



MINUTES

City Commission Workshop

1:30 PM – Thursday, January 29, 2026 – City Hall

Acknowledgement of Quorum and Proper Notice

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Michael Holland

Call to Order: 1:32 p.m.

1. Workshop Item with Discussion and Direction

1.1 Priorities and Downtown Planning Discussion

Tom Carrino, City Manager, introduced Dr. Richard Levey and explained the purpose of the workshop to follow-up from the previous workshop and to discuss some action items and implementation.

Dr. Levey reviewed the agenda for the workshop explaining what each step would entail. He then reviewed the top three priorities identified at the December workshop: 1) Regional/local trails; 2) Waterfront Promenade/Ferran Park; and 3) Hotel. He stated that the objective for the workshop is to establish an initial draft of a program to accelerate the downtown transformation. He then discussed project versus program management and explained the difference. He advised they need a program management system.

Dr. Levey then reviewed how he worked with staff subsequent to the December workshop. He explained that key staff were asked to complete a Project Action Form for each of the projects identified during Workshop #1. The form included a best estimate of project cost and timeline with real costs. He stated that Miranda Burrowes facilitated the meetings with staff and they provided supplemental information after the initial meetings. He commented on various Economic Development initiatives that weren't exactly projects.

Dr. Levey then reviewed the individual priorities, beginning with the regional trail, and the various phases for each. He cited the strategy for the regional trail to develop a continuous regional trail between Tavares and Umatilla to attract visitation and then reviewed the description for each phase, the deliverables, timelines and cost estimates. He indicated they should focus on the concept phase at the workshop and noted that doesn't have any new additional cost for that phase. He asked for any questions or comments on the format. He then provided an overview of the local trails priority stating the strategy was to create a local trail system to connect the City's neighborhoods to the downtown. He recommended the City retain a consultant to develop a trails master plan with a cost estimate of \$125,000. He noted the overall cost would vary depending on where those trails were located.

Dr. Levey then discussed Priority #2 - Waterfront and cited the strategy to create an exceptional waterfront experience to drive economic growth to downtown. Under the concept phase, he discussed the possibility of revisiting the park master plan. He then commented on possible improvements to the bandshell and noted the improvements that are already budgeted. He cited the benefit to possibly expanding the stage area to allow for larger

events. He suggested that staff could provide the information regarding conceptual changes without any additional cost.

Dr. Levey commented on the community pool as part of Priority #2. He discussed the need to evaluate all the options during the concept phase and making a decision as to where the pool should best be located with an estimated cost of \$25,000. He then reviewed the current dock expansion project and what has already been accomplished. He noted that the concept phase of this project is done as they have already undertaken the preliminary design.

Dr. Levey then discussed the community center as part of Priority #2. He commented on all of the discussion surrounding the facility. He stated that, if they are thinking big about the waterfront, the land all the way up to the community center should be part of that thinking. He suggested that an analysis should be done of all the options for the facility. He stated that a formal inventory of all the building's uses should be completed with development of alternative locations for each of those uses. He cited a number of possible options and provided a cost estimate of \$50,000 for analysis of the options.

The Commission asked if the evaluation of the facility could be part of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan with Dr. Levey responding affirmatively, particularly if they feel the function of the building is closely related to the Parks and Recreation program. The Commission asked if the pool would also be part of that master plan with Dr. Levey agreeing. He indicated that a Parks and Recreation Master Plan could take the better part of a year. He added that the top two decisions pertaining to the waterfront is what is happening with the community building and what is happening with the pool. He opined that it would be a good idea to include those as part of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan which would put it in context of the entire citywide program.

Dr. Levey then discussed property acquisition as part of the waterfront and cited various properties the City has considered. He stated that those decisions will drive the evaluation of the waterfront master plan. He emphasized that understanding where they are going with those properties would be very informative to the overall program management. He cited the concept phase as identifying the strategic importance of all the potential acquisitions. He commented that identifying what the future waterfront will look like will be important and affect all of those considerations.

Dr. Levey reviewed the private sector/RFP for the hotel and emphasized that will be important to the program management. He stated that the issuance of a City-directed RFP may show that the market isn't ready. He commented that the demand for hotel rooms may be in a year or two rather than now.

Dr. Levey discussed the next steps beginning with economic development ideas discussed at the first workshop: 1) Position hotel initiative with Lake County TDT; 2) Major league fishing which would help drive demand for hotel rooms; 3) Improve engagement with downtown business community including identification of a core group of businesses; and 4) Continue marketing the Waterman property without focusing solely on those properties. He also suggested they consider segmenting the property for development.

