

**Town of Camden
Regular Town Council Meeting
Camden Municipal Building
November 3, 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 October 24, 2025, in the following manner:

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

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

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

Council Absent: Councilman Woodall

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

AMENDMENTS

None.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Town Hall will be closed on Tuesday, November 11th, in observance of Veterans' Day.

Town Hall will be closed on Thursday, November 27th, and Friday, November 28th, in observance of Thanksgiving.

The 5th Annual Camden-Wyoming Christmas Parade will be held on Saturday, December 6th, at 6:00 P.M.

MINUTES

A motion was made by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to approve the October 6, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes as amended. All in favor; none opposed.

FINANCE REPORT

Ms. Lewis stated that the delinquent tax amount for tax years 2022-2024 is now \$13,407.44. She added that we received \$79,579.66 in RETT funds in October.

Councilwoman Sturgeon mentioned that expenditures are generally tracking right and look like we are under budget in most areas. She added that the workers' compensation line was a bit high and asked if there was an increase for the new policy year.

Ms. Lewis said that the workers' compensation cost gradually increases each year, and at times, the increase can be significant. It's largely tied to payroll—new hires, Public Works positions, and other higher-risk or higher-premium roles all affect the rate. Because of that, it isn't always budgeted perfectly since we don't always know what changes to expect when the budget is prepared.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked if it is a calendar year policy or a fiscal year policy.

Ms. Lewis stated that it is based on the policy year, which is from September to August.

CAMDEN WYOMING FIRE DEPARTMENT

Fire Chief Phillip Lewis gave a report that included, but was not limited to, fire and EMS calls.

CAMDEN WYOMING SEWER & WATER AUTHORITY

Councilman Ridgely advised that they were unable to approve their budget at their October meeting due to a lack of quorum, and they are hoping to have a quorum by January. They are short members, and two existing members are experiencing health issues. If they can meet in January, they will be able to approve the budget retroactively. In the meantime, he encourages both Camden and Wyoming to consider extending an invitation to candidates who may be interested in serving on this board.

FRIENDS OF HISTORIC CAMDEN

Councilman Ridgely explained that a new historical marker was installed honoring Brinkley Hill—a significant stop on the Underground Railroad, which is located near the tennis courts at the High School. Their November meeting will be on the 20th, and the next meeting will be in January, where they will have an author as their guest speaker. He added that they will be installing a few flags as part of the ongoing flag project and are hoping to have them in place by the Christmas parade, and they continue to make progress on their website.

POLICE REPORT

Chief Whitney gave a report that included, but was not limited to, traffic arrests and criminal activity. He stated they had 72.5 hours of paid overtime and 2.5 hours of court overtime. He added that they have had a total of 530 calls for this period, some of which were more serious, compared to 546 for this period last year.

Councilman Ridgely referenced past minutes and noted that in April, the department logged approximately 1,200–1,300 hours on duty, compared to roughly 1,700 hours now. He asked if the increase was due to having more officers.

Chief Whitney responded that the increase reflects departmental demand, not staffing increases. Staffing levels must accommodate required shift coverage and support for special events (parades, town activities, etc.). Due to recent federal developments and anticipated community impacts, additional officers were deployed to local retail and food establishments. Outside agencies assisted, and one agency provided officers at no cost to the Town.

Councilwoman Sturgeon clarified that police calls are not decreasing. Investigators spend significant time completing follow-ups, preparing cases, writing reports, and supporting prosecutions. Higher hours reflect more thorough and effective policing.

Mayor Dougherty added that rising calls have multiple impacts: officer availability, safety, and recruitment and retention. Public criticism also affects morale and hiring in the law enforcement field.

Chief Whitney noted that the department is now accredited and displays a certificate and banner to reflect this achievement. The department's portable Wi-Fi units (MiFi's) are no longer reliably connected to the state system. When MiFi units disconnect, officers must restart reports and log back in, causing major delays. During a traffic stop, officers may need to release drivers because they cannot complete checks or citations. Verizon has attempted various fixes (tower realignment, technical adjustments), but the issues persist, and has suggested transitioning to Cradle Point in-vehicle units with external antennas. The standard costs \$1,007 each. Verizon is offering them to us for \$449 each, with monthly service remaining at \$39.99 per unit. The total for 14 units would be \$6,286. Chief Whitney explained that if Mayor and Council approve him to proceed with this necessary upgrade, the units could be purchased using RETT funds, which are intended for public safety. Chief noted the late timing of the quote he received from Verizon and said he understood if Council preferred to wait since this is not an agenda item.

Mayor Dougherty asked if pricing would remain available next month.

Vice Mayor Rhodes warned that a delay could increase the cost.

Councilwoman Sturgeon emphasized it is a safety issue.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Sturgeon, seconded by Councilman Ridgely, to authorize Chief Whitney to purchase Cradle Points out of RETT for up to \$7,000.00. All in favor; none opposed.

