MINUTES
City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, June 04, 2026 – City Hall

Invocation: Pastor Jay Cochenour, Life Community Church

Pledge of Allegiance: Commissioner Willie L. Hawkins

Call to Order: 6:01 p.m.

Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice

PRESENT: Commissioner Willie L. Hawkins, Commissioner Michael Holland, Commissioner George Asbate, Vice Mayor Gary Ashcraft and Mayor Emily A. Lee

1. Agenda Update

Interim City Manager, Rick Gierok, noted there were no updates to the agenda and introduced the City Attorney Taylor Tremel of Bowen and Schroth.

2. Approval of Minutes

2.1 Approval of Minutes for April 16, 2026, City Commission Meeting and May 7, 2026, City Commission Meeting

Motion made by Commissioner Hawkins, Seconded by Commissioner Holland to approve the minutes as submitted for April 16, 2026, and May 7, 2026, City Commission Meetings. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Holland, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

3. Presentations

3.1 Eustis Memorial Library Update for Summer Programs

Library Director Ann Ivey highlighted summer library programs, including children's activities, wildlife presentations, and a new pizza-themed adult summer reading program with prizes. She also announced a July 15 public event featuring a live hawk as part of the America 250 Celebration.

3.2 Economic Development Leases

Economic Development Director Al Latimer reviewed city economic development leases and agreements, noting the information would assist the Commission as staff continues implementing the master plan and developing a strategic plan. He reported several agreements are expired or operating under temporary terms, including the Chamber of Commerce, Lake Action Community Agency, and Eustis Community Alliance. Remaining agreements include El Marie (expiring July 31, 2026), Win-One Ministries (through December 31, 2027), Eustis Properties (through May 31, 2028), Lake Adventures (3% of gross sales), Girl Scouts (through 2073), and the National Guard Armory (until no longer needed by the state).

4. Audience to be Heard

Mike Gambino, a Eustis resident, stated he felt a recent interaction with Police Chief Craig Capri regarding social media comments was intimidating and said he would continue exercising his right to criticize government actions.

Carrie Schreier, mother of Jordan Ellis, said she had issues regarding the Eustis Police Department's investigation into her son's death, including evidence handling, investigative procedures, and the lack of a formal internal affairs investigation. She requested transparency and accountability.

Gary Winheim, a retired Eustis Police Department commander, questioned the department's handling of the Jordan Ellis investigation regarding evidence, procedures, and leadership.

Michael J. Watkins, a Tavares resident, spoke in support of Chief Capri, citing his positive community involvement and relationship-building efforts.

May Hazleton, a Eustis resident, supported Chief Capri and highlighted his leadership, transparency, and the department's CFA accreditation.

Carla Vivian Miller-Mitchell, a lifelong Eustis resident, stated that Chief Capri was the best police chief the city has had during her lifetime.

Devon Turner, a Lake County resident, commented on Chief Capri's conduct and encouraged the Commission to consider leadership action.

Benny Hill, representing Windermere Ministries, supported Chief Capri and described him as a community-focused leader.

Chaplain Renee Hill, Eustis Police Department lead chaplain, credited Chief Capri with supporting the chaplaincy program and its continued service to the community.

Pam Simmons, a Eustis resident, spoke in support of Chief Capri and praised his community engagement.

Latoya Young, a Eustis resident, thanked Public Works staff for the Prevatt Street reopening and shared positive experiences with Chief Capri.

Johnny Saunders, a Eustis resident, supported Chief Capri and cited his responsiveness and community involvement.

Kalen Ellison, a lifelong Eustis resident, praised Chief Capri's accessibility and support of youth programs.

Daniel DiVenanzo, a local business owner, credited Chief Capri with improving public order and encouraged fair consideration of the allegations.

Amy Harris, a Eustis resident, spoke in support of Chief Capri and encouraged residents to verify information before making judgments.

Eric Schreier commented on his son Jordan's death investigation, citing unanswered questions about evidence, procedures, and transparency.

Stephanie Winheim mentioned department investigations, records handling, the chaplaincy program, and transparency.

Chaplain Renee Hill clarified that the chaplaincy program is active, available 24/7, and providing community support.

Casey Boatwright read a statement on behalf of the Ellis family regarding the investigation into Jordan Ellis's death and requested transparency and accountability.

5. Consent Agenda

5.1 Resolution Number 2026-50: Budget Amendment in the amount of $1,250,000 to the Adopted FY 2025/2026 Budget for the Building Fund

5.2 Resolution Number 2026-53: Approval of Axon Enterprise, Inc. Master Services and Purchasing Agreement and Florida Municipal Addendum for Public Safety Technology Systems and Services

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Holland, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

6. Ordinances, Public Hearings, & Quasi-Judicial Hearings

6.1 Resolution Number 2026-37: Approval of Rate Increase for Water, Wastewater and Reclaimed Water Consumption

City Attorney Taylor Tremel read Resolution Number 2026-37 by title, a resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, authorizing an adjustment to the City's rates for water, wastewater and reclaimed water services to provide for an annual adjustment per Ordinance Number 2026-10, to be effective June 1, 2026.

