

City of New Castle Delaware
Regular City Council Meeting
New Castle Senior Center – 400 South Street
Meeting Held in Person and via Zoom
Tuesday, August 12, 2025
7:00 p.m.

Call to Order: 7:00 PM

Roll Call

Present: Council President Suzanne M. Souder
Councilperson Andrew Zeltt
Councilperson Brian M. Mattaway
Councilperson Joseph F. Day, III

Absent: Councilperson Nermin Zubaca

Also present: Antonina Tantillo, City Administrator
Michael Hoffman, City Solicitor
Mayor Valarie Leary
James Whisman, City Treasurer
Jeffrey Bergstron, City Building Official
Police Chief Richard McCabe
Fire Chief David Majewski

Council President Souder called the August 12, 2025, City Council meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. The assembly stood for the Pledge of Allegiance. Roll call followed and a quorum to conduct business was declared.

Minutes

Minutes of July 8, 2025

A motion to approve the minutes of the July 8, 2025, City Council Meeting as amended was made by Councilperson Day. The motion was seconded by Councilperson Zeltt and was unanimously passed.

Treasurer's Report

Mr. Whisman presented the unaudited Treasurer's Report as of July 31, 2025:

Total unrestricted funds	\$ 7,854,711.65
Total restricted funds	\$ 2,935,864.88
Total cash	\$10,790,576.53

Mr. Whisman stated that receipts for the first month of the fiscal year total \$292,334.42 and expenditures total \$741,851.90; adding that monthly receipts will far exceed expenditures soon.

A motion to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented subject to audit was made by Councilperson Day, seconded by Councilperson Zeltt, and was unanimously passed.

Reports from the City Administrator and Staff

Report From the City Administrator

Council President read Ms. Tantillo's report:

- City of New Castle Taxes – Tax bills have been sent out and are due by September 30th.
 - Those who pay by August 29th will receive a 2% discount.
 - For Fiscal Year 2026 only, during the month of September the base tax amount is 2%.
 - A 1.5% penalty will be assessed on unpaid taxes as of October 1st, with an additional 1.5% penalty will be assessed on unpaid taxes as of November 1st.
 - A 6% penalty will be assessed on any delinquent taxes as of December 1st.
 - For each consecutive month after December, an additional interest charge of 1% will be applied.
 - For this year, those wishing to apply for a senior or disability tax exemption have until September 30th to do so.
- Delaware River Trails Study – The report was completed by John, Mirmiran & Thompson and it is expected that they will present the report at the September Council meeting.
- Delaware Street Railroad Improvement Project – DelDOT is working to complete the railroad arm improvements this summer and they continue to work with Norfolk Southern to finalize the plans for the rest of the project to complete the work by next spring or summer.
- WILMAPCO – New Castle hosted the first Walkability Study meeting on August 6th and another meeting will be scheduled in the fall. WILMAPCO will share a report from the meeting publicly at a later date.
- Dobbinsville Fishing Pier – DNREC is working on Permit approvals from the Army Corps of Engineers State Wetlands and Coastal Zone Management, which will take some time. It is hoped that construction will begin next year.
- University of Delaware Summer Interns – The summer interns have begun to assist with several top-priority projects.
- Grants
 - The City applied for a DP&L Environmental Stewardship grant to move the Delaware River Trail project to the next stage and to add informational kiosks along the Trail in July.
 - The City applied for Cybersecurity and Homeland Security grants in July and August.
- Dog Park – The City Engineer is finalizing specifications for fencing and other amenities.

- Code Red – All residents who have registered were thanked, and residents who have not registered were encouraged to do so. For assistance registering, please contact the City office.
- Legislation Update – The Charter Change to authorize the City to levy taxes on real property on varying rates based on classification went before the State Legislature as HB144. It was approved and signed by the Governor.

