



MINUTES

City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, February 19, 2026 – City Hall

Invocation: Mayor Emily A. Lee

Pledge of Allegiance: Commissioner Michael Holland

Call to Order: 6:18 p.m.

Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice

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

1. Agenda Update

City Manager, Tom Carrino, requested that agenda items 7.10 through 7.15 be removed from the agenda, as those matters could not be considered following a decision made at the Local Planning Agency (LPA) meeting.

Motion by Commissioner Asbate; Seconded by Commissioner Ashcraft to remove the Goman Update (Item 3.3) from the agenda, requesting that the consultant's report instead be submitted to the City Manager's office and routed through Dr. Levy so that all guidance could be consolidated in a single unified direction. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

2. Approval of Minutes

2.1 Approval of Minutes

December 12, 2025, City Commission Workshop
January 29, 2026, City Commission Workshop

Motion by Commissioner Asbate; seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve the Workshop Minutes. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

3. Presentations

3.1 Proclamation Declaring February Black History Month and Recognizing the 32nd Annual African American Heritage Celebration

Mayor Lee read and presented a proclamation declaring February as Black History Month and recognizing the 32nd Annual African American Heritage Committee Celebration. City Manager Carrino noted that Commissioner Hawkins serves as a representative of the Heritage Committee and that committee members were present in the audience. Representatives were invited to the podium for the proclamation reading and photos.

3.2 Georgefest Update

Director of Events and Communication, Cheri Moan, provided the Commission with an overview of the 124th Annual Georgefest celebration. She outlined a full week of programming beginning on Saturday with headliner Will Mosley, followed by Sunday activities which include the Chamber's Chili Cook-Off, Bass Tournament, live music, and pageants at Life Pointe Church, which are Miss Florida qualifiers. She noted there were eleven contestants competing for Miss Eustis and four for Miss Teen. Midweek grassroots programming for families and children would include a game night, an ice cream social with free hot dogs from Sonic, a Camp Georgefest jump zone, and an immersive piano experience with art in the park on Wednesday evening. Thursday features Sunset Sounds and a VIP night with Jackie Moore, who would mingle with commissioners and sponsors prior to the show. Friday's headliner is Mac McAnally, Jimmy Buffett's guitarist. Saturday would feature a full lineup at the bandshell from 12:30 p.m. through the fireworks. Director Moan highlighted a new temporary stage extension allowing bands to stack, resolving a longstanding logistical challenge. A carnival, strolling pianist, strolling DJ, and live music at Pocket Park were also announced.

Commissioner Asbate praised the new event t-shirt design, including its pocket option.

3.3 Goman Update

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

4. Appointments

4.1 Reappointment to the Code Enforcement Board (CEB) – Member

City Manager Carrino presented the reappointment of Stephanie Carter to the Code Enforcement Board. Commissioner Asbate expressed warm appreciation for Ms. Carter, describing her as a long-time Eustis citizen and an outstanding community leader.

Motion by Commissioner Asbate; Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve the reappointment of Stephanie Carter to the Code Enforcement Board. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

4.2 Reappointments to the Historic Preservation Board (HPB) – 2 Members

City Manager Carrino presented the reappointments of Matthew Callis and Dorothy Stevenson to the Historic Preservation Board.

Motion by Commissioner Holland; Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve the reappointments of Matthew Callis and Dorothy Stevenson to the Historic Preservation Board. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

5. Audience to be Heard

Pam Rivas, a resident of Eustis representing Mega Workplace/UCF Incubator, provided an update on the incubator's progress. She reported two new incubator clients: Oxford Family Farms, who focus on agricultural education, tourism, and agricultural technology; and Design X Factor, an automation and AI company that emerged from UCF's Excellence in Entrepreneurship program. She also highlighted Intelligence Factory, who is a recent incubator

client that was featured in the Orlando Business Journal that gave public credit to the City of Eustis and Mega Workplace for providing a collaborative environment that supported their growth. That company is planning a significant hiring effort with positions paying over \$150,000. An upcoming March workshop on "Scaling Your Business with Intention" was also announced. Ms. Rivas thanked the Commission for their decision to support the Business Incubator, calling it a strong return on investment.

