than estimated due to assessment adjustments. Expenditures are slightly under budget for the quarter, at 23%, showing good financial control and responsible spending.

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 it's Fire Prevention Week — a good time to discuss fire safety with children. The fire department will be out at various events throughout the month, and there will be an open house at the fire station on October 25th from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. featuring activities, displays, and movie vouchers for children.

CAMDEN WYOMING SEWER & WATER AUTHORITY

Councilman Ridgely advised that they had a budget workshop last month and that Camden Wyoming Sewer & Water are in good financial standing and do not anticipate any fee increases to the customers.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked if the budget is already finished.

Councilman Ridgely said that there were no significant comments, but that they have not received the final draft, and the budget should be passed at the next meeting.

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC CAMDEN

Councilman Ridgely explained that progress continues with the flag project, with the website being finalized and plans to install several flags in the town center by December. The Town Manager offered to help with hanging the flags. The next meeting will be a tour of the historic Quaker Friends Meeting House on Camden Wyoming Avenue, hosted by Mike Richards, on Thursday, October 23rd at 7:00 PM.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Whitney gave a report that included, but was not limited to, traffic arrests and criminal activity. He stated they had 16 hours of paid overtime and 6 hours of court overtime. He added that they have had a total of 529 calls for this period, with some being more serious, compared to 626 for this period last year. Chief said that the three new Tahoe's came in, and the remaining maintenance funds from the three retired vehicles will be transferred to the new ones. No issues are expected with the new vehicles, but adjustments may be made to ensure the budget lines align correctly.

Mayor Dougherty questioned whether all the vehicles are fully equipped now with decals.

Chief Whitney said that one vehicle is still outstanding. It's currently at the upfit shop for equipment installation and will go to graphics next week before being fully put into service.

Councilman Ridgely asked for an update on the two candidates being hired.

Chief Whitney stated that our Recruit is on medical leave but is expected to return in time for the academy. A new candidate has passed all testing and interviews and is currently in the background check process. The department continues to seek additional candidates.

Councilman Ridgely asked if both candidates appear to be on track for the January academy.

Chief Whitney confirmed.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked where they are in this certification process.

Chief Whitney said that the State certification process is underway, with the accreditation standards inspection scheduled for Thursday, October 9th. This marks a major milestone toward achieving statewide accreditation after a long process.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Scott stated that he did 26 inspections in September. He mentioned that Popeye's is expected to open by the end of October. The personnel handbook, last updated in 2005, is being revised, and work is underway with the police chief to update the town code book for codification through e360. Public Works has been addressing issues around the retention pond near Walmart to deter unwanted activity. The Town is also replacing the damaged south-side highway Welcome to Camden sign. All employees completed FOIA, ethics, and sexual harassment training, and current staff and election committee members will attend election training this Friday.

Councilman Ridgely confirmed that e360 is a cloud-based program intended to streamline and simplify the Town's codes and ordinances online. He asked about the status of the project and if there is a target date for when it will be available.

Mr. Scott explained that the codification must be completed before it can go online, and the goal is to have the codification completed by the beginning of next year. He explained that earlier communication with the codification company dated back to around 2006–2007, though several past contacts are now deceased. The company believed updates were current through 2011, but some outdated material was found. Mr. Scott and Chief Whitney are reviewing the code to remove obsolete items, such as old automobile regulations. He also negotiated cost savings by using existing binders instead of purchasing new ones. Once their review and recent ordinances are submitted, the project should be ready to move forward.

Councilman Ridgely asked Mr. Scott about a recent situation involving a residential construction project where the builder became confused about code requirements. The inspector, possibly a third party, initially said the project couldn't proceed as planned, but the issue was later resolved.

Mr. Scott explained that the original permit was for garage renovation, but during inspection, it was discovered that the owner planned to convert it into livable space built on a slab without proper footers or foundation, which would have caused structural issues. The work was corrected; the improper construction was removed, footers were dug, and the structure was reframed. It will now serve as office space, and everything is progressing properly.

Councilman Ridgely said he was glad the issue was resolved but noted it could have been avoided if the Town's website provided clearer instructions and a detailed checklist outlining permit requirements for residential and commercial projects. He pointed out that while the current application includes checkboxes, the lack of clear guidance allowed the applicant to proceed without understanding that footings were required, which should not have happened.

Mr. Scott explained that the situation was complicated because the applicant attempted to handle the project themselves with help from a relative rather than hiring professionals. He advised that projects involving livable space must be done by qualified professionals to ensure safety and longevity, emphasizing that improper work could lead to serious issues like structural failure or fire hazards. Mr. Scott concluded by saying he would review the Town's existing checklist, but noted that in over 20 years, this was the first instance of a homeowner attempting to handle an entire construction project alone.

