

The Smithfield Town Council reconvened their February 17, 2026 Town Council meeting on February 24, 2026, at 6:30 pm in the Town Hall Council Chambers to hold budget discussions. Mayor M. Andy Moore presided.

Council Members Present:

Mayor Pro Tem Sloan Stevens
Dr. Gettys Cohen, Jr., District 1
Travis Scott, District 3
Doris L. Wallace, District 4
Stephen Rabil, At-Large
John Dunn, At-Large
Roger Wood, At-Large

Council Members Absent:

Administrative Staff Present

Kimberly Pickett, Interim Town Mgr.
Elaine Andrews, Town Clerk
Tracy Stubblefield
Gary Johnson, Parks & Rec Director

Also Present:

Robert Spence, Jr., Town Attorney

Administrative Staff Absent:

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor M. Andy Moore called the meeting to order at approximately 6:30 pm.

NONPROFIT REQUESTS

Interim Town Manager Kimberly Pickett reviewed the nonprofit requests received for the FY 26-27 Town of Smithfield budget. She stated that most of the requests were for the same amount as last year. However, Partnership for Children asked for \$1,000 more, and Johnston County Public Library asked for \$2,850 more this fiscal year.

Pickett further explained that she needed to finalize the tourism budget by the end of the month so it could be submitted to the tourism board and then the county board. Pickett stated that Smithfield Downtown Development Corporation (DSDC) is requesting \$120,000 for payroll, a significant increase from last year. The increase for funding is driven largely by a request by Heidi Gilmond (DSDC Director) for an additional full-time staff position. Pickett noted that the salary for the former part-time, now full-time employee is pending any additional funding the DSDC can get in the new fiscal year. She further described ongoing discussions in which the Performing Arts Center (PAC)/historic board has asked the DSDC board to take over the PAC, which would effectively create two arms under DSDC (downtown and PAC). There will be separate funding pots and potentially shared leadership under The DSDC with the Director as the executive director and supported by additional full-time and part-time staff. Pickett relayed that tourism staff are willing to fund DSDC salary for one more year, but they are uncomfortable with the \$120,000 figure and have expressed concern about the long-term sustainability of using tourism funds for an organization whose primary mission is downtown small business development rather than tourism.

Councilman Travis Scott recalled prior discussions about using tourism funds to pay salaries for the Ava Gardner Museum and DSDC, noting this had been framed as a way to free other town funds. He referenced the previous year's proposal of \$60,000 for Ava Gardner and \$80,000 for DSDC and said the board needs a clearer picture of the total tourism funding available before committing further. Scott expressed concern about dedicating a large, recurring amount of tourism money specifically to DSDC salaries, questioned whether Smithfield is receiving a fair share of tourism resources relative to what it generates, and emphasized the need for oversight and accountability in how tourism funds are allocated and spent.

Councilman Stephen Rabil agreed with Scott's points, and mentioned that former Town Manager Mike Scott stated he would relay an accounting of what was on hand and what was spent, but those numbers were never given, so it is unknown. Interim Manager Pickett pointed out that the budgeted numbers for tourism were on the last page of the budget book. Councilman Scott stressed that they wanted to know how those funds were being allocated.

Mayor Andy Moore also agreed, regarding Tourism funds and related projects. Moore stated that the Board would like a little more visibility as the new PAC team comes on board—perhaps by way of occasional presentations to let the Board know of upcoming projects. Interim Manager Pickett stated she sits on the Tourism Board. She reported that from their last reported financials, the town's 3% tourism revenues are managed in a dedicated budget that must fund marketing for Smithfield (including billboards, website, and digital/print advertising), along with Ham and Yam and Ava Gardner Festival promotions, a \$60,000 Ava Gardner salary appropriation, DSDC capital and salary appropriations, and several special projects such as wayfinding signage, Greenway trail markings, and potential appearance commission murals, plus a small sculpture lease line item, for a total of approximately \$386,446. She added that the county's separate 2% tourism fund is used for capital projects (including a prior \$500,000 Tobs appropriation), pays tourism staff and operating costs, and supports 50/50 grant programs offered twice yearly. Pickett added that she can provide council with the latest tourism financials and documentation, or Board minutes upon request.

Councilman Sloan Stevens stated that for clarity, the ask is whether or not the Town will fund a second staff member of the DSDC, with Councilman Scott questioning whether the salary would come from the Tourism, or the Town's General Fund. Pickett agreed that this was the ask.

Councilman Travis Scott also inquired about a debt paid off for downtown, that they were responsible for paying back. Pickett noted that she would have to check into that and find out.

Councilman Sloan Stevens stated that he could see a benefit in the idea of the DSDC having more help to do an overall better job with the goal being a thriving downtown. There was some discussion regarding the DSDC Board's hiring of part-time personnel, that is now transitioning to a full-time employee without knowledge of approved future funding for the position. Mayor Moore, recognizing the already tight budget for the DSDC, questioned if the funding for personnel was taking away from funding for already budgeted projects designed to help and promote businesses downtown. It was discussed that the position was funded until June 2026.