Report from Chief McCabe

Chief McCabe reported that:

- On August 23rd the Department will partner with the CCD to sponsor a Safe Street Block Party on Gray Street beginning at 12 noon. Everyone is invited.
- The Department Backpack Drive was enormously successful this year. The supplies will be delivered to schools at the beginning of the school year.
- At the start of school marked police cars will be stationed in the areas of Carrie Downie School and Harvest Christian Academy in addition to the county Crossing Guards. Chief McCabe asked that drivers pay attention to the yellow flashing lights when school children are present and to slow down.
- In response to several questions from residents Chief McCabe explained the breakdown of Crime Statistics in the monthly report.
- Street Sweeping – Chief McCabe provided the background of the Street Sweeping Regulations that are federally mandated and how the Department has handled warnings and ticketing of violations. Significant outreach to the community was done through a number of outlets; including the Department website, the Department and City Facebook pages, The Crier, and The Weekly.
- Traffic Citations – Chief McCabe shared statistics of traffic violations, noting that since the institution of Directive Patrol, 650 citations have been issued, and more than one-half of them are for Street Sweeping violations. Chief McCabe assured residents that the Department is not ignoring complaints and they are doing their utmost to monitor speeding and other infractions. He urged residents to file a Police Report for any vehicular damage.
- Code Red – Chief McCabe stated that the plan is an excellent way to communicate in real time and urged all residents to sign up.

Report from Mr. Bergstrom

Mr. Bergstrom stated that he had nothing additional to report.

Council Communications

Councilperson Mattaway

- Councilperson Mattaway recognized the members of the Flood Resiliency Committee.
- Blood Drive – A Blood Drive will be held on Saturday, September 13th in conjunction with a Health Fair. More information will be forthcoming.

- Councilperson Mattaway respectfully requested that City Council be prepared to take action to better increase the City's yield in a prudent manner as the Finance Committee gets acclimated and prepares their suggestions for reporting.

Councilperson Zeltt

- Art on The Green is scheduled for September 27th from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. All vendor spots have been filled.

Councilperson Day

- The Old New Castle Litter Crew met on July 13th. Sixteen volunteers collected 26 bags of trash along Chestnut Street and Wilmington Road. The next event is Sunday, August 24th. Volunteers will meet at the New Castle Elementary School and will concentrate on Delaware Street and Ferry Cut-off.
- Backpacks and school supplies are being accepted at the Police Department through August 15th.
- Councilperson Day thanked Mr. Reeves and Ms. Price and the volunteers for their work on the Saturday Market, opining that the Market is great for the City.
- The General Assembly had a Special Session to discuss the reassessment. SB 204 was introduced by Senator Brian Pettyjohn, which would allow all municipalities to charge a variable tax rate based on classification. He noted that New Castle was cited in the legislature and the testimony as being at the forefront of requesting a variable tax rate.
- Councilperson Day attended the Walkability Study meeting on August 6th at the Library from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- The lease for the Boatyard has been signed and in the next week a communication will be sent out to the membership.

Report from the Council President

- Council President Souder read a letter of thanks from the Director of the Senior Center for the \$5,000 grant that was awarded to them by the City.
- Council President Souder stated that Street Sweeping is important; adding that:
 - The City is required to sweep the streets to reduce the amount of debris entering the Delaware River and to keep storm drains becoming clogged.
 - If vehicles are not moved, it severely limits the street sweeper from doing a good job.
 - Streets are cleaned the 3rd full week of each month from May to September.
 - Signs are located at a height that will make them visible above large vehicles.
 - Street Sweeping is noted in The Weekly, on the City Website, and in The Crier, and is announced on Code Red on Sundays prior to the Monday streets will be cleaned.
 - Alerts via Code Red can be received by text, email or phone.