Dr. Levey summarized the concept phase of the program management and explained why it may be preferable to have a separate local trails master plan rather than incorporate that into the parks and recreation master plan. He explained that grant programs are different for trails than for parks and recreation. He emphasized that the top two decisions are what is being done with the community center and what is being done with the pool.

Dr. Levey then discussed program execution and selecting someone to focus on that to keep them on track. He recommended that there be one person designated to do the execution. He commented on how large developments may be managed with one program manager working with numerous project managers. He encouraged them to identify that individual and what should be included such as monthly reports at Commission meetings and quarterly updates.

Commissioner Asbate expressed concern regarding the cost and aligning the steps so they can keep progressing. He cited the number of big-ticket items and commented on his lack of comfort regarding the City's cash flow.

Dr. Levey explained that is why he focused on the concept phase. He stated that once those key decisions are made, their staff can put together a more accurate capital plan. He indicated he is recommending they spend the 1% making their decisions as to what they are going to do. Once they have their decisions made, then they can re-prioritize and create a financing plan. He emphasized this will be a multi-year financing plan. He stated that grants should play a role. He added that making those decisions comes first. He emphasized that staff has to hear what they want. He recommended that they agree to the concept phase of the priorities. Once the decisions have been made, then they can look at the overall costs.

Mayor Lee confirmed that they need to create the vision, look at the costs and then see what they can spend or can't spend in order to prioritize.

Dr. Levey responded that they have articulated the vision. He stated they want a great waterfront, they want a trail system and to take advantage of the economic benefit of trails and improve interconnectivity, and they want to add a hospitality component within the city. He said they are passed the vision stage although they can revisit it. He indicated they are in the pre-execution stage. He stated the first two decisions need to be what to do with the community center and the pool. He articulated how those decisions might be made based on identifying the alternatives. He stated that making those decisions within the next three to five months will clear the path to determining what projects will come first and the cost.

Commissioner Hawkins commented on some of the timelines and associated costs. He stated there are some that could be done before the end of the year into the first of next year. He asked if that would be important to get the word out that Eustis is working with Dr. Levey responding affirmatively and stating that the key will be the marketing and timing. He suggested that a commitment to the overall downtown program management would be a statement.

Dr. Levey recommended continually communicating externally about what they are doing.

Commissioner Hawkins expressed support for those items they can move forward with and get done and commented on the message it would send.

Mayor Lee asked if they need to consider the acquisition of other properties with Dr. Levey responding that they need to consider the strategic importance of each property. He stated they need to do an analysis of how important each might be and how they would proceed.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the difficulty in agreeing on the right choices. He asked what is most important to the City and what will generate the most revenue. He commented on the program being a 20-to-25-year plan.

Dr. Levey stated most of the priorities are not market-driven other than the hotel.

Mayor Lee asked if they should consider the property acquisition first and how much they want to expand the downtown.

Commissioner Hawkins responded that they want to be in control of the waterfront, so they do need to consider that with Commissioner Asbate commenting on the possibility of increasing costs. He also commented on public/private partnerships.

Discussion was held regarding the various properties of interest to the City with Dr. Levey encouraging them to make decisions about the City's properties while thinking about the other sites. He recommended they commit to the overall program and start all of the priorities and run them parallel. If you need to take more time on one, then take it, but don't get hung up on one thing. Don't lose sight of the end game.

Discussion was held regarding action to be taken for the workshop with Dr. Levey recommending they commit to the overall program management plan. He commented on a number of items could be done by staff; rather than paying a consultant.

Discussion was held regarding wrapping up the pool in the Parks and Recreation Master Plan with Dr. Levey responding that could be done but it would take longer. Further discussion was held regarding whether they could consider locations for the pool or community building without having to spend money.

Mayor Lee commented on the Carver Park Master Plan and questioned why they didn't do them together.

Mr. Carrino explained that the Recreation Master Plan has been in the CIP for several years but the Commission consistently pushed it back. Related to Carver Park, there were too many suggestions regarding the use of Carver Park so the decision was made to use some engineering funds to do a master plan for just Carver Park.

Rick Gierok, Engineering and Capital Projects Director, explained it was only \$10,000 and gave some ideas of what could be done with Carver Park. He indicated it is not to the level that the \$200,000 would be. He explained that master plans are intended to be fluid and subject to change. He commented on the decision regarding the City pool. He stated that, if that is a hard "no", then they can move on. He expressed support for the Citywide Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Further discussion was held regarding budgeting for the Citywide master plan and how to take care of short-term needs. It was noted that Parks and Recreation is in need of additional space.