Daniel DiVenanzo, a local business owner with multiple establishments in Eustis, commended the Commission for the direction established through the recent workshop with Dr. Levy. He encouraged progress on bike trails, the lakefront, and a hotel. He shared firsthand experience leasing to a seaplane operator and cautioned that seaplane operations are quite noisy, potentially conflicting with park and bandshell use. He also noted that a dinner boat concept had been presented to him but was impractical due to a minimum sixty-parking-spot requirement. He expressed support for relocating the pool to Carver Park. Regarding the community center, Mr. DiVenanzo stated he would be willing to guide a design committee through the process and then build the facility at cost through his construction company estimating a 12,000 to 12,500 square foot facility at a cost of \$3.5 to \$4 million with the city managing the funding and site selection.

Debbie Weinert, a non-resident representing Triangle Community Alliance and its partnership with the Dollywood Foundation's Imagination Library, reported growing from 2 to 1,500 children enrolled across nine cities, with 1,000 children enrolled in 2025. She expressed hope that the city would consider budget appropriations to enroll Eustis children in the early childhood literacy program. She noted prior support totaling \$2,511 from individual discretionary contributions, including \$500 from Commissioner Asbate personally.

Commissioner Asbate noted that budget discussions occur in August and September and encouraged her to submit materials through the City Clerk for distribution to the Commission.

Ann Ivey, Library Director, provided updates on the Eustis Memorial Library. She confirmed that interior painting had been completed and that Public Works was also addressing the air conditioning. She noted that a \$500,000 grant application for Phase 2 construction had been submitted two weeks prior. She reported that the Lake County Library System Director had resigned and expressed concern about potential changes to the interlocal agreement in light of the evolving property tax issues, pledging to keep the Commission informed. She expressed appreciation for the Commission's continued support of the library.

Commissioner Hawkins complimented her selection of exterior paint colors.

Brian Kerstein, a resident of over three decades, addressed the Commission regarding significant personal losses stemming from a sewage backup at his home on Floral Avenue on October 26th. He stated that four to six inches of sewer water entered his home, and that the Davies Group, the city's claims investigator withdrew its investigator forty-five minutes prior to the scheduled investigation. He relayed that his insurance company and a third-party investigator found no obstructions in his plumbing or yard up to the meter. He further disclosed that his next-door neighbor's home had been remediated by the city on two separate occasions using Servpro, and that a new backflow device had been installed at the street for that property, without any inquiry to him about related plumbing problems. He stated his dates of plumbing issues corresponded with the backup events. He had previously attempted to speak with the former city manager without success and subsequently was told by Deputy City Manager, Miranda Burrowes and staff member Greg Dobbins that the event was an "act of God." He estimated to have spent nearly \$35,000 out of pocket to restore his home. He noted

that attorney Anthony Sabatini had sent a pro bono demand letter that was denied, and he expressed willingness to pursue a resolution before retaining legal counsel for civil litigation.

City Manager Carrino noted that with legal correspondence being involved, communication should flow between attorneys. He directed Human Resource Director Crouch to involve Risk Manager Martin in communicating with Mr. Kerstein.