Mayor Andy Moore stated that while the DSDC is a separate entity governed by its own board and only partnered with the town through funding, the town must still ensure accountability for the public dollars it provides. He said he does not oppose additional funding or supporting events such as fireworks, but emphasized that continued support should depend on measurable results—such as improvements in downtown business activity. Mayor Moore added that if performance is lacking, the Council should know what is going on, so performance can be re-evaluated for accountability. Moore acknowledged current downtown challenges (parking, vacancies, lighting, etc.), noted that running a downtown is inherently difficult, and suggested treating the increased funding as a trial, with a clear understanding that it will be revisited based on outcomes.

Councilman Sloan Stevens commented that DSDC Director Heidi Gilmond is very detailed and thorough in her work, and he believes having a helper or assistant is beneficial because the assistant can handle forms and administrative tasks, allowing Gilmond to focus more on larger, "big-picture" responsibilities and strategic work for downtown.

It was discussed that the salary for the new hire would be below forty thousand dollars annually. Councilman John Dunn asked if the plan was to add more people next year, with Pickett stating, yes there will be a separate Performing Arts Center (PAC) staff requirement. She stated their salaries would be predominately fund-raised salaries. Dunn asked what were fund-raisers for downtown. Pickett replied that for the Ham and Yam festival, there were sponsors and vendors, booth rentals and contests.

The Board surmised that the DSDC's \$50,000 funding increase request was the \$40,000 for the additional staff's salary and that the other \$10,000 likely included an increase in the cost for fireworks due to rise in expense, with some commenting that the fireworks were nice events.

Councilman John Dunn noted that while the additional DSDC staffing cost could be covered with tourism funds this year, it would likely have to shift back into the town's regular budget next year, so the long-term impact on the general fund needs to be considered (estimating roughly a \$35,500 part-time equivalent coming from the ordinary budget). Interim Town Manager Kim Pickett said she can speak with Gilmond about planning for next fiscal year if the \$120,000 salary level is approved, including recognizing that they cannot continue to rely on tourism capital project funds for this purpose and will need a plan for fundraising and budget management going forward.

Councilman Travis Scott asked Pickett to revisit and clarify how the proposed PAC arrangement would connect to DSDC and how funding might be allocated. Interim Town Manager Kim Pickett outlined a tentative concept under which Gilmond would serve as executive director over both DSDC and the Performing Arts Center (PAC) with separate funding structures, noting the plan is still developing and the PAC lacks a business plan. Council members voiced concerns about splitting Gilmond's time, rising salary costs, and ensuring both DSDC and PAC receive adequate attention, while also highlighting negative social media activity and broader downtown challenges. They agreed to try the additional DSDC funding but stressed that it must be accompanied by better reporting, regular updates/financials, and clear accountability, with future support contingent on visible, measurable improvements downtown.

The Board continued its discussion on DSDC funding and accountability. Interim Manager Pickett offered to share more information regarding the organization's activities and financials with the Board from her regular meetings with the DSDC.

Councilman John Dunn asked how much tourism funding the town has committed over the past three years, noting that it has been heavily used—yet intended for projects like the soccer complex and possibly baseball. Pickett stated that the tourism fund balance has been reduced to the required 15% minimum, with the final FY25 balance still pending audit. Dunn cautioned that continued use of tourism money for downtown development will ultimately impact the general fund (e.g., funds that could go to streets, sidewalks, or paths). The Board discussed whether to fund the additional DSDC staffing from tourism this year as a trial, with the understanding that if the town cannot support it long-term, the funding would cease and DSDC would have to address the full-time position. Members agreed this year could serve as a trial period using tourism funds, with the option not to fund it next year if results are less than desired. As part of ensuring accountability, Councilman Sloan Stevens suggested to place DSDC on the Council agenda quarterly to present updates on DSDC activities, spending, and outcomes.

Councilman Travis Scott expressed concern that the town is committing tourism funds without clearly knowing what alternative projects they might otherwise support, noting that tourism's overall budget is

about \$740,000 and this DSDC request is only one part of it. He emphasized that while the goal is to help downtown businesses, results have been limited, and compared this to the prior decision to fund additional police officers as a trial. He suggested structuring the added DSDC support in the budget as something other than a permanent salary line, so that if it is not renewed it does not appear as a direct salary cut. The Board agreed by consensus to try the increased DSDC funding for this year, to keep it in tourism as a one-year trial with a plan to revisit next year, and to rely on accountability through results rather than micromanaging DSDC. It was also confirmed that tourism has already been told this may not be an ongoing commitment.

The Council continued the discussion for nonprofit funding, with it being a consensus that a small increase in funding requested by the library (\$2,850) and Partnership for Children (\$1,000) were agreed upon.

The Board discussed school funding, with Pickett noting that last year the Town gave \$1,500 to each school within the Town's limits, and also to Wilsons Mills Elementary. It was discussed that ALA and Wilsons Mills Elementary was not on the list for funding for FY 2026-27, leaving a total of eight schools who may receive the \$1,500 allocation each.

There being no further discussion, Councilman Roger Wood made a motion, seconded by Councilman John Dunn to adjourn the budget meeting at approximately 7:32 p.m. Unanimously approved.


M. Andy Moore, Mayor



ATTEST:


Elaine Andrews, Town Clerk