Discussion was held regarding relocation of the pool and whether a new pool should be constructed prior to closing of the existing pool. Discussion was also held regarding expansion of the Carver Park facility with staff indicating the estimated cost for that is \$1.4 million; however, that estimate is from 2020.

It was a consensus of the Commission that the pool should be moved.

The Commission asked when they would know about the Curtright Center with Mr. Carrino stating that the elementary school is going to be housed at Curtright while the school is being worked on.

Discussion was held regarding expansion of the existing Carver Park facility.

Sam Brinson, Parks and Recreation Director, indicated that he could get an estimate done regarding expansion of the existing building.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not they demolish the existing pool and then go without a pool for a number of years.

Discussion was held regarding the status of the current work on the trails with Greg Dobbins, Public Works Director, responding that the City is still working on the conceptual plan and determining where the trail should be located. He noted that Tavares and Mount Dora have completed some trails and he can get some information from them.

Mr. Carrino reported that the City is actively working with Kimley-Horn, Tavares, Umatilla and Lake County to put together the component of the North Lake Trail that will go through Tavares and Eustis.

Dr. Levey commented that there are two different aspects - the regional trail and local trails to provide some interconnectivity. He stated that they need a master plan to determine the location for Eustis only trails that could feed into the regional trail. He noted that it may take five years for the regional trail to be completed; however, it may only take a year to figure out the City's own local trails and begin construction to tie neighborhoods into the downtown.

Mr. Gierok reported that he and Mr. Dobbins have been working on that and that the updated capital plan will probably include a project for conceptual design for local trails. He noted that City staff will have the information regarding available right-of-way and where they could possibly construct a boardwalk. He expressed support for moving ahead with local trails rather than waiting on the regional trail. He confirmed that Mr. Dobbins is working with the group on the regional trail.

Discussion was held regarding incorporating trails development into the local planning regulations to require new developments to incorporate trails.

Dr. Levey responded that, if they have a local trails master plan in place, then when a developer proposes a development adjacent to a trail, they can require they include a trail or contribute to construction of a trail.

Miranda Burrowes, Deputy City Manager, stated that the City has adopted the County's trails master plan.

Dr. Levey recommended that the City have a local trails master plan in order to require developers to do trails.

Further discussion was held regarding local trails and incorporating those requirements into the land development regulations as soon as possible.

The Commission asked how long a trail master plan would take with Mr. Gierok estimating eight months.

Discussion was held regarding local trails and getting developers to help pay for those.

It was a consensus of the Commission for staff to move forward with a trails master plan.

Discussion was held regarding the pool with Mr. Gierok recommending they allow staff get the first step done and create a high level conceptual. Staff can identify some possible properties. He discussed working around the pool if they know it is leaving. He also commented on relocating the Chamber of Commerce with the possibility of removing that facility. He stated that removal of the pool and the Chamber building would immediately expand the park's footprint.

Discussion was held regarding the need for additional recreation space with Mr. Gierok noting that the Parks & Recreation Master Plan is in the FY2026-27 Capital Improvement Plan. He suggested he could discuss moving that up with Finance Director Lori Carr.

Commissioner Hawkins stated that would be good as long as it doesn't cause a problem for his immediate needs. He asked if CRA funds could be used for the master plan with Mr. Carrino indicating that only a portion as it would have to apply to property within the CRA. He stated that if an item is already in the CIP, then you can't re-allocate CRA funds for that.

Discussion was held regarding expanding the Carver Park building with Mr. Gierok indicating doing an RFP for a design build would speed up the timeframe to approximately one year. Discussion was held regarding the size and estimated cost with Mr. Gierok indicating the roof was planned to be two-story high to allow for indoor sports.

Ms. Burrowes commented that the Parks building is not currently in the CIP so it would have to be added to that to get it into the process.

Mayor Lee expressed support for Mr. Gierok being the program manager with Mr. Gierok responding that he would get it started but he would reach out for assistance and emphasized the need for the City Manager's office to be involved.

Discussion was held regarding who should be the visionary person and who should be nuts and bolts and what happens when Mr. Gierok is no longer interim city manager.

Mr. Carrino stated they may need to consider creating a new high-level position with the authority needed to drive their agenda.