- The window of time for street sweeping is large because Public Works must fit this work into trash, recycling, yard waste pickup as well as their regular tasks; and not all employees are licensed to drive large vehicles such as the trash trucks and street sweeper. The City is working on having more employees licensed.
- The designated start time for street sweeping is set to accommodate the summer work hours of Public Work employees, which is 6:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.; and starting street sweeping later could require workers to work more than 8 hours.
- If you are on vacation during a street sweeping week, you can (1) ask a friend or relative to move your car, or (2) park in one of the public parking lots for the duration of your vacation. If using a City parking lot, contact the City Office to notify them of the dates that your vehicle will be parked in the lot. If you are using a Trustee parking lot, contact the Trust office to notify them of the dates that your vehicle will be parked in their lot.
- Council President Souder informed the assembly that the first reading of Ordinances 555 and 558 would be conducted later during the meeting.

Business From the Mayor

- Regarding ticketing for street sweeping, Mayor Leary noted that if residents pay their bill online there is a link to The Crier in the eBill they receive.
- The City has hosted concerts and gatherings this summer and it is a joy to enjoy them with friends and neighbors.
- Mayor Leary stated that she concurred with many of the legislators who felt the reassessment was not done correctly and is not equitable. She added that the City has no control over that. She has communicated with Senators Poore and Brown and has expressed her opinion regarding the reassessment to them.
- Mayor Leary explained that the Grant Budget is completely separate from the main budget and the budget process. The grant budget can be viewed on the website and states:
 - Revenues: \$1.2M+ for roads, playground, and public safety
 - Expenses:
 - \$858,000 for road repairs
 - \$375,000 for the playground (via the Bond Bill)
- Proclamation – Mayor Leary read a Proclamation to recognize September as Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month in the City of New Castle and in Support of the “Turn the Towns Teal” Ongoing Awareness Campaign. Teal ribbons will be put out on Wednesday, August 27th, from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon.

Council Discussion, Possible Motion and Vote on Resolution 2025-40 – A Resolution Honoring the Legacies of Barbara Pinkett Hicks and Bernard Pinkett.

Councilperson Brian Mattaway read Resolution 2025-40 and distributed New Castle City flags to the families of Mr. Bernard Pinkett and Ms. Barbara Pinkett Hicks.

Councilperson Mattaway put forward a request that City Council begin a tradition that any person, business or organization that is recognized with the presentation of a Proclamation in their honor be given a New Castle City flag.

A motion to approve Resolution 2025-40 was made by Councilperson Day. The motion was seconded by Councilperson Zeltt and was unanimously passed.

Comments from Good Will Fire Company

Chief Majewski reported that:

- There were 220 dispatched EMS incidents and 136 dispatched fire incidents in July.
- Good Will Fire Company worked with the New Castle Police Department to manage the road closure on Rt. 9. During that time there was an increase in motor vehicle accidents on Frenchtown Road and the Fire Company worked with DelDOT and other agencies with those accidents. Also during that time the Fire Company responded to a structure fire in the Llangollen community.
- The Good Will Fire Company Marine Unit was the first marine unit to respond to the Delaware Memorial Bridge accident in July and remained on site for just under four hours until cleared by Command.
- The Marine Unit also responded to flooding and sport water-type incidents on the River.
- The Fire Company conducted training with the Delaware Army National Guard 126th Medivac Unit in July on the River while they conducted hoists from their aircraft.
- Firefighters responded to a content fire in a warehouse in early August.

Public Comment

Binnie Beale – 26 The Strand

Mr. Beale spoke on Ordinance 555, stating that:

- The Ordinance is a flawed document that is too accommodating to the needs of the commercial district but not to the residents, particularly in the Historic Area.
- Over 70 neighbors in the Historic Residential area do not want their community changed by additional traffic of non-residents living side-by-side with residents.
- Mr. Beale urged Council to draft an Ordinance that is more balanced to the needs of the residents to keep the community an upstanding, colonial town.

Phil Gross – 1301 13th Street

Mr. Gross stated that:

- Separate workshops should be held on projects so people can decide what their interests are and not have to sit through a 2-3 hour Council meeting.
- Council and the City Administration have weaponized themselves so that they choose what happens in the city regardless of what the people want; i.e., the dog park.
- There is no extra money to spend and the dog park and road resurfacing should have been stopped.

