

Public Safety Committee

Regular Meeting

March 17, 2026 – 10:00 AM

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Seabrook Island Town Hall, Council Chambers
2001 Seabrook Island Road
Seabrook Island, SC 29455



MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman May called the meeting to order at 10:02 am.

ROLL CALL

Committee Members Present: Darryl May, Chairman; Jill Boissonnault, Bruce Ludwin, Jim Sporn, and Mike Sankovich

Town Staff Present: Joe Cronin (Town Administrator) Tyler Newman (Planning and Zoning Director), and Peter Wiggins (Town Clerk).

FOIA STATEMENT

The Town Clerk confirmed that the meeting was advertised in compliance with the requirements of the South Carolina Freedom of Information Act. Agendas were posted and furnished to news media and all others requesting notification.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

February 17, 2026

Mr. Sporn motioned to approve the minutes of February 17, 2026, seconded by Mr. Ludwin.

Mr. Sporn's motion was APPROVED unanimously.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

Comprehensive Emergency Plan

Chairman May reminded the committee that the completion of the Town's Comprehensive Emergency Plan is a priority for the Public Safety Committee. He stated the town is working with a consultant to facilitate the rewriting of the plan. Chairman May closed by stating the status of the consultant is complex, but that staff is in contact with the consultant to determine whether he will continue to be available to assist the Town in rewriting the plan.

Disaster Recovery Council (DRC)

Mr. Wiggins stated the DRC Emergency Preparedness Drill will be on April 29, at 9:00 am. He stated that the DRC won an award that is given every year by the Municipal Association of South Carolina (MASC). He stated that MASC will be at Town Hall on April 29 to film the drill. He closed by stating that staff will travel to Greenville, SC this summer to accept the award on behalf of the DRC.

Beach Rules

Chairman May stated that the committee had been given joint jurisdiction with the Environment & Wildlife Committee (EWC) over the Beach Rules. He stated some of the items that were discussed by the prior EWC were issues of Public Safety.

Definition of the "Beach"

Chairman May stated that the first issue discussed by the prior EWC was the definition of the "beach". He stated that SIPOA had historically been responsible for everything from the dry sand inland, and the Town was responsible for everything from the high-water mark seaward. Chairman May stated this definition can be problematic if beach patrol or the town's code enforcement officers issue a citation on the dry sand, due to the current definition of the "beach" not including the dry sand.

The committee was in unanimous agreement that the definition of the beach should be amended per the draft language that was included as part of Ordinance 2025-08.

Beach Fires

Mr. Cronin stated before the committee moves on to discuss regulating and permitting fires on the beach, the larger policy question of whether the Town wants to continue to allow fires on the beach should be answered. He stated most beach communities in South Carolina prohibit fires on the beach.

Ms. Boissonnault asked if the Town were to prohibit beach fires, could the ordinance be written so that fires at the Polar Plunge and the Full Moon Bonfire could still be allowed. She also asked if the committee could find out how many permits have been issued by SIPOA in the prior year.

Mr. Cronin stated the permitted fires were not the issue, but rather the unpermitted fires. Mr. Cronin stated that beach patrol staff were on Kiawah Island and counted approximately 17 beach fires in one evening. Mr. Cronin stated that SIPOA informed the Town they had only issued 4 or 5 permits for fires that evening. He stated that the number of permits issued by SIPOA will not tell the entire story, as most of the fires on the beach are unpermitted.

Mr. Sporn asked if SIPOA had an enforcement capability related to beach fires.

Mr. Sankovich asked when the town's enforcement capability stops in the evenings.

Mr. Cronin stated that in the off-season, there is no beach patrol. He stated that between April and September they are on the beach until 4:30 pm, and 7:45 pm in the peak season.

Mr. Sankovich said that in his experience, being at a beach fire, beach patrol will ask to see the SIPOA issued permit.

Mr. Cronin stated one reason the draft ordinance was written was to give the Town enforcement capabilities on beach fires. He stated he has had conversations with Chief Ryan Kunitzer of St. John's Fire District (SJFD) about enforcing town issued permits. He stated that one reason for engaging SJFD, was that SJFD was and is currently unable to enforce SIPOA issued fire permits. In closing, he stated that in order for SJFD to enforce permits, the permit will need to be issued by the Town.

Ms. Boissonnault asked if SIPOA had been contacted about beach fire permits, and if so, what was their response to the Town stepping into the permitting process.

Mr. Sankovich stated that when he was Chair of the SIPOA Safety and Security Committee, they approached SJFD to ask about enforcing beach fire permitting. He stated that the response from SJFD at that time was they were too busy to take on extra enforcement duties.

Mr. Cronin stated that SIPOA was contacted last year. He stated the Town told SIPOA they were not seeking to replace SIPOA in the permitting process, but rather to ensure SIPOA gives the approval for any beach fire taking place on their property. He continued by stating that the only way to remove SIPOA from the process would be to prohibit beach fires above the high-water mark, thus only permitting beach fires on public property.

Mr. Sankovich stated that it was his opinion that fires should not be allowed on the dry sand.

