



Eyes on County Council – May 12, 2026

Highlights:

- The Moorings at Lewes' zone change application to add new buildings was approved, with one condition and after much discussion. The applicant's plan requires some current residents to move out of their homes and into new ones, without much choice in the matter.
- There was lengthy testimony regarding Sunset Bridge, a respite care facility seeking permission to operate in Bethany Beach. The application was deferred for Council to create conditions on the application.

Upcoming Events:

- Public hearings for four new ordinances based on the recommendations of last year's Land Use Reform Working Group are on the **May 19** agenda:
 - ORD 26-01 Changes to the Sussex County Rental Program, intended to improve participation in affordable housing development.
 - ORD 26-02 Changes to Cluster Subdivision and Residential Planned Community requirements, which would limit cluster subdivisions and Residential Planned Communities in low-density areas to help preserve farmland and reduce sprawl.
 - ORD 26-03 Changes to Chapter 99-9(c) Subdivision and Street Layout requirements, which would revise standards for reviewing new developments and subdivisions.
 - ORD 26-04 Changes to Open Space requirements, which would revise how open space is identified and preserved within residential developments.

Public is encouraged to attend this meeting in a show of support to change Sussex County land use policies. Meetings are held at 2 The Circle in Georgetown. The May 12 meeting will start at 9 AM.

Announcement:

- Justine Cuccia and Jill Hicks will oppose incumbents Doug Hudson for County Council district 4 and John Rieley for County Council district 5, respectively, in the upcoming election. The current makeup of Council is four Republican and one Democrat. Cuccia and Hicks are Democrat candidates – with similar platforms to incumbent Jane Grunebaum. Sussex County Council has been majority Republican for decades.

Public Comment

Michelle Steinhauer spoke, saying that she lives in Breakwater Community, which borders the Moorings at Lewes. She said that many people in Breakwater viewed the public notice for C/Z 2033 as insufficient and unfair because it did not inform the public what was being proposed or by whom; so that the neighbors didn't have time to respond.

She was stopped by Council President Doug Hudson from continuing her remarks because C/Z 2033 was on the agenda for a final Council vote.

Todd Lawson, County Administrator, spoke about the Delaware Opioid Commission Grant Applications.

- The Commission awarded Sussex County \$479,641 for opioid grants.
- There were 25 grant applications exceeding \$2,500,000.
- Sussex County staff reviewed the applications and recommended five that prioritized treatment and recovery: Impact Life (\$116,547), Fisher of Men Foundation (\$116,547), Delmarva Adult & Teen Challenge (\$116,547), Atracare (\$75,000), and Delaware Psychological Services (\$55,000).

Sussex County sewage and waste activity summary:

- A total of \$2,000,000 was approved for sludge removal and other work at the Wolfe Neck Regional Wastewater Facility.
- A total of \$14,000 was approved for maintenance on six Sussex County landfill sites.

Old Business

- **Change of Zone #2033** - to grant a zone change from an MR-RPC Medium Density Residential – Residential Planned Community district and to amend conditions for approval of 2 prior Zone Change for a 38-acre parcel on Gills Neck Road just east of King's Highway in Lewes (The Moorings at Lewes)

Ms. Gruenebaum offered a condition on the application: that the master plan be revised to add a minimum separation distance of 40 feet between the proposed new buildings and any existing buildings adjacent to the application site. Council unanimously approved the condition.

Council members made comments on the application:

Ms. Gruenebaum said that DELDOT determined that the application will have minimal effect on traffic, but said it will in fact, add to an already overburdened road for which there is currently no scheduled date for start of construction. The dangers to citizens from overburdened road systems is increasing, and every development that adds traffic is a cause for concern.

She commended the applicant for accommodating those residents who have to move to allow for the new apartment building, but said it is more than regrettable that the applicant first created their preferred site plan and then presented it to the affected residents with a finalized design that required their move. She said that being presented with a fait accompli regarding the ability to stay in one's home demonstrates a remarkable lack of respect for existing residents. She added that for many residents, their move to Moorings Cottage was to be their last move; but that now, at an advanced age, they are forced to move again.

Mr. Rieley questioned the requirement for a minimum 40-foot distance required by the condition and whether it is appropriate. Mr. Whitehouse noted that is a requirement for multi-family buildings in existing county code. Mr. Rieley wondered if the condition would force the applicant to build fewer buildings, and questioned how long the process would take if the applicant needed to re-file the application because of that.

He said that process could have been handled much better. Concerns about the impact to their neighboring communities was not given sufficient weight, and the way it was presented to the residents made it a disappointing process.

Mr. Lloyd said that senior housing is needed in Sussex County, especially on the east side. He said that residents of The Moorings would be able to stay on site because services are provided there; and that the applicant made a big effort to rehouse the residents.

Mr. McCarron agreed that the applicant did a poor job of managing the process of presenting the proposed changes to residents of The Moorings.

Despite Council member misgivings, the application was unanimously approved.

- **Conditional Use #2622** - to grant a Conditional Use in a C-1 General Commercial district to amend an earlier C/U #2563 to allow storage on property used as a campground for the homeless (Tharros Village) just south of Tokyo Steakhouse on Route 1. The storage in question would be items related to the operation of the campground, mainly pallets for the tents.

Ms. Gruenebaum noted that Council was not voting on Tharros Village itself, but only on whether they can store materials there on state property, which the state has said they could do; and wondered why the county had to vote on it.

Mr. McCarron said that while he commends the work of the volunteers at Tharros Village, he opposes the project because he believes it is that state's responsibility to help the homeless.

Mr. Rieley agreed with Mr. McCarron's remarks.

Mr. Lloyd said he disagrees with the siting of the campground, although he commends the efforts of Code Purple to provide shelter for the homeless.

The vote: The motion passed. with Ms. Gruenebaum, Mr. McCarron, Mr. Hudson voting YES; Mr. Rieley ABSTAINING; Mr. Lloyd voting NO.

Introduction of Proposed Zoning Conditional Use Ordinances:

One new proposal was introduced:

Conditional Use #2569 – to grant a Conditional Use in a GR General Residential district for solar arrays on 45 acres on the southwest side of Oak Orchard Road.

Council Member Comments

Mr. Lloyd said he had seen several senior level staff out picking up trash off the sides of the road, and wanted to commend them.

Public Hearings

- **Ordinance** authorizing the issuance of \$7,243,669 of Sussex County general obligation bonds for the Joy Beach sewer project was unanimously approved.
- **Conditional Use #2594** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for an auto repair business on 3.07 acres on Long Neck Road was unanimously approved.
- **Conditional Use #2636** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for a mechanical trailer maintenance business on 5 acres on Doddtown Road in Harbeson. The applicant, Mr. Antonio Lopez, explained that he bought the land to use for running a business in order to feed his family. Council members asked questions about the hours of operation; Mr. Lopez responded that some of work takes place after midnight. Complaints from neighbors cited five 18-wheelers on the property; there are no turn lanes. Mrs. Lopez and one of Mr. Lopez's employees spoke in favor of the application. Council members commended Mr. Lopez for his efforts to start a business, but concluded that the location does not support the type of business, and denied the application.

- **Conditional Use #2541** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for mini-storage on ~4.5 acres on Rt 113, 2 miles north of Ellendale. This application was approved, with the condition that the buildings on the site be no larger than 2,500 square feet in size and 20 feet in height.
- **Conditional Use #2602** – to grant a Conditional Use in a MR Medium Density Residential district for a non-profit respite care facility on 3.64 acres in Bethany Beach, near Fred Hudson Road.

Terry Sariski, founder of Sunset Bridge Corporation and a resident of Bethany Beach, delivered a detailed presentation explaining the organization’s mission, operations, and vision for a retreat home supporting individuals and families facing end-of-life situations.

- She shared personal experiences caring for five immediate family members with terminal illnesses, which, combined with years of hospice volunteering in Pennsylvania and Delaware, inspired the creation of Sunset Bridge Corporation.
- She explained that Sunset Bridge is a nonprofit public charity focused on helping families navigate the transition period after a terminal diagnosis.
- The organization aims to create a retreat home where terminally ill guests and their families can stay together temporarily in a peaceful environment near the water.
- Families would receive emotional support, guidance, planning assistance, and time together during a highly stressful period.
- Sunset Bridge is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization staffed by volunteers.
- Families could stay for approximately one to two weeks free of charge. Guests would receive customized plans including hospice and palliative care options, home preparation, estate planning, medical directives, caregiving resources, digital and legacy planning, and emotional and spiritual support. To be eligible, guests must be adults with a terminal diagnosis, referred by medical or social service professionals; and not bedridden.

Several people spoke in favor of the application:

- Carol Hess, who said she lost her mother recently to a terminal illness, and described bringing her to stay at the beach for the last months of her life.
- Ms. Wong, a member of a group called Nurses and Neighbors, a Sussex County nonprofit.
- Steve Rhodes, a family therapist and Sunset Bridge board member.
- Rob Sariski spoke about his wife’s commitment and compassion.

One person spoke in opposition:

- Ward Gazer(?) is a neighbor who said that many comments had been submitted by neighbors in opposition to the application, who believe that the facility is not appropriate for the location. He noted that the property lies in a coastal floodplain.

Six conditions were proposed for the application; Council voted to defer until the conditions could be clarified and discussed.

Council Meeting Schedule: Tuesdays – check agenda for timing and location

- May 19 – four important land use reform ordinances are on the agenda.
- June 2

Council Meeting Broadcast

[County Council Meeting - May 12, 2026](#)

Related Articles:

[Sussex County Council approves Moorings at Lewes ...](#)

[Tharros Village holds 'Opening Day' for those in the Lewes ...](#)

[Delaware affordable housing bill sparks local control debate](#)

[Route 9 corridor review workshop set May 19 | Cape Gazette](#)

Note: Eyes on County Council makes every effort to render events at public meetings accurately. It either explicitly quotes speakers, or paraphrases their statements as accurately as possible. If any representation in these notes is inaccurate, please contact us.