MAYOR

Mayor Dougherty shared the Town's financial situation, noting that because the municipal building is financed through bonds, the Town cannot simply pay off its mortgage early due to bondholder restrictions and regulations. He added that he is currently exploring whether the Town can legally purchase its own municipal bonds when they appear on the open market. Doing so would allow the town to essentially pay interest and principal back to itself, improving long-term financial efficiency. He explained that there are restrictions on how municipalities can invest and where they can hold funds, as those funds must be

safeguarded for the public good. The Town is in strong financial condition and may be able to pursue this strategy soon. Mayor Dougherty closed by expressing appreciation for Town employees, Police Officers, and Public Works staff for their dedication and hard work.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked whether the Town's finance personnel or the Accountant has been involved in the discussions regarding the possible bond purchase.

Mayor Dougherty advised that they have not yet done so, as they are pursuing the legal route first. He added that the Town is currently in that process.

OLD BUSINESS

Ordinance #2025-O-02 – Establishing a Standard for Attendance at Public Meetings – Discussion

Mayor Dougherty stated that the purpose of this Ordinance is to address attendance at public meetings. A draft Ordinance was prepared and previously discussed. He explained that the proposed Ordinance would apply to all elected Council Members and appointed Members of the Planning Commission and Board of Adjustment. Under the draft, three absences would trigger a review by the Mayor to determine whether the individual should remain in the position. The Mayor would have discretion to waive absences for valid reasons, such as illness or family emergencies. If three absences were not excused, a certified letter would be sent to the individual notifying them of their removal, with 30 days to appeal the decision to the Town Council. Mayor Dougherty noted that, in practice, the Council would likely be lenient the first time such a case arose. He added that some had expressed concern about whether the Ordinance grants too much authority to the Mayor. Alternatives were discussed, including having the Mayor and Council jointly determine whether absences are excused. However, this could complicate the process, as deliberations would need to occur in executive session, potentially delaying action by one or two months.

Mayor Dougherty asked the Council for input and suggestions on how the attendance policy should be structured.

Councilwoman Sturgeon commented that the Ordinance should clarify that it refers to three consecutive absences, not just three absences in total. She noted that distinction is important, so it's not interpreted as three absences spread out over several years.

Mayor Dougherty clarified that, as the ordinance is currently written, it refers to three non-consecutive absences within any 12 months.

Councilman Woodall added that it would function as a rolling 12-month period.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked for clarification, noting that she thought a rolling period implied consecutive absence.

Mayor Dougherty and Councilman Woodall clarified that it is not consecutive, but rather any three absences within a rolling 12-month period.

Mayor Dougherty explained that under the draft Ordinance, the attendance rule was written to allow three non-consecutive absences within any rolling 12-month period, beginning with the first absence. For example, if the first absence occurred in May, the 12-month period would run through the following April. Once the first absence passes 12 months, it will no longer count toward the total. He noted the policy was intended to take effect with the new Mayor and Council next year and suggested moving the effective date to March 2026.

Councilman Woodall asked whether remote attendance (via computer) could be allowed to prevent unnecessary absences.

Mayor Dougherty noted that virtual participation had been permitted during the COVID-19 state of emergency but is not currently authorized. The Town could consider adopting an ordinance to allow it in the future.

NEW BUSINESS

Ordinance # 2025-O-03 (previously Ordinance #70) – Creating the Qualifying Conditions to Serve as a Member of any Commission or Committee in and for the Town of Camden – First Reading

Mayor Dougherty introduced Ordinance #2025-O-03, an Ordinance establishing qualifying conditions for service as a member of any commission or committee for the Town of Camden.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked where the proposed Ordinance originated.

Mayor Dougherty explained that it arose from a review by the Chairperson of the Board of Adjustment, who discovered that in 2005, an ordinance amendment had removed the requirement for Board of Adjustment members to be residents of the Town of Camden. Historical research indicated this change had been made to allow one long-serving Member, who had moved out of town, to continue serving. As a result, the Board of Adjustment became the only Town board without a residency requirement.

Councilman Woodall asked whether the Mayor had a reference to the Ordinance or code section that removed the residency requirement.

Councilwoman Sturgeon expressed concern that the draft language was too broad, as it referred to “any commission or committee,” which could limit participation to town residents and restrict access to outside subject-matter experts.

Mayor Dougherty clarified that the intent was for the residency requirement to apply only to three bodies: the Town Council, the Planning Commission, and the Board of Adjustment. He reiterated his belief that anyone serving on these boards should be a resident of the Town of Camden, noting that while a business owner might have an interest in Town matters, only residents are eligible to vote and should serve on such boards.