Chief Whitney reported issues with the cameras at Camden Town Center (adjacent to Walmart). Some cameras and camera banks are down. Advantech is running tests, including taking the PTZ system offline, which restores partial function. Two cameras may still require further action. He added that there is no funding request at this time, but it will likely be necessary in the future.

Mayor Dougherty noted that a recent incident, captured on an older camera, highlighted the system's limits. Most cameras are 15–20 years old. Many are analog and pixelate when zoomed, making facial or license-plate identification unreliable. Eventually, the entire system will need replacement.

Chief Whitney agreed but suggested phasing the replacements to reduce budget impact. Funding needs could be planned during the next budget cycle. We have approximately 58 cameras. The camera system was installed years ago using FCVC grant money, including the tower and antennas. Repairs and replacements are typically funded through said grant money, not the Town. The current FCVC allocation is already earmarked for new cameras at the three upcoming traffic circles.

Councilman Ridgely raised questions about pricing and whether alternative bids could be considered.

Chief Whitney explained that the Town uses a proprietary Advantech system that requires the installation and integration of all cameras. While cameras might be available through other vendors, Advantech will not allow outside companies to work on its network. Therefore, the project is sole-source, and attorney review has confirmed that no competitive bid is required, and they will recommend the specific camera type (Honeywell or otherwise) depending on site needs.

Councilman Ridgely acknowledged the proprietary situation but wanted clarity on options. Chief reiterated that due to the system's nature, all work must go through Advantech.

TOWN MANAGER REPORT

Mr. Scott stated that he did 30 inspections in October. The Town of Camden sign at the south end of town (near the tracks) had to be replaced, presumably after being struck by a vehicle. No police reports were filed by either the Camden PD or Delaware State Police. The ductwork at Town Hall was cleaned from the third floor down to the first floor due to mold concerns, especially on the second floor. Air handlers were cleaned, and UV lights are being installed on the two primary air handlers (Town side and Police side) to reduce mold circulation. A building permit was issued for Coastal Volleyball and construction is underway. He added that our property and casualty insurance costs increased by roughly 13%. Mr. Scott recognized Brian, Public Works Director, for clearing the area behind the shops adjacent to Walmart, which improves Police visibility where individuals sometimes hide. Unfortunately, one day after the cleanup, someone dumped a water heater in the area. The incident was captured on camera, though the image quality was not sufficient to read the license plate.

Councilman Ridgely asked for an update on the e-360 code updates for the Town's website.

Mr. Scott explained that the entire code book must be reviewed, and the update process will take at least one year due to the large volume of pages. He has reviewed the printed code and identified errors. The next step is to meet with the codification team (likely via Zoom) to correct the mistakes. All ordinances from 2021 to the present must be added, though the number of new ordinances is relatively small.

Councilwoman Sturgeon noted that at the last meeting, a resident submitted a formal request concerning the public comment protocol, and she learned afterward that the resident had not received the requested information.

Mr. Scott clarified that the decisions about who may or may not speak during public comment are made by the Council.

MAYOR

Mayor Dougherty shared that he has been reviewing the municipal bonds outstanding on our building and has mentioned previously that we should look into and possibly consider paying them off. Because these are publicly sold municipal bonds, we cannot retire them directly. However, he was able to get the contact information for the bond representative, the lawyer handling the bonds, whose office is in New York. He will be reaching out to him. If we are unable to retire them, we may be able to purchase any outstanding bonds on the open market. That's the option we're currently exploring. If this is feasible, it would require a vote by the Council, since it would involve using funds from our reserves. Paying off the bonds would be beneficial, as it would effectively retire the building from debt and remove those payments from the budget.

PUBLIC HEARING

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

Mayor Dougherty explained that this Ordinance is intended to establish a formal standard for attendance at public meetings for elected and appointed officials. The town charter grants the Council authority to discipline or require officials to attend meetings and, in certain circumstances, replace them. Currently, no Ordinance exists to address attendance expectations or procedures. This Ordinance is meant to create a clear framework for accountability and consistent standards.

A motion was made by Councilman Ridgely, seconded by Councilwoman Sturgeon, to move into Public Hearing. All in favor; none opposed.

Dawn Gonzalez (Barclay Farms) reiterated her support for establishing a standard for Council member attendance. She emphasized that serving on the Council is a commitment, and that repeated absences reflect poorly on the Council as a whole. She noted that a member has missed multiple meetings this year, which could affect Council votes. Ms. Gonzalez urged the Council to establish clear procedures and protocols for addressing absenteeism, including authority to remove and replace members, when necessary, to ensure accountability and transparency for both the Council and taxpayers.

A motion was made by Councilman Ridgely, seconded by Councilwoman Sturgeon, to exit the Public Hearing and return to the regular Council session. All in favor; none opposed.

OLD BUSINESS

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

Mayor Dougherty explained that this is the final reading of the Ordinance and asked if there were any other questions or comments from the Council.

Councilman Ridgely asked if we received an official opinion from our Town Solicitor.