6. Consent Agenda

- 6.1 Resolution Number 2026-15: Amending the FY 2025/26 adopted Budget for the Sales Tax Fund (010) and Governmental Grants Fund (018) to adjust the adopted budget to reflect a grant awarded by FDOT for the Northshore Bridge and Culvert Engineering Project
- 6.2 Resolution Number 2026-16: Approving a Purchase in Excess of \$100,000 for a Public Works Grapple Truck
- 6.3 Resolution Number 2026-21: Approval for amending the FY2025/26 adopted budget for the Governmental Grants Fund (018) to recognize award of FY 2025/26 FDLE Grant

Motion by Commissioner Holland; Seconded by Commissioner Asbate to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7. Ordinances, Public Hearings & Quasi-Judicial Hearings

- 7.1 Resolution Number 2026-17: Preliminary Subdivision Plat w/ Waivers for Forest Glenn for Parcels with Alternate Key Numbers 1193532, 1193770, and 3862860

City Attorney, Sasha Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-17 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; approving a preliminary subdivision plat with waivers for the Forest Glenn Subdivision (2025-S-04), a ninety-seven lot townhome single-family residential subdivision, on approximately 23.13 acres of property located on the west side of Palmetto Street south of Getford Road (Alternate Key Numbers 1193532, 1193770, and 3862860).

Development Services Deputy Director, Jeff Richardson presented Resolution 2026-17 for the preliminary subdivision plat of Forest Glen. The owner is Bergland Land Holdings, with Chuck Hyatt of Half Engineering serving as the applicant's representative, and Jason Lee of Bergland Land Holdings was also present. The development encompasses approximately 23.13 acres total, with 15.47 dry acres suitable for development. The project proposes ninety-seven townhome units with a minimum lot size of twenty-two by ninety feet, which is consistent with the design district's townhome standards. The proposed density is approximately 6.27 dwelling units per acre, roughly half of the twelve units per acre maximum permitted under the existing land use. Approximately forty seven percent of the site (outside wetlands) would be designated as open space, with about 1.34 acres dedicated to a dog park, play field, and open areas. The property is located on Palmetto Street south of Getford Road, adjacent to the Wastewater Treatment Plant. The project had gone through multiple Development Review Committee (DRC) rounds beginning in July 2025, with final DRC approval in December 2025. A portion of approximately six acres was previously an unincorporated parcel that had been annexed into the city.

Two waivers were requested: first, to allow a zero landscape buffer along the western property line abutting the treatment plant, noting the presence of an existing six-foot chain-link fence providing separation; and second, to limit the sidewalk installation to the east side of Palmetto Street only,

where residential development is occurring, due to wetland interference and right-of-way constraints to the north.

Continuing, Deputy Director Richardson noted that Palmetto Street currently exists as a prescriptive rather than dedicated right-of-way, and the applicant is willing to dedicate that as part of the planning process, including an additional ten feet of right-of-way beyond the current forty-foot prescriptive width, bringing it to a fifty-foot dedicated right-of-way. He flagged an ambiguity in Section 2 of the resolution, recommending that the phrase and final plat be stricken from the clause requiring submission within twelve months, so that only final engineering construction plans are required within that timeframe. An amended resolution was provided to the City Clerk.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:56 p.m.

Attorney McGregor Love appeared on behalf of the applicant and noted that the full engineering and design team was available to answer questions.

Brian Broomfield, a Eustis resident, raised concerns on behalf of a church member who had received notice of the project. He inquired about the number of units, affordability, traffic density on Palmetto Street, and the proximity of the sprayfield. He also raised general infrastructure and density concerns given the tight nature of the road and surrounding area.

In response, Jason Lee, applicant representative, addressed the concerns: speed tables would be installed along Palmetto to slow traffic, along with reflective permanent markings and striping. A photometric plan for street lighting would be required and submitted to staff. Regarding flooding, St. Johns River Water Management District permitting has already been secured. The existing six-foot chain-link fence along the treatment plant property line would remain in place. He confirmed that the lots are individually platted, and are intended for owner-occupied, single-family purchase, which begins in the two hundreds. Additionally, the applicant voluntarily dedicated a corner clip of property to the city for public right-of-way to preserve existing access for residents of the subdivision to the south.

City Attorney Garcia closed the public hearing at 7:07 p.m.

