



Town of Hilton Head Island TOWN COUNCIL MEETING Thursday, July 9, 2026, 10:00 AM Minutes

Call to Order

Mayor Perry called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Council Members present: Alan Perry, Mayor; Alex Brown, Ward 1, Mayor Pro-Tempore; Patsy Brison, Ward 2; Steve DeSimone, Ward 3; Tammy Becker, Ward 4; Steve Alfred, Ward 5; Melinda Tunner, Ward 6

Others Present: Marc Orlando, Town Manager; Brittany Ward, Town Attorney; Kim Gammon, Town Clerk

Pledge to the Flag

Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Alfred moved to approve. Ms. Becker seconded. Motion carried 7-0.

New Business

Discussion of Public Safety Matters Related to Law Enforcement Services

Mayor Perry began the meeting by reminding everyone of Hilton Head Island's ongoing commitment to community safety in light of recent incidents at public spaces, including a tragic event on July 4th. The Mayor acknowledged the victims, their families, and the broad network of responders who supported the community during and after the incident. The Mayor emphasized that public safety is the foremost responsibility of local leadership and is a shared duty across the community and that Hilton Head Island's longstanding reputation for safety is the result of sustained effort, but changing visitor patterns and increased use of public spaces and evolving expectations require the Town to continually adapt its approach to safety. Mayor Perry then introduced the Town Manager, Marc Orlando.

Marc Orlando, Town Manager, stated that the Town of Hilton Head Island's Public Safety Program focuses on readiness, prevention, and coordinated support across multiple departments. Public safety is a core strategic priority, guided by ongoing feasibility studies and investments that strengthen situational awareness and enhance community safety and that the Town advances public safety through two major areas: capital investments—such as public realm improvements, safety cameras, and license-plate reader technology—and daily operational activities led primarily by Fire Rescue and the municipal Public Safety Department.

Fire Rescue is a large, well-established department of 154 employees overseeing fire services, EMS, emergency management, and building safety. The Public Safety Department, with 11 employees and a \$2.4 million budget, focuses on municipal code compliance, beach and park safety, short-term rental oversight, event support, and coordination on waterways. The Town provides visibility, observation, and coordination but does not serve as sworn law enforcement. Instead, it complements the statutory responsibilities of the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, maintaining a strong and collaborative partnership with the Sheriff and other agencies such as SC Department of Natural Resources and private community security teams and that this collaboration ensures aligned efforts during routine operations, special events, and emergency situations. Mr. Orlando stated that public safety represents a major investment, with more than 42% of the Town's \$68 million general fund and 54% of Town personnel dedicated to safety functions and that overall, the program delivers critical support for resident and visitor safety, community quality of life, and the smooth coordination of local and regional safety partners.

Mayor Perry highlighted the Town of Hilton Head Island's continued and growing financial commitment to public safety and noted that the Town has made significant capital and operational investments and will continue prioritizing them. He relayed that, in addition to Town funding, residents contribute nearly \$7 million in FY 2027 through the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office HHI Police Fee, which has risen substantially over the past five years and, altogether, the community will invest more than \$9.4 million in public safety in the upcoming fiscal year. The Mayor expressed that the central question raised is not whether the Town is investing enough, but whether current strategies, resource allocations, and partnerships are aligned with today's operational needs—and whether new or revised approaches may be necessary moving forward. Mayor Perry invited Sheriff Tanner to provide an overview of law enforcement operations and current resources.

Sheriff Tanner pointed out that he believes there is an additional tax that is paid directly through Beaufort County and related to a countywide portion of the Sheriff Department's efforts across every municipality and requested that someone provide the figure representing what the Town contributes to Beaufort County for coverage.