Mr. Cronin stated that he would have no objection to allowing fires only on the wet sand. He stated that in effect, this would remove any private property owner from the permitting process, including SIPOA and Camp St. Christopher.

Ms. Boissonnault asked who would be responsible for permitting and enforcement.

Chairman May asked Mr. Sankovich to speak with SIPOA and make sure they were comfortable with what was being discussed. He added that he wanted to ensure that SJFD is still willing to provide whatever permitting and/or enforcement they had previously agreed to.

Mr. Wiggins reminded the committee that the prior EWC discussed moving fires to the wet sand only. He stated that the EWC did not

want to move fires to the wet sand due to the possibility of burned wood and other debris being washed into the ocean during an accidental wave inundation.

Chairman May commented that people should have the respect to pick up everything before they leave the site so that wood and other debris isn't washed into the ocean.

Mr. Cronin stated he would advocate for getting the beach fires as far away from the dunes as possible. He stated he thought that SJFD would also want the fires as far away from dune vegetation and other structures as possible.

Chairman May stated that it appeared the committee was in unanimous agreement that it would be their recommendation to continue to allow fires provided they are permitted and to only allow fires on the wet sand.

Chairman May provided a brief report of the current SIPOA beach fire rules.

Ms. Boissonnault asked how permit holders would be notified if SJFD or the Town needs to cancel beach fire permits.

Chairman May stated that the Town's Communications and Events Director can communicate any new beach fire permit rules and cancellations via the Town's regular channels of communication. He continued by stating that these items are more operational in nature that don't need to be addressed right now, but that he thought any new rules passed by council should be included in short-term rental information packets given to guests of Seabrook Island.

Mr. Cronin added that the Town has budgeted funds to replace all beach signage. He stated that new rules would be a part of the new beach signage.

In closing out the beach fires discussion, Mr. Cronin stated he would be striking language requiring authorization of private property owners of beach fires being constructed on their property. He stated that this is purely due to the committee recommending fires be built on wet sand only. He also stated that he would be amending the language requiring the Town, SIPOA, and SJFD to establish suitable fire locations at regular intervals throughout the year. He stated if the Town were only to allow fires on wet sand, this site location requirement may not be needed.

Fishing and Swimming

Chairman May informed the committee that the town's attorney had advised the Town not to regulate fishing on the beach, as that was an

activity that was solely administered to by the SCDNR. He continued by stating that the Town's attorney had been contacted by the SCDNR, and advised that the Town could regulate fishing on the beach if it was in the best interest of safety.

Chairman May moved onto a list of issues recommended by the EWC. He stated that the EWC has recommended a prohibition on shark fishing within 300 yards of the shoreline.

Mr. Sankovich asked how this prohibition would be enforced.

Chairman May asked if people are fishing for sharks in the vicinity of swimmers, would that not qualify as a safety issue.

Chairman Hamilton of EWC stated that this was a common regulation found amongst neighboring beach communities. Chairman Hamilton recalled a kayaker off of Seabrook Island dropping large bait into the water and caught a 10' bull shark that was pulled onto the beach. He continued by stating if people are fishing for sharks, there is a potential for sharks being attracted to the waters adjacent to the beach.

The committee was in unanimous agreement that shark fishing should be prohibited within 300 yards of the shoreline.

The committee was also in unanimous agreement to support the EWC recommendation that all fishermen must always remain within 25' of their fishing pole(s).

Chairman May stated that he recently visited Hilton Head and noticed there were designated parts of the surf that were for swimming only. He stated he would support a small number of similar places on Seabrook beaches that would be for swimming only. He continued by stating that on Seabrook Island, the areas around Boardwalk's 1 and 9, including the areas around the Club are popular for sunbathers and swimmers.

Ms. Boissonnault stated she was in support of Chairman May's proposal. She stated that the Town should approach Camp St. Christopher and ask if they would like to see a swimming only section of the beach established near the camp.

Mr. Sankovich stated that he likened the ocean surf to a roadway, swimmers as the pedestrians, and fisherman as the vehicles. He stated they should share the roadway, but that swimmers should have the right-of-way in the name of safety.

In closing, the committee was in unanimous agreement to keep current language in Chapter 32 giving a code enforcement officer the authority to require fisherman to move in the interest of public safety. Additionally, the committee was in agreement that sections of the beach at Boardwalks 1, 9, and near the Seabrook Island Beach Club should be established as swimming only beach.

Stunt Kites

Chairman May moved onto discuss allowing stunt kites on the beaches of Seabrook Island. He proposed that the ordinance prohibit stunt kites in the swimming only areas.

Chairman Hamilton of EWC stated that his committee has recommended a total prohibition on stunt kites on the beach. He stated this recommendation was made so as to protect birds on the beach.

Chairman May stated that he would propose that the recommendation of PSC should remain that stunt kites be prohibited only in the designated swimming areas. He stated that when EWC and PSC meet as a joint committee to recommend a draft ordinance, the different prohibitions of stunt kites between the committees can be further discussed.

Off/On-Leash Pet Rules

Chairman May stated that EWC has recommended that the beach beyond Boardwalk #9 become an on-leash area.