Commissioner Asbate expressed strong support, noting the density was approximately half of what is permitted. The speed tables would also help the corridor, and that existing trash and deterioration along that road would be addressed with the new development. He emphasized that these would be individually owner-occupied units starting in the low two hundreds. This will not be a bulk rental situation. He described the development as a genuine lift for the northern part of the city.

Commissioner Hawkins voiced appreciation for the cleanup the development would bring, noting persistent littering in the area.

Motion by Commissioner Hawkins; Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution Number 2026-17. The motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.2 Resolution Number 2026-18: Consideration of Fine Reduction/Release of Lien for 315 Palmetto Street, Code Case 18-00810

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-18 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, providing for Commission determination of a Code Enforcement lien on property located at 315 Palmetto Street; authorizing implementing actions; and providing for an effective date.

Code Enforcement Supervisor, Eric Martin stated Resolution 2026-18, reflects a Code Enforcement Board recommendation to reduce an outstanding lien of \$21,300 (accrued at \$100 per day over 213 days) for an overgrown vacant lot to \$2,130 (a ninety percent reduction) with a release of the lien upon payment.

Code Enforcement Supervisor Martin explained the property's history: the original violation commenced in 2018; the property owner, Ms. Fair, has never appeared before the board despite proper notices being sent to her Apopka address by certified mail, which were returned unclaimed. However, the first-class mailings were not returned, and the property was posted. The property came into compliance in 2019, when the owner became aware of the lien upon attempting to sell the property. In September 2025 she was required to bring the lot into compliance again which she did, with a passed inspection on October 6, 2025, before her reduction request would be considered. A prior violation in 2020 had also been issued and resolved quickly under her father's care.

Code Enforcement Board Chair Alan Paczkowski addressed the Commission in depth. He clarified that the board's vote had been 4 to 3 in favor of the reduction, and that it was a contentious proceeding. He described Ms. Fair's testimony as shifting throughout questioning: she first claimed she had no money to pay anything, then reversed course and indicated she could find the funds to pay \$2,130 once that figure was proposed. After the meeting adjourned, a board member informed him that they had voted incorrectly and wished to change their vote to "nay." He was there to raise this issue with the Commission.

City Attorney Garcia addressed the procedural matter directly, advising the Commission that the board's vote was the official action taken at a duly noticed public hearing. A board member's post-adjournment communication expressing a change of mind to another board member, rather than to the board's attorney for proper procedural handling at a subsequent meeting, did not constitute a valid alteration of the record. As a result, she advised that the Code Enforcement Board's recommendation stand as presented. However, she confirmed that the Commission, sitting in an appellate capacity, retained full discretion to alter the reduction amount or timeframe as provided for in the resolution, or they could deny the reduction entirely, as Ms. Fair retained the right to appeal to the Commission regardless.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:31 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 7:31 p.m.

Commissioner Asbate expressed significant concern about sending the wrong message to property owners city-wide by offering a ninety percent reduction to a repeat offender who had never appeared before the board, noting that compliant property owners including himself face prompt and consistent code enforcement action. Vice Mayor Ashcraft agreed the reduction was too lenient but acknowledged the Code Enforcement Board had the same materials. Commissioner Holland, drawing on his prior experience on the Code Enforcement Board, stated he would have reduced the lien by no more than fifty percent and found the ninety percent reduction excessive. Commissioner Hawkins expressed deference to the board's quasi-judicial role while acknowledging the discomfort with the outcome.

Ultimately, the Commission deliberated an appropriate amount and Mayor Lee proposed \$12,000 as a reduction figure, which is roughly a forty-three percent reduction, and payable within thirty (30) days, with the lien reverting to the full original amount of \$21,300 if payment was not made.

Motion by Mayor Lee; Seconded by Commissioner Holland to approve Resolution Number 2026-18 as amended by reducing the code enforcement lien at 315 Palmetto Street to

\$12,000, payable within thirty (30) days, with the lien reverting to the original \$21,300 if payment is not received. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.3 Resolution Number 2026-19: Consideration of Fine Reduction/Release of Lien for 1033 South Grove Street, Code Case 25-00911

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-19 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; providing for Commission determination of a Code Enforcement lien on property located at 1033 South Grove Street; authorizing implementing actions; and providing for an effective date.