Sheriff Tanner then introduced a video showing some events that transpired on Hilton Head Island during the July 4, 2026 weekend. This video is part of the BCTV recording of the meeting and can be viewed as part of the meeting via this link: [Jul 09, 2026 Hilton Head Special Town Council Meeting - Beaufort County, SC](#)

Sheriff Tanner focused on current public safety realities, the changing environment in Hilton Head Island, and the extensive efforts by the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office to manage increasing activity, especially in high-traffic beach areas like Coligny. He explained that the video shown to Council was intended to give residents and officials an unfiltered view of the nighttime activity officers deal with regularly. He highlighted the Sheriff's Office's continuous 24/7 operations across Beaufort County and noted how Hilton Head Island has evolved culturally and demographically over decades. The Sheriff discussed recurring conversations about whether Hilton Head Island should form its own police department, emphasizing that while he has never opposed the idea, it is a major undertaking often underestimated by the public. He referenced recent events, including the July 4th shooting where deputies arrived

within 17 seconds, to demonstrate the capability and rapid response of the Sheriff's Office, supported by coordinated efforts with multiple agencies. He shared detailed call-for-service and crime-rate data, noting significant reductions in calls over the past two years. He explained that Hilton Head Island's status as a destination brings heavy seasonal activity, requiring vigilant resource allocation based on real-time information from deputies. The Sheriff also outlined recommendations made in 2025 to improve the Coligny area—such as lighting, landscaping changes, and camera expansion—and updated Council on progress, including the establishment of a new substation in Coligny Plaza at a symbolic lease rate of one dollar per year. The Sheriff finished by acknowledging partner agencies, noting ongoing investigative progress with the July 4th cases, and reinforcing that some operational tactics must remain confidential. Overall, his message stressed the need for continued adaptation, enhanced infrastructure at key hotspots, and strong collaboration between the Town and law enforcement. Sheriff Tanner then introduced Daniel Gourley, II, general counsel for the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office.

Mr. Gourley outlined the Sheriff's Office's key recommendation to the Town Council: implementing a juvenile curfew to address recurring late-night issues involving minors on Hilton Head Island. He explained that other cities in South Carolina—such as Charleston, Myrtle Beach, Columbia, and Greenville—already use curfews effectively, giving law enforcement the authority to stop, identify, and direct juveniles home when encountered after certain hours. He stressed that enforcement should extend to parents who knowingly allow their children to be out late. Based on patterns observed by deputies, he recommended an 8:00 p.m. curfew for unaccompanied minors in known hotspot areas, with reasonable exceptions for emergencies, work, or travel home. He noted that juvenile behavior shown in the video highlights a lack of respect for law enforcement and the absence of legal tools to intervene, since current laws—like disorderly conduct—no longer apply to minors. The curfew, he argues, is a lawful, tested solution that would give officers the tools needed to reduce disruptive juvenile activity and improve public safety.

Sheriff Tanner then expanded on earlier recommendations by urging the town to enhance its overall community-based safety structure, in addition to considering a juvenile curfew. He suggested creating community resource positions within the Town—built out from the existing Code Enforcement team—to function similarly to community policing. These staff members would gather information directly from non-gated neighborhoods, address quality-of-life concerns beyond crime, and work more closely with residents. He noted that Code Enforcement already interacts with the community through issues like short-term rentals, parking, and business licensing, making it a strong foundation for a broadened role. He emphasized that this approach does not require sworn law-enforcement officers; the Town can build it in-house with leadership from its experienced public safety director. He reiterated support for the juvenile curfew, highlighting that the Town can tailor it by season, age, or specific hours, and stressed the importance of public education, so residents understand the new rules. He concluded by noting that shaping an environment where poor behavior leads to a loss of opportunity is an effective corrective approach for young people, reinforcing the need for these measures to address recurring issues in hotspot areas.

Mayor Perry thanked Sheriff Tanner and Mr. Gourley and asked Council about enhancing the

Town's Code Enforcement. He asked the Town Manager to work on obtaining this information, including funding needs, so it could be brought to Council for consideration. The Mayor then asked Council for comments and questions.

Council discussion centered on recent public safety concerns on Hilton Head Island, particularly incidents involving teenagers on the beach, including the July 4th shooting at Coligny Beach. Council members, the Mayor, and the Sheriff debated responsibilities, needed changes, and next steps.