Finance Deputy Director Mari Leisen presented Resolution No. 26-37, proposing a 2.5% increase in water, wastewater, and reclaimed water rates effective June 1, 2026. She stated the increase supports utility operations, regulatory requirements, infrastructure needs, and long-term sustainability while the city's consultant, Raftelis, completes a comprehensive rate study.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about utility fund balances and whether they were considered in the rate study. Finance Director Lori Carr reported the unrestricted water and sewer fund balance is approximately $12 million, projected to decrease to $9 million, and stated future consultant recommendations will consider fund balances and other utility factors.

City Attorney Tremel opened the public hearing at 7:03 p.m.

Daniel DiVenanzo supported the rate increase and commented on changes to property tax policies, including homestead exemptions, could reduce revenue and shift costs to other sources, potentially impacting commercial property owners.

Finance Deputy Director Leisen clarified that utility rates are separate from property tax revenue.

Mr. DiVinanzo responded that while the funds are separate, reductions in property tax revenue could still affect city finances overall and lead to broader cost pressures.

City Attorney Tremel noted public comment guidelines and with no further public comments, he closed the public hearing at 7:05 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft. to approve Resolution Number 2026-37. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Holland, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

6.2 Resolution Number 2026-45: Preliminary Subdivision Plat for Doris Park Landing (S-26-0001) for Parcels with Alternate Key Numbers 1784077, 1784140, 2535628, 1444756 and 2585153

City Attorney Tremel read Resolution Number 2026-45 by title, a resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; approving a preliminary subdivision plat for the Doris Park Landing Subdivision (S-25-0001), an 18-lot single-family detached and 230-lot townhome single-family residential subdivision, on approximately 41.17 acres of property located on the east side of State Road 44 and south of Eustis Airport Road (Alternate Key Numbers 1784077, 1784140, 2535628, 1444756, and 2585153).

Senior Planner Kyle Wilkes presented Resolution Number 2026-45 for the Doris Park Landing preliminary subdivision plat. He noted corrections to the staff report and plan sets and stated staff would improve document clarity. The project proposes a 248-lot residential subdivision on 41.17 acres, including 18 single-family homes and 230 townhomes, with 38.9% open space and 3.32 acres of park area. He stated the project met city land development requirements and included required transportation mitigation, landscaping, and floodplain permitting.

Commissioner Asbate questioned the roadway capacity analysis and whether State Road 44 is currently over capacity or projected to be impacted by the development.

Senior Planner Wilkes and Development Services Director Jeff Richardson explained that State Road 44 is operating below the city’s adopted level of service and that the traffic study identified required turn-lane improvements and mitigation measures.

Commissioner Hawkins requested clarification on traffic projections, roadway conditions, and the timing of improvements.

Development Services Director Richardson explained that traffic projections follow standard methodologies from the Institute of Transportation Engineers and the Lake Sumter MPO.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft requested clarification on impervious surface calculations and high recharge area requirements.

Senior Planner Wilkes stated he would provide additional impervious surface information. Development Services Director Richardson explained that the MCR zoning designation allows up to 40% impervious surface and that the code does not provide a separate standard for high recharge areas within this zoning category.

Interim City Manager Gierok clarified that the property is designated as a high recharge area but is not within a wellhead protection zone.

Commissioners Hawkins and Asbate commented on transportation improvements and project timing. Development Services Director Richardson estimated approximately 18 to 20 months for site development.

Interim City Manager Gierok explained that State Road 44 widening remains a long-term FDOT and MPO priority, with right-of-way acquisition underway but funding not yet secured. He stated staff continues coordinating with agencies to advance the project.

Commissioner Hawkins expressed frustration with delays in addressing the State Road 44 widening project.

City Attorney Tremel opened the public hearing at 7:35 p.m.

Cindy Newton, a resident of unincorporated Eustis, noted that development and excavation could impact underground water flows, springs, sinkholes, and drainage basins, potentially increasing flooding risks.

Oren Owen, a resident, commented about worsening flooding, stormwater impacts, and traffic congestion, requesting that drainage and transportation issues be addressed before additional development.

Cecil Pinchos, Lake County resident, noted flooding, traffic capacity, and water resources related to future development.

B.J. McCarty, city resident, asked the Commission to deny Resolution Number 2026-45, citing that growth is outpacing infrastructure, emergency services, and local control over development decisions.