City Council Regular Meeting
August 12, 2025

- The City is not fair or equitable in selecting who participates on Boards, Commissions, and Committees.
- There is a tab for meetings and a tab for events on the city website, and events should not be included on the meetings tab.
- Mr. Gross asked if notification of meetings would be sent out on Code Red.

Dr. Somasunderam Padmalingam – 222 Chestnut Street

- Dr. Padmalingam recommended that Council institute fines for people who do not clean up their pet's feces.
- Dr. Padmalingam stated that there are people in the city who may not be able to afford their increased taxes and there should be some consideration for those people to pay their taxes in installments.
- Dr. Padmalingam commended the Police Department and asked if the Police Department can provide the number of crimes committed in the City in 2024 and through July of 2025.

Council President Souder stated that anyone wishing to make arrangements for installment payments on their taxes should contact the City Office. She added that the City Office can help those applying for the tax exemption for seniors and those with disabilities with low incomes.

Gwen Henderson – 2 Booker Circle

Ms. Henderson requested that speed bumps be installed in the Penn Valley development to deter speeders.

Walt Cooper – 803 Lamprey Lane

Mr. Cooper stated that the only city amenities the development of Riverbend receives are Police and Fire protection, but the residents of Riverbend are being taxed at the same rate as city residents who receive trash pick-up, snow removal, street repaving, and other amenities. He asked why the city raised taxes in the same year that the county raised them. Mr. Cooper stated that many residents in Riverbend are on fixed incomes; and some also have a \$25,000 lien on their properties that was placed on their properties by the builder in addition to their mortgage, upkeep of the development, and clubhouse fees. He asked that City Council reviews the situation in Riverbend because they get no other services besides Police and Fire.

Cynthia Batty – 18 East 3rd Street

With regard to Ordinance 555, Ms. Batty shared that more than 30% of the parcels in the Historic District have off-street parking (157 parcels).

Dennis Young – 12 West 5th Street

Mr. Young stated that he appreciated the discussion regarding street sweeping. He asked that the parking lot behind the Post Office have security cameras installed for vehicles that are parked there during extended trips.

Ennio DiAlessandro – 38 West 7th Street

Mr. DiAlessandro stated that his city taxes went up 200-300%.

Aritha Brown – William Penn court

Ms. Brown stated that taxes in Delaware have gone up two or three times in the past year, but wages and social security have not. She asked how the City can justify raising taxes when incomes have not increased.

Council President Souder explained that the City had not raised taxes in 16 years.

Council President read written comments:

Ellen Kantnor – 2nd Street

Ms. Kantnor's comments were in opposition to Ordinance 555 for short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District, stating that:

- Studies have shown that almost universally short-term rentals have disrupted communities to the extent that many municipalities and entire countries have felt the need to reset regulations.
- She submitted articles from various cities and countries regarding this matter.
- The regulations in the Ordinance are not stringent enough and Ms. Kantnor urged Council to consider each piece of the Ordinance and how it affects the quality of life and the collective future in the Historic Residential District.

Carol Vukelich – 33 The Strand

Ms. Vukelich's comments were in opposition to Ordinance 555 for short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District. She stated that whole home short-term rentals should be allowed only in the Historic Commercial District. She suggested several revisions to the Ordinance:

1. The definition of "whole home rental" is muddled and should be more clearly defined.
2. Why must an "Inn" be non-owner occupied? Why limit the number of days to seven?
3. It is unclear which aspects of §230.27.1 apply to Bed & Breakfast and Inn short-term rentals.
4. It is not clear that B&Bs and Inns are required to be licensed.
5. B&B homeowners should be required to be in the home when guests are in residence.
6. Two hours for a local contact to respond physically is much too long. 30 minutes is an acceptable response time.
7. Interior placards should be available in all short-term rentals.
8. The same safety requirements should be met by all short-term rentals.
9. 270 days per year is too high. 180 days is typical.
10. It should be made clear that 2.5% of all residential units in each district is inclusive of whole home, B&B and Inn short-term rentals.
11. Specified violations should apply to all forms of short-term rentals.