Key points included:

1. Long-standing public safety issues on the beaches. Several council members emphasized that problems involving large teenage gatherings, fights, and drug use have been occurring for years, mostly unnoticed by non-beach-goers. There was consensus that the time has come for meaningful action.
2. Insufficient “boots on the beach”. Multiple council members expressed concern that deputy sheriffs are rarely present on the beaches unless a major event is anticipated. The Sheriff disputed this to a degree, saying deployment is based on intelligence and need, and that teams are dispatched when necessary. He stated 28 officers were deployed on July 4th, mainly on the South End.
3. Town vs. Sheriff responsibility. A key theme was whether the Town of Hilton Head Island must create and operate its own police department or significantly expand code enforcement. The Sheriff reiterated that his office is obligated to serve the entire county and cannot contract with municipalities, though Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) can be used to authorize enforcement of town ordinances.
4. Potential creation of a Town of Hilton Head Island Police Department. Several council members referenced a long-standing discussion about establishing a local police department. The Sheriff provided estimates:

- Startup cost: \$26–\$30 million for the first year
- Full implementation timeline: 3–5 years
- He said he would fully support the Town if it chooses this path.

5. Enhancing Code Enforcement. There was agreement that code enforcement could be expanded with additional officers equipped with radios and body cameras. The Sheriff supported better integration between deputies and code enforcement, especially on the beach.
6. Role of technology (cameras, drones, Flock system). The Sheriff stressed that technology is essential. Cameras provided critical evidence in the July 4th incident. He strongly encouraged the Town to expand beach cameras and adopt a drone program for overhead surveillance.
7. Curfew discussions. Several members discussed establishing a teen curfew in certain areas. Concerns were raised that curfews may simply shift gatherings elsewhere and must be paired with broader community mitigation and youth support.
8. Coordination with the incoming Sheriff. Because Sheriff Tanner is leaving office in about six months, some council members stressed that this meeting should help shape expectations for the next Sheriff.
9. Community concerns and resource offers. The Lowcountry Alliance for Healthy Youth

offered funding (\$15–\$20k) to help cover armed officers on weekends.

Council members described additional issues:

- Drugs and marijuana use on beaches
- A series of teen gatherings and parties at Gumtree, Sea Pines, and other locations
- At least one incident where a 911 caller was told no officers were available to respond
- Need for monitoring social media flyers promoting teen beach meetups

Next steps identified

Council members expressed interest in:

- Proceeding with a study on expanded code enforcement or creating a police department
- Drafting a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the incoming Sheriff
- Ensuring better communication and expectation-setting
- Improving beach safety through surveillance, staffing, youth programs, and possible curfews
- Hearing public comments before forming final action items

Council Member Brison had the following suggested timeline for action:

Within 30 days

- Adopt a curfew ordinance.
- Create a system for additional beach patrols at Coligny and other areas where crowds may shift.
- Get a recommendation from the Town Attorney on how to manage and disperse large crowds, via ordinance or state statute.
- Issue a press release to the community and vacation rental companies explaining how they will receive safety alerts or shelter-in-place notices (perhaps via Nixle if appropriate and efficient).

Within 90 days

- Investigate the use of drones for public safety.
- Begin analyzing options for an interim or intermediate law enforcement force, including cost and service analysis, and the potential path toward a full police department.

After the election / with the new Sheriff

- Establish an agreement with the incoming Sheriff, reviewing past services and prior contracts.
- Explore youth programs and interventions.
- Evaluate drug intervention programs for the community.
- Discuss the law enforcement fee with the County and assess possible changes or reductions until the Town establishes its own police force.

- Consider charging for parking at Coligny.

Additional recommendation

- Add this topic to the July 14 council agenda for continued discussion and sequencing of immediate, secondary, and long-term actions.
- Evaluate possible youth/juvenile programs and whose duty it would be.
- Evaluate drug intervention programs and whose duty it would be.