Mayor Dougherty and Councilmembers agreed to defer action on the Ordinance until next month to review the existing 2005 Ordinance before moving forward.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Kahan Maniar (Camden Cigars) explained that he holds a seat on our Board of Adjustment and was recently reappointed to a 3-year term ending in 2028. He noted that although he does not live within Town limits, he owns and operates three businesses within Town limits and expressed concern that the proposed residency requirement might affect his ability to continue serving after his current term expires. He stated that he wishes to continue contributing to the community despite not being a resident and emphasized that his desire to serve is based on his commitment to the Town, noting that he has been involved in meetings and community matters and operates several businesses within Camden. He added that some property and boundary maps in the area are inconsistent. His former cigar shop, for example, was located near the Town line and sometimes identified as Dover rather than Camden, making it difficult to clearly determine boundaries in some cases. Mr. Maniar reiterated that he wants to continue helping the community regardless of his residential status.

Mayor Dougherty explained that through this Ordinance, a person would need to live within Town limits to serve on one of the Town's boards, not merely own property or operate a business there.

Councilman Woodall stated that the existing Ordinance states that eligibility to serve would extend to individuals who are either residents or property owners within the Town of Camden limits.

Carol Milton (Camden Commons) requested clarification of the formal guidelines for public comments, noting that at times the Council appears to respond to certain speakers but not to others. She feels that the Council should provide brief responses to questions, beyond a simple yes or no answer. She also thanked the Town for installing the dead-end sign in her development.

Dawn Gonzalez (Barclay Farms) asked for an update on the Town's virtual access and participation policy. She questioned how Council Members would be able to vote remotely if attending virtually and expressed frustration that there has been no progress on virtual public participation. She emphasized that residents who attend virtually should have their questions and comments treated with the same respect as those attending in person. Ms. Gonzalez urged the council to establish clear professional guidelines for virtual participation and public interaction, stating that taxpayers deserve both access and responses to their questions.

Bob Wayson (William Street) asked Chief Whitney for clarification regarding recent police activity, specifically whether the 18 criminal incidents and multiple assaults referenced in the report were discovered by Officers on patrol or were called in by residents. Mr. Wayson asked for clarification regarding confidentiality in police reporting and questioned whether the identity of a person who reports a crime or suspicious activity is shared with the alleged offender. Mr. Wayson expressed concern that individuals who call in incidents may have their names disclosed and stated that citizens should have the same right to confidentiality and protection as victims. He suggested the Town consider establishing a formal policy or Ordinance to ensure the anonymity of individuals who report crimes or suspicious behavior to law enforcement.

Sharon Morgan asked for clarification on virtual participation and questioned how public comments and input would be heard. She stated that this has been an ongoing issue and feels that residents attending remotely can be heard and contribute during meetings.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Woodall emphasized the importance of addressing the virtual access and participation concerns raised earlier in the meeting and asked how the Council planned to move forward, specifically, who would take the lead on implementing or overseeing the virtual setup, and how a test run should be conducted to ensure it works effectively.

Vice-Mayor Rhodes thanked everyone for attending the meeting and expressed appreciation to the public, Town staff, Police Chief, and the Fire Department. She stated that their efforts and support are valued and appreciated by the Council.

Councilwoman Sturgeon stated that she created a standard operating procedure for virtual access that was sent to both Council and Town staff. She emphasized the importance of respect and professionalism, noting that regardless of the topic or the level of passion involved, everyone — including Council Members — should remain respectful toward one another. Reflecting on prior meetings, she acknowledged that while the public had remained respectful and passionate, some Council Members had allowed their emotions to get the best of them, leading to foul language and disrespect. She stressed that Council Members must maintain professionalism and remember their duty to serve the public. She also expressed gratitude to the Police Department for their hard work, especially as they approach tight deadlines and upcoming certifications, adding that she has complete confidence they will perform

successfully. Finally, she thanked Malori for her efforts in organizing and improving the financial reporting, expressing appreciation for the continued progress.

Councilman Ridgely echoed his fellow Council Members in expressing appreciation to the Town staff, Police Department, and Fire Company for their continued dedication to keeping the community safe and the Town running smoothly. He noted that, although it might have fit under announcements, he wanted to highlight an important upcoming event. On Monday, October 13th, the Caesar Rodney School Board will be voting on whether to move forward with a referendum that would involve an increase in school taxes. He shared that he had attended a meeting earlier in the year with the superintendent and other officials, during which they outlined several shortfalls the district is facing. He also noted that the last successful referendum was passed in 2015, and if approved by the school board, this new referendum would likely appear on the ballot in February 2026. He concluded by thanking everyone for their attention.

Mayor Dougherty responded that virtual participation would be a subject for Council discussion. He suggested that Councilman Woodall call him sometime, and they could discuss the matter in more detail.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made at 8:12 p.m. by Councilman Ridgely, seconded by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, to adjourn the council meeting. All in favor; none opposed.

*Respectfully submitted,
Lynda Huizinga, Town Clerk*