Mr. Cronin stated to the committee that staff have received complaints that at the end of Boardwalk 9 is an off-leash area. He stated the complaints are from dog owners whose dogs may not be well behaved on a leash having to socialize with dogs that are off leash. He stated the request from these owners has been to move the off/on-leash boundary from its current position (300 yards NW of Boardwalk 9) up to Boardwalk 9. He stated this would allow dog owners whose dogs are not well behaved on a leash to directly access an on-leash area at the end of Boardwalk 9.

Chairman May proposed the distance from the end of the boardwalk to the on-leash area be cut from 300 yards to 150 yards. However, he stated that he would agree to move the on/off-leash boundary up to Boardwalk 9, but stated he wanted to get the input of EWC and also dog owners before deciding on a recommendation.

Mr. Sankovich stated he did not have strong feelings on the boundary one way or the other.

Ms. Boissonnault stated she would like the boundary moved up to Boardwalk 9 based on the comments made by Mr. Cronin and hearing stories from dog owners whose dogs are not as well socialized. She

closed by stating she wanted to give dog owners the opportunity to speak to the committee before making a recommendation.

Commercial Activity

Chairman May stated that the reason he felt there was not much commercial activity on Seabrook Island beaches was that the population density is not enough to make most commercial ventures financially viable. He stated that the kinds of activities he was referencing are activities like chair and umbrella rentals and selling ice cream. However, related to allowing these types of businesses to exist, he asked rhetorically, "what's the harm?".

Mr. Cronin stated there are other commercial activities that staff know are taking place in violation of the current ordinance. He stated these are activities such as photography. Mr. Cronin stated his goal was not to expand allowed commercial activity, but rather to recognize the commercial activity that staff know is already taking place on the beach. He continued by stating that the most common question staff receive is can couples be married on the beach. He stated the answer is that technically, gatherings such as wedding ceremonies are permitted on the beach, but that commercial wedding organizers that bring chairs or take photographs on the beach are prohibited. He closed by stating that prior debate has centered around amending the current ordinance to recognize activities that staff know are already taking place.

Mr. Sankovich likened being approached by a commercial photographer on the beach to a solicitor coming to your house. He stated that soliciting is not permitted on Seabrook Island.

Mr. Cronin stated it would be his recommendation that the current language in 32-55 be amended to clarify what can and cannot be done.

Chairman May used the scenario of a group doing yoga that pays an instructor before the yoga session, and then doing yoga at sunrise on the beach. He stated he did not view this as a commercial activity taking place on the beach.

Mr. Sankovich stated he would have a problem with yoga participants from outside Seabrook Island coming through the gate to participate in yoga sessions on the beach, but stated Chairman May's scenario is not a problem.

Chairman May stated that he did not view photographers on the beach as being an issue, and in his opinion, this type of activity would not be prohibited under the current ordinance. He closed by stating that if a local gym were to advertise workouts on the beach, that would merit further discussion, but stated that as it stands, he would

recommend leaving the current language prohibiting commercial activity as it is.

Chairman May stated that his recommendation would be to amend the current ordinance to permit gatherings on the beach, provided they do not take place in a designated swimming area or inhibit beach patrol. He added that the ordinance should make it clear that commercial activity connected to any gathering is prohibited.

The committee was in unanimous agreement with Chairman May's recommendation.

E-Bikes

Mr. Cronin gave a brief report on what types of E-Bikes are allowed on Seabrook Island. He stated that bikes equipped with a throttle (Class 2 and above) are not permitted on Seabrook Island.

Ms. Boissonnault stated she wanted to ensure that the E-Bikes currently permitted (Class 1) on Seabrook Island would not be prohibited.

Metal Shovels

Ms. Boissonnault asked how the metal shovels became a topic for discussion. She stated that if beach fire holes are required to be a significant depth, a metal shovel would be required.

Chairman Hamilton of EWC stated there are plastic shovels that can dig holes for beach fires. He stated it is on the list for discussion because most other beachside communities ban metal shovels. He stated he would not have an issue allowing metal shovels on the beach.

Drones

Mr. Cronin stated drones have been discussed at prior committee meetings as they relate to their use in fishing. He stated that the Isle of Palms have seen drones used to drop large bait into the water as a method to catch sharks. He stated that if the committee would like to prohibit this activity, he would need to consult the town attorney to ask if this kind of prohibition is consistent with state statute.

Chairman May stated he would be in support of whatever the committee can do to prohibit shark fishing.

Canopies/Umbrellas

Mr. Cronin stated that before the committee considers any restrictions on shade structures, they should invite beach patrol staff to appear at a future PSC meeting. He stated that the committee can make a determination after hearing from beach patrol staff whether these shade structures are an issue.

Nudity

After a brief discussion related to the appropriateness of nude sunbathing on Seabrook Island, the PSC was in unanimous agreement that nudity on the beaches of Seabrook Island should be prohibited.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, Chairman May declared the meeting adjourned at 12:06 pm.

Peter D. Wiggins II, MPA
Town Clerk