Mark Bobik noted development impacts on flooding, infrastructure, and public trust, asking the Commission to consider residents in future decisions.

Stanley Blackwell, Lakes of Mount Dora resident, opposed approval until State Road 44 improvements are completed, citing traffic.

Christine Collins, city resident, commented on growth impacts on traffic, emergency response, and school capacity.

Brian Rothschild, city resident, opposed the development, noting growth impacts, flooding, traffic, infrastructure, and project review.

Lindsay, a Lake Lincoln resident, opposed the development due to existing flooding and drainage issues, stating additional development could worsen impacts on nearby properties.

There being no further public comment, City Attorney Tremel closed the public hearing at 8:00 p.m.

Commissioner Holland stated he could not support the proposed development due to its size and existing road conditions. He was not prepared to make a motion based on the current conditions and the need for additional information.

Commissioner Hawkins agreed with Commissioner Holland and stated he was not comfortable with existing traffic conditions or the potential for further congestion from the development. He noted that there was no clear infrastructure plan in place, and he could not support moving forward at this time.

Commissioner Asbate stated that he had heard both accurate and inaccurate statements during public comments, but there are real roadway issues that cannot be ignored. He commented on the long-term consequences, and he was not prepared to approve the project without more information. He suggested tabling the item to allow staff more time to gather additional details and address outstanding questions, and if forced to vote, he would most likely vote against the proposal.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft agreed that there were too many unresolved issues to proceed, and he would support tabling the item to a future date for additional review and consideration.

Mayor Lee stated that significant information was not included, particularly regarding traffic and roadway impacts, and she would need additional analysis and could not make a responsible decision without further details.

City Attorney Tremel clarified procedural requirements and noted that the applicant should be given an opportunity to respond before any final action.

Jeff Summit, representing Summit Engineering, acknowledged comments about traffic and flooding but stated these are regional infrastructure issues beyond the applicant's control. He noted the project complies with city requirements, has completed DRC review, and includes lower density, open space, and stormwater considerations. He requested specific direction and additional information if needed.

Mayor Lee asked whether any formal efforts or discussions were underway regarding roadway issues.

Interim City Manager Gierok responded that discussions regarding the roadway were ongoing, but nothing had been formally scheduled adding that staff would be participating in a related meeting the following day.

Commissioner Hawkins stated that roadway capacity is a community-wide issue and must be addressed before additional homes are added.

Mr. Summit asked for clarification and if roadway impacts were the primary issue.

Commissioner Asbate noted that there were multiple issues being considered, not just traffic.

Mayor Lee requested additional transportation information and review before final action.

Commissioner Hawkins asked whether the developer had conducted community outreach meetings with nearby residents.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft clarified that developer-led public meetings may not be required under the regulations applicable to this project.

Yasamin Rahmanparast, the property owner, stated the development team met with neighbors and incorporated feedback, including preserving a tree buffer. She noted the project meets updated stormwater standards, provides lower-than-allowed density, and includes traffic improvements. She supported tabling the item to provide additional information.

Mayor Lee recommended tabling the item to allow additional information to be gathered.

Motion made by Commissioner Asbate, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to table Resolution Number 2026-48 to a date certain of December 3, 2026. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Holland, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

Mayor Lee requested a five-minute break at 8:14 p.m. Commissioner Holland left meeting 8:16 p.m. The meeting was reconvened at 8:23 p.m.

6.3 Resolution Number 2026-48: Approval to Establish a Formal Fund Balance Reserve Policy for the City

Finance Director Lori Carr presented resolutions establishing a formal fund balance reserve policy, noting current finance policies have not been updated since 2014. She stated the policy aligns with GFOA best practices to improve fiscal stability, transparency, and accountability. She explained fund balance classifications and recommended maintaining approximately 90 days of operating expenses to support emergencies, cash flow needs, and financial stability.

Commissioner Asbate questioned whether a 90-day reserve was sufficient during a major financial disruption. Mayor Lee agreed that 90 days seemed limited.

Finance Director Carr explained that reserves provide stability during events such as major disasters, support credit ratings, reduce borrowing needs, and allow funds to be invested for future priorities. She noted best practices generally recommend a fund balance target of approximately 25% of annual operating expenditures.

City Attorney Tremel opened the public hearing at 8:32 p.m. There was no public comment offered, and he closed the public hearing at 8:32 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Asbate, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve Resolution Number 2026-48. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

6.4 Resolution Number 2026-49: Approval of General Fund - Fund Balance Designations and Amounts

City Attorney Tremel read Resolution Number 2026-49 by title, a Resolution by the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, approving fund balance designations and amounts for the general fund and providing for an effective date.