Council Member Becker relayed that she has scheduled a meeting, open to the public, to be held at the Hilton Head Island Branch Library that evening, where the public could come and continue the dialogue or if unable to attend the Town Council meeting, would be able to participate at the library meeting. Ms. Becker also expressed support for the recommendations from a report that landscaping changes be addressed as soon as possible and parking fees at Coligny need to be discussed and addressed. She also gave assurance that growth management/capacity for the Island is being addressed and requested that Town Council give authority to the Town Manager and Town Attorney to begin working with the Sheriff's Department to implement ordinances to begin the work needed to be done. Additionally, Ms. Becker questioned the amount and the use of the County's Police Fee. Ms. Becker also relayed that the Lowcountry Alliance for Healthy Youth may have available funds from the opioid lawsuits to assist Hilton Head Island for services to help with addiction and it could be possible for Fire Rescue to work with that nonprofit to bring those dollars to the Island.

Mayor Perry asked Mr. Orlando for his thoughts and summary of expectations as to how to provide the best safety and security for Hilton Head Island, its residents, businesses and guests, in consideration of the fact that Beaufort County, which provides Hilton Head Island's policing, will have a new Sheriff in place in approximately six months.

Mr. Orlando responded to offer an explanation with regard to the Coligny area study that was mentioned several times during the meeting. The study contains security-related recommendations and was in the planning process when it was requested by several council members. Because it was in the planning process and remained an active study in the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office, it was advised that the study not be released at that time. The study does recommend landscape improvements, additional lighting and camera expansion. Landscaping was cut back, additional lighting was added and there is a contract underway for additional cameras.

Mr. Orlando then outlined ongoing efforts, challenges, and proposed next steps related to public safety, beach operations, and cooperation with the Beaufort County Sheriff's Office. He emphasized that Hilton Head Island has already invested heavily in public-realm improvements—including cameras, the Coligny quadrant, and beach infrastructure—and that planning for the Beach Operations Center is well underway. He clarified prior comments regarding golf carts on the beach, explaining the intent was to ensure law enforcement and Town staff have adequate equipment (ATVs, vehicles, cooled units) due to overwhelming beach conditions, and he relayed that there may be unspent funds of approximately \$20,000 in the Beaufort County Law Enforcement Fee which could be used toward essential items. Mr. Orlando relayed that the Town Attorney would work on a proposed curfew ordinance for

Council's review, and discussed the Town's Community Resource Officer (CRO) model, noting the Town of Hilton Head Island already employs 11 CROs and that their role is municipal-code-focused, not law enforcement. Mr. Orlando acknowledged the ongoing theme of redefining the Town–Sheriff partnership and highlighted the need for a clearly structured MOU that specifies service expectations, measurable results, and accountability, especially given the law enforcement fee (approximately \$6.9M and rising) placed on taxpayers. He stressed that the ordinance defining this fee requires services “above and beyond” base County law enforcement levels, prompting a need for renewed clarity via a Memorandum of Understanding. He suggested, moving forward, four possible service-delivery models:

- Status quo
- Strengthened Memorandum of Understanding with measurable outcomes and accountability
- Hybrid model with deputized officers assigned to Town needs
- Formation of the Town's own police department

Council Member Becker requested a timeline for the Town Manager's recommendations.

Mr. Orlando requested time to produce key deliverables, including a curfew ordinance (within 30 days) and a full public-safety assessment, and he underscored the need to collaborate with Sheriff Tanner now and with the incoming sheriff beginning January 4th. In closing, Mr. Orlando asked Council for direction and reaffirm the shared responsibility—town, sheriff, and community—to set service levels, understand current gaps, establish expectations in writing, and ensure taxpayer dollars are tied to clearly defined public-safety outcomes.

Mayor Perry closed the discussion by thanking everyone for their time and stated that they should use the knowledge gained from this experience and continue to work together to keep the Town of Hilton Head Island as one of the safest communities in South Carolina.

Mayor Perry asked for public comment:

John Davidson: addressed Council regarding real property values, the lawsuit regarding the dredging project, the ability to look ahead, that the time allotted for public comment is ineffective.

Richard Bisi: addressed Council regarding shootings at Coligny Beach and measures that could be taken to prevent such incidents, including monitoring of social media.