Ron Stach – 104 East 3rd Street

Mr. Stach's comments were in opposition of Ordinance 555 for short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District, stating that:

- The Ordinance fails to recognize trends in short-term rental legislations and threatens property values and neighborhood cohesiveness.
- Requirements for "off-street parking" are vague.
- A high number of rental days per year has caused significant problems in places where no or inadequate legislation exists.
- Members of the Historic Residential Area are largely being ignored in addressing these issues, and many of the Planning Commission members have been dismissive or have expressed verbal and non-verbal disdain when they are raised.

Mr. Stach urged Council to reconsider the legislation as proposed.

Ron Vukelich – 33 The Strand

Mr. Vukelich's comments were in opposition of Ordinance 555 for short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District, stating that:

- All residents of the Historic Residential District are opposed to businesses of any sort in the Historic Residential District.
- There is no objection to short-term rentals in areas designated as commercial.
- The general opinion of those opposed to and in favor of short-term rentals is that they "wouldn't want one next to me."

Mr. Vukelich urged Council to vote in favor of short-term rentals in commercial areas only.

Dorsey Fiske – 3rd Street

Ms. Fiske's comments were in opposition of Ordinance 555 for short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District, stating that:

- The Ordinance is badly written.
- The definition of "off-street parking" is unclear.
- 270 days for short-term rentals is far too much in a residential district. It would be appropriate only in a commercial district.
- It is unreasonable for a non-owner local contact to be available 24 hours a day.
- The Planning Commission has not considered the likelihood of people buying a number of houses in the Historic Residential District in order to make a business of renting them as short-term rentals.

Ms. Fiske urged Council to draft a better Ordinance.

Dwayne Foster – 206 Delaware Street

Mr. Foster stated that he rents the property on Packet Alley that he is currently renting as a short-term rental. He stated that he has rented the property as a short-term rental for approximately seven (7) months without incident. He asserted that the Ordinance was written because of his short-term rental on Packet Alley. He stated that the Ordinance is almost 60 years, and opined that people could have been renting homes out as short-term rentals in the Historic Residential District for 60 years; further opining that those opposed are fear-mongering these people into agreeing with their argument.

Mr. Foster thanked the Planning Commission for the hard work that went into drafting the Ordinance.

Council Discussion, Possible Motion and Vote on Resolution 2025-39 – A Resolution to Appoint Warren Flowers to the Flood Resiliency Committee.

Warren Flowers – Flood Resilience Committee – Term Ending December 31, 2027

Council President Souder read Resolution 2025-39 and noted Mr. Flowers' background and qualifications.

A motion to approve Resolution 2025-39 was made by Councilperson Day. The motion was seconded by Councilperson Mattaway and was unanimously passed.

First Reading of Ordinance 555 – An Ordinance to remove the definition of tourist home, add definitions for short term rental, bed and breakfast, and hotel, motel and inn, to make corresponding code revisions, and to add a new section 230-27.1 regarding short term rentals.

Council President Souder, Mayor Leary, and Councilperson Day read Ordinance 555.

First Reading of Ordinance 558 – An Ordinance to Amend the City of New Castle Municipal Code Regarding the Good Will Firefighter and Ladies Auxiliary Real Property Tax Exemption.

Council President Souder read Ordinance 558.

There being no further business to discuss, Council President Souder called for a motion to adjourn.

A motion to adjourn was made by Councilperson Day and seconded by Councilperson Zeltt. The motion was unanimously passed and the meeting adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen R. Weirich, City Stenographer

Next Regular Meeting Date: September 9, 2025