Finance Director Carr recommended designating general fund reserves as follows: increasing the hurricane reserve to $1.4 million, creating a $5 million rate stabilization reserve, allocating $5 million for capital improvements, and establishing a $1 million grant match reserve. The remaining $6.6 million would serve as a 90-day operating reserve.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft noted that the emergency reserve was insufficient based on recent storm costs and recommended increasing it to $1.5 million–$2 million. Mayor Lee agreed the reserve should provide adequate short-term funding until reimbursements are received.

Commissioners discussed reserve flexibility and reallocation authority. Finance Director Carr stated the Commission could adjust designations as needed, with the city’s total fund balance at approximately $20 million. Interim City Manager Gierok recommended revising the emergency reserve to $1.5 million.

City Attorney Tremel opened the public hearing at 8:41 p.m. There being no public comment, the public hearing was closed at 8:41 p.m.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to amend the resolution by increasing the emergency hurricane reserve from $1 million to $1.5 million. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

6.5 Second Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-26: Amendment to the City of Eustis Municipal Firefighters’ Pension and Retirement System

City Attorney Tremel read Ordinance Number 2026-26 by title on second reading, an Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, amending Chapter 70, Pensions and Retirement Article III, City of Eustis Municipal Firefighters' Pension and Retirement System, Section 70-69, Titled “Retirement Age” of the City's Code of Ordinances and providing an effective date. He explained that the item had been previously discussed by the commission and was returning for second reading.

City Attorney Tremel opened the public hearing at 8:43 p.m. There being no public comment, the public hearing was closed at 8:43 p.m.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve Ordinance Number 2026-26. The motion passed on the following vote.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Lee

7. Other Business

7.1 Discussion - Memorial and Remembrance for Timothy Totten

Interim City Manager Gierok announced plans to honor Tim Totten's community contributions, including a memorial bench and plaque at Ferran Park, renaming the Amazing Race for Charity, and possible facility or park naming. Staff will bring a resolution forward for Commission consideration.

Commissioners indicated unanimous support, recognizing Tim Totten's charitable efforts, community impact, and the success of the Amazing Race event. Staff will prepare a resolution, including consideration of renaming Sunset Island Park.

7.2 Discussion of Legal Services

Interim City Manager Gierok reopened discussion on city attorney services, outlining options to continue current counsel, issue an RFP for outside counsel, or hire an in-house attorney.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft supported exploring an in-house attorney and noted the current contract structure. Commissioner Asbate supported evaluating both in-house and outside counsel options to determine the best approach.

Commissioner Hawkins noted additional transitions and losing continuity with current counsel. Mayor Lee requested additional cost information and noted the importance of land-use expertise.

Interim City Manager Gierok recommended not pursuing both options simultaneously and suggested advertising an in-house position first while preparing an RFP if needed. The Commission continued discussion without final direction.

Regarding the Medical Marijuana Treatment Center matter, Commissioner Asbate directed City Attorney Tremel to continue working toward a resolution and return with a recommendation.

8. Future Agenda Items and Comments

8.1 City Attorney:

City Attorney Tremel reported no items for discussion.

8.2 City Manager

Interim City Manager Gierok announced the city received a $440,000 DEP grant for two heavy trucks with no local match required. He also requested Commission direction regarding the July 2nd meeting due to a light agenda.

The Commission reached consensus to cancel the July 2nd City Commission meeting.

8.3 City Commission

Commissioner Hawkins had no additional comments.

Commissioner Asbate requested an update on the Spring Ridge repayment agreement and the approximately $700,000 outstanding balance, asking that the matter be prioritized.

City Attorney Tremel stated the agreement was under review and would provide an update and draft agreement with redline revisions to the Commission.

8.4 Mayor

Mayor Lee provided community updates, including the Cardinal Cove Community Garden revival, downtown mural project, and receipt of 250 county-provided celebration flags. She requested Commission support for a reception honoring elected officials and dignitaries during upcoming festivities.

Commission reached consensus to move forward with planning the reception. Commissioner Asbate noted the event would help strengthen partnerships with county officials and community organizations.

Commissioner Hawkins reminded the Commission of the upcoming Tim Totten memorial event. Mayor Lee suggested commissioners participate together during the ceremony to recognize ongoing memorial efforts.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft shared updates on preparations for the Japanese Festival and requested Commission support for sponsorship outreach materials.

9. **Adjournment:** 9:37 p.m.

**These minutes reflect the actions taken and portions of the discussion during the meeting. To review the entire discussion concerning any agenda item, go to www.eustis.org and click on the video for the meeting. If available, the video recording may be accessible at https://www.youtube.com/@EustisComRel/streams or an audio recording may be requested from the office of the City Clerk.*

CHRISTINE HALLORAN City Clerk	EMILY A. LEE Mayor/Commissioner