Mayor Dougherty advised that he was present during the prior discussions and has already reviewed the language and added that his absence tonight shouldn't have any effect on the legality of this ordinance.

A motion was made by Councilwoman Sturgeon, seconded by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, to pass Ordinance #2025-O-02. Four in favor; one absent. Motion carries.

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 – Discussion

Mayor Dougherty asked the Council for any questions or concerns that they may have on this previously introduced Ordinance.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked if, by making this change, we are going to limit our ability to include people on these commissions or committees who have technical expertise, or, in other words, prevent ourselves from having subject-matter experts. The Charter is very clear about the structure for Council membership and expresses concern that this change could box us in and prevent us from having subject-matter experts on our committees. She stated that we originally made a change to ensure we could retain expert input, and now it seems we might be moving away from that and would like to make sure we aren't putting ourselves at a disadvantage.

Mayor Dougherty said this change specifically creates uniformity among all the Town's commissions. This change restores the process to the way it was. When the new Chairperson of one committee asked about this while reviewing the Ordinances, he checked our unofficial historian to see what happened. All committees were structured this way until 2005, when a long-term, well-liked member moved out of Town, and the ordinance was changed to let him stay. Personally, I believe that it was a mistake; if you don't live in town, you shouldn't represent town residents. It's not about the person's abilities; it's about representation. This change would revert the committee's Ordinances to ensure that Town residents are the ones appointed and operate these committees. While it's possible that an expert in a specific area could be excluded, that's rare. Most committees are served by residents who are willing to take a stand, voice an opinion, and participate, which is what's required for nearly all committees.

Councilwoman Sturgeon asked if the Town Solicitor is required to attend commission meetings or if that is on an as-needed basis.

Mayor Dougherty confirmed that he is asked to attend these types of meetings as needed.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Carol Milton (Camden Commons) stated that she had formally requested the bylaws or Ordinances governing public comments at last month's meeting and had not received them. She asked what steps she should take to obtain the information. She further explained concerns about the condition of properties in Camden Commons, noting issues caused by the absence of an HOA, and that one resident, reportedly facing eviction, has a yard cluttered with bicycles, chairs, and other items. Another neighboring property has overgrown weeds that have not been addressed for months. She has also noticed basketballs and other items accumulating in the neighborhood and asked for guidance on what resources are available to help maintain the neighborhood, clarification about what is allowed during the public comment period, and how residents should bring forward these types of concerns.

Mayor Dougherty advised that she should speak with him after adjournment.

Bill Cofone (Main Street) asked whether members of committees or Council could attend meetings via Zoom when traveling or dealing with family obligations, given modern technology. He clarified that he is not on a committee but wanted to raise the question since the Ordinance discussion did not address remote attendance.

Dawn Gonzalez (Barclay Farms) requested clarification about the hierarchy within the Town, such as who to contact if a question posed to an employee goes unanswered. She congratulated the Police Department on its accreditation and asked for clarification on what accreditation means for the Camden them. She thanked the Council for moving forward with establishing attendance standards. She agreed with Mr. Cofone's earlier comment and hopes that remote attendance options will be built into standards for Council and committee members. Ms. Gonzalez noted she is still waiting for the public comment protocol referenced by Councilwoman Sturgeon at last month's meeting and asked for clarification regarding the Ordinance establishing qualifying conditions to serve on committees or commissions. She added that she loved the mad scientist-themed Halloween costumes that Town staff wore at the recent Trunk-or-Treat event.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilman Ridgely said he sees that the Police force is working hard and he appreciates the great job they are doing. He also thanked Harold and the rest of the Town staff for all they do. He added that he is excited for the Christmas parade and looks forward to continuing to act in the best interest of the Town for the remainder of his term.

Councilwoman Sturgeon thanked Malori and everyone at the Town, including Harold; whenever we have community events, the Town is well represented, and she really appreciates the staff and everything they do to make these special events successful. We're entering a busy season with holidays, audits, and personal commitments, which is a tremendous amount of work, and she appreciates everyone's hard work and dedication. She also congratulated Chief Whitney on the accreditation, which is a great achievement that reflects the Town's commitment to showing that the Police Department meets professional standards. The Police Department takes great care in everything they do, and it reflects on everyone on the force. She emphasized that they are ready to support them in any way needed, especially during the holidays, in the cold, when people may be a little short-tempered.

Vice-Mayor Rhodes thanked Chief Whitney for all he's done for a successful accreditation, which she knows was very challenging. She thanked Harold and his team, especially Brian (Public Works Director), who all do a great job. She also thanked the Fire Department for everything they did and thanked the members of our Town for attending.

Mayor Dougherty said thanked everyone for coming and thanked the Town employees for all they did.

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 8:14 p.m. by Councilwoman Sturgeon, seconded by Vice-Mayor Rhodes, to adjourn the council meeting. All in favor; none opposed.

*Respectfully submitted,
Lynda Huizinga, Town Clerk*