Code Enforcement Supervisor, Eric Martin presented Resolution 2026-19, which reflected a recommendation of Code Enforcement Board to reduce an outstanding lien of \$2,600 to \$1,000, with release of the lien upon payment for a vacant lot at 1033 South Grove Street.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:37 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 7:37 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Holland; Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve Resolution Number 2026-19 per the Code Enforcement Board's recommendation. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

Mayor Lee announced a five-minute recess at 7:38 p.m. and reconvened the meeting at 7:44 p.m.

7.4 Resolution Number 2026-20: Approval of Purchase and Sale Agreement for Acquisition of Property Located at 100 North Bay Street and Related Parcels

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-20 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; approving and authorizing the execution of a purchase and sale agreement for the acquisition of real property located at 100 North Bay Street and related parcels; finding a valid public purpose; authorizing the Mayor and City Clerk to execute the agreement; providing for implementation; and providing for an effective date.

Prior to the presentation, City Attorney Sasha Garcia stated for the record that the seller's representative, Harold Vilches, had advised her that Commissioner Asbate had been previously involved in a contract related to this property prior to him taking office. She noted that under Florida law, voting determinations are made by individual elected officials, and that Commissioner Asbate confirmed that he did not believe this would affect his participation. He voluntarily supplemented for the record, that he had four conversations with Attorney Zelmowski of the Florida Board of Ethics. He provided all documentation and facts and received a clear determination that no binding agreement existed, and no financial gain was involved. He accepted full responsibility should any subsequent action arise through any channel.

City Manager Carrino provided a brief background, noting the property had been considered in November under Resolution 2025-100, at which time the Commission elected not to move forward, choosing instead to wait for the December workshop with Dr. Levy and the establishment of strategic priorities.

Consultant Mike Goman of Goman+York pointed out that he was there to present on the proposed acquisition. Refreshing the Commission's memory on the three subject properties: 100 North Bay Street (the main Bank of America building at approximately 17,240 square feet with adjacent parking totaling approximately 22,400 square feet of land area); 200 South Bay/200 South Eustis (the former drive-through and parking parcel at approximately 45,500 square feet, just over one acre); and the Bay Street connector parcel (approximately 5,600 square feet). In total, the acquisition would encompass approximately 18,924 square feet of building area and 1.69 acres of land across all three parcels.

The proposed purchase price is \$1,800,000 for the combined three parcels. Key agreement provisions included conditions precedent Commission approval, two MAI appraisals required under Florida statute, appropriation of funds, and a clear title and survey as well as a ninety (90) day due diligence and inspection period during which Phase 1 and likely Phase 2 environmental studies would be conducted. The appraisal structure provided for automatic price adjustments: if the average of the two appraisals exceeded \$1,800,000, the price would adjust upward but could not exceed \$2,000,000; if the average came in between \$1,440,000 and \$1,620,000 (ten to twenty percent below the purchase price), the matter would return to the Commission for further discussion; and if the average fell below \$1,440,000, an extraordinary vote of the Commission under Florida Statute 166.045 would be required.

Mr. Goman presented cost-comparison data on replacement construction costs, noting that new office and municipal buildings range widely from \$350 to \$1,000 per square foot depending on the purpose and finish level, with comparable municipal buildings generally coming in at \$500 to \$750 per square foot. He referenced comparable transactions including the Kissimmee City Hall addition (12,500 square foot at \$12,000,000, or approximately \$1,000 per square foot) and an Orlando Business Journal quote estimating a comparable downtown building at approximately \$600 per square foot in construction costs. He also noted that a nearby historic building at 128 East Magnolia was sold at approximately \$76 per square foot, reflecting its age, historic limitations, lack of parking