Teresa Duncan: addressed Council to relay that the gathering was planned on social media, the Sheriff's Department and officers did a great job, and suggested beach markets should have their own security.

Skip Hoagland: addressed Council to state that more police presence is needed in hotspot areas, the level of law enforcement needs to be expanded in connection with community growth and that Hilton Head Island should establish its own police department with the

possibility of a tourism fee to help offset costs.

Pamela Ovens: addressed Council to commend officers on their response and handling of the shooting incident, which shows that the current system is working, and thanked the Sheriff's Department.

Krista Flanders: addressed Council to request an increase in law enforcement presence on beaches and to strengthen the Town's partnership with Beaufort County Sheriff's Office through education, prevention and community outreach and suggested investment in addiction treatment and recovery resources.

Mark Piekarski: addressed Council to suggest that the Town expand service with the Sheriff's Department to enhance security in order to immediately address safety.

Rick Gillette: addressed Council to express concern regarding the unintended consequences of free parking at Coligny Beach and perhaps the free parking should be re-evaluated to reduce over-crowding and improve safety.

Lynn Greeley: addressed Council to express the need for Hilton Head island to have its own police force with increased police presence, especially in consideration of the expanded airport, which brings increased visitors, and suggested using tourism revenue to offset costs.

Kris Reitz: addressed Council regarding the need for law enforcement and patrolling to prevent the disruptive and dangerous late-night negative activities that have been occurring on the Island.

Dave Ferguson: addressed Council to express that Town Council's first responsibility is public safety and action should have been taken sooner to prevent the shooting tragedy, instead of reacting after the fact.

Philip Smith: addressed Council regarding the need for more sheriffs, traffic enforcement and canines, as well as a lockup facility, all of which may be used to deter criminal behavior.

Paige Cope: addressed Council regarding concern about the history of shootings on the Island and the change in community and feels the residents are taking a back seat to visitors, tourism and development and many residents no longer feel safe and requested that Council become more proactive.

Chuck Dowd: addressed Council and commended the Sheriff and the Sheriff's Department, stated that changes in the community require serious consideration of having a police department on the Island so it would be dedicated to the issues that affect the Island and noted that if such department heads are ineffective, they could be replaced.

Dominique Binins: addressed Council and expressed that he moved to Hilton Head Island to feel more safe, but juveniles on the Island are out of control because they understand the limitations of law enforcement and additional measures are needed to manage their actions

and behavior before another tragedy occurs.

Niwar Davis: addressed Council regarding the need for there to be immediate accountability for juveniles in order to avert catastrophic effects on the community and suggests that the community and Council need to work together more often to solve issues.

Laurie Yingling: addressed Council to share that her son-in-law and grandson were present on the beach at the time of the shooting, and they felt that something bad was going to happen based on the atmosphere.

Alexandra Ascencion: suggested outreach programs for youth in the community.

Public Comment - Non Agenda Items

Richard Bisi: addressed Council regarding concern that the scheduled time for the meeting disenfranchises working people who cannot attend meetings during working hours; and thought that the juvenile curfew would be a good idea.

Dave Ferguson: addressed Council regarding thoughts on ways to handle public safety such as putting more of the funding from the budget towards public safety, conversion of the Wild Wing Cafe building on Pope Avenue into a substation for law enforcement to include a holding cell, to show a strong police and civil community presence.

Skip Hoagland: addressed Council regarding the use of AI technology in place of a lawyer, forensic audits and financial oversight.

Brenda Armstrong: addressed Council regarding concern over the Island's growth, support of the curfew for juveniles and a request for additional educational assistance for the Island's most affected children and expressed concern for the Island's children who lack activities during the hottest months of the summer.

Adjournment

At 2:23 p.m., Mr. Alfred moved to adjourn. Ms. Becker seconded. Motion carried 7-0.



Alan R. Perry, Mayor



Kimberly Gammon, Town Clerk

The full recording and a transcript of this meeting can be found on the Town's website at www.hiltonheadislandsc.gov