Further discussion was held regarding keeping that in mind when selecting the new city manager with Mr. Carrino stating that the City Manager conducts day-to-day operations and can't be the one to also be the program manager.

Dr. Levey expressed agreement with Mr. Carrino.

Discussion was held regarding the community center and whether or not it should be relocated. The following suggestions were discussed: 1) the Methodist Church; and 2) the fairgrounds.

Discussion was held regarding the private sector utilizing the community center site for a hotel.

Mr. Gierok commented on the questions surround the community center including needed renovations and doing a public/private project. He suggested allowing staff to bring back information on the options before making a decision on the roof. He cited the property must be considered as part of the waterfront.

Discussion was held regarding providing a response to the unsolicited proposal that was submitted regarding use of the community center site.

Discussion was held regarding the Chamber of Commerce and the Bank of America building.

Mayor Lee summarized that they have agreed that the pool should be relocated, that they will undertake a local trails study, that they will do a Parks & Recreation study, and they will have staff bring back information on those. She asked about discussion on the bandshell.

Mr. Gierok stated there is a project already in the budget which does not include any structural modifications but will make the facility more usable. He noted that a suggestion was made to extend out the stage. He stated that Cheri Moan, Events and Communications Director, did an AI design of that expansion and it looked beautiful. He noted that the facility is an historic site

but he thought the proposed changes would probably be able to be approved through historic preservation. He commented on what could be done that would improve the usability of the facility. He estimated the cost would be approximately \$1 million.

Dr. Levey stated that they would need to compare the cost estimate versus anticipated increased revenues for the return on investment which should be done before making any decisions.

Mr. Gierok indicated that staff could develop the proposed concept and obtain cost estimates at no cost and, if approved, they could look into grants.

Mayor Lee then recapped that staff would be bringing back information on possible acquisitions and alternatives for the community building.

Mr. Gierok emphasized that they need to provide direction and explained how staff would develop concepts and then bring back information on proposed capital projects. He opined that he expects the capital plan process to change.

The Commission commented that Ms. Moan needs to make sure information gets out to the public whenever they move forward with one of these projects. It was also suggested that they work on getting community partners they may be able to utilize.

It was suggested that Parks & Recreation should develop partners within the community that they could reach out to when the City facilities are booked.

The Commission discussed reaching out to the private sector regarding the community building with Mr. Gierok stating that would be one of the options when staff brings back the conceptual plan for the community building. He expanded on the idea of a public/private partnership for a hotel and convention center.

Discussion was held regarding utilizing public/private partnerships.

Mayor Lee asked about the dock expansion with Mr. Gierok responding that the conceptual plan is done and they are under contract for the design of the dock. He cited a number of issues that have arisen for the project. He stated they are looking into available grants.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft noted he had recently met with the boat manufacturer and they have sold the tour boat they had reserved for the City so staff may need to reach out to them. He recommended they also reach out to the seaplane provider.

Mr. Gierok reported that they are in design for the docks; however, the contract hasn't been signed. He indicated they could move forward with design and then they could look at applying for grants or they could pull the plug on the project.

Discussion was held regarding the need to reach out to the two vendors.

The Commission questioned whether or not Dr. Levey would continue to work with them with Dr. Levey commenting on the excellent direction provided to staff during the workshop. He said the progress obtained in the workshop was very productive. He encouraged them to continue to make those directions each time staff brings forward the additional information requested.

Commissioner Asbate suggested scheduling routine workshops for every 30 or 60 days so they can discuss various issues.

Discussion was held regarding scheduling for another workshop with Mr. Gierok recommending they provide an overview of the regional trail and then providing updates

quarterly. If they encounter a problem, they can always bring it back sooner to the Commission.

Dr. Levey recommended that Mr. Gierok refine the timelines and send them back out to the Commission.

Commissioner Asbate asked if staff could prepare a conceptual local trail map so they could have that when they consider annexations with Mr. Gierok indicating that they will be working on capital projects in April and they will make sure all of the initiatives are included on the CIP. He commented on the number of unfunded initiatives. He explained they can't really work on something until it's in the budget.

Commissioner Asbate recommended alerting Development Services about the local trails so they can alert applicants to that issue.

Dr. Levey recommended that the local trails plan be incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

2. Adjournment: 4:14 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 in question. A DVD of the entire meeting or CD of the entire audio recording of the meeting can be obtained from the office of the City Clerk for a fee.*

CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk

WILLIE L. HAWKINS
Mayor/Commissioner