Camden Council reviews Dusty Bend revitalization plan, advances City improvements and public safety measures

The Oct. 20 meeting featured a vision for Dusty Bend, action on City finances and ordinances, and updates on Halloween safety and community activities.

A vision for revitalizing Camden's Dusty Bend community took center stage at the Oct. 20 meeting of Camden City Council, where members reviewed recommendations for improving the area's appearance, supporting local businesses, and creating a more welcoming environment for residents and visitors.

Blake Sanders, a landscape architect with Studio Main, presented a small-area master plan for Dusty Bend outlining recommendations for both immediate improvements and long-term revitalization. The presentation followed months of work involving Councilman Phil Elliott, City staff, property owners, business representatives, and community stakeholders.

The plan envisions Dusty Bend as a welcoming gateway into Camden, with recommendations focused on strengthening the area's identity, supporting local businesses, and improving pedestrian access. Proposed improvements include district signage and landscaping, sidewalk enhancements, traffic-calming measures, and a potential public gathering space.

Sanders emphasized that revitalization would require a phased approach and collaboration among the City, property owners, and businesses. An advisory committee is among the recommended first steps to help guide implementation. The presentation was informational, and Council took no formal action.

While the Dusty Bend plan focused on future development, Council acted on several ordinances affecting businesses, transportation, and City operations.

Among those receiving second and final reading were measures addressing the operation of utility terrain vehicles, or UTVs, within City limits and updates to parking regulations.

Council also gave final approval to a zoning amendment providing greater flexibility for awnings extending over downtown sidewalks while maintaining size restrictions. The change addresses a regulation has prevented a Rutledge Street business from expanding its awning because of the sidewalk's width.

Financial matters included an amendment to the City's fiscal year 2026-27 budget incorporating Mayor Vincent Sheheen's proposal to designate up to $250,000 each for engineering and related services, property, or easement acquisitions, and building repairs, within a $750,000 authorization. The additional language was approved before the ordinance received its second and final reading.

Lease-purchase financing of no more than $700,000 was also authorized for police vehicles and a street sweeper for the Public Works Department. City Manager Matt DeWitt noted that the equipment costs were included in the City’s fiscal year 2026-27 budget.

The financing agreements required separate Council approval given through a Council resolution.

Another item addressed the administration of municipal elections. Council gave first reading to an ordinance dissolving the Camden Municipal Election Commission, as required by state law for municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents. Kershaw County already conducts the City's elections and would assume responsibility for certification and appeals as well now.

Camden Police Chief Rushing outlined temporary street closures along portions of Lyttleton Street and Fair Street on Halloween night. With Halloween falling on a Saturday this year, pedestrian traffic is expected to be heavier than usual. The closures will last approximately two and a half hours on Oct. 31 to improve pedestrian safety in these heavily traveled areas. Mayor Vincent Sheheen thanked the Police Department for working with residents to develop the plan.

During public comments, William Browning thanked the City of Camden for its support of a recent Horse & Hound event weekend that drew more than 2,100 attendees to one event and provided approximately 1,000 complimentary tickets to first responders and local healthcare personnel.

City Manager DeWitt reminded residents that Camden's second annual City Hall Candy Crawl will take place on Friday, Oct. 30, from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. at Camden City Hall. The free, family-friendly event will feature trick-or-treating with City departments and a special Halloween experience hosted by the Camden Fire Department.

DeWitt also announced a temporary adjustment to Council's November meeting schedule. Rather than meeting on the first and third Tuesdays, Council will meet Nov. 10 at 6 p.m. and Nov. 24 at 5:30 p.m. The regular schedule will resume in December.

Council members recognized additional community activities, including Camden High School's homecoming celebrations and a recent free tree giveaway that provided City residents with opportunities to add trees to their properties.

Councilwoman Delia Davis acknowledged October as both Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Domestic Violence Awareness Month, sharing personal reflections on the impact of both issues on families and the community. She encouraged continued awareness, early detection and support for those affected.

Council also requested that the meeting adjourn in memory of Rusty Davis, a beloved Camden musician and longtime owner of Davis & Sons Guitar Shop, who died Oct. 6 at age 72. A fixture of Camden's music scene for nearly six decades, Davis performed throughout the community and helped inspire generations of musicians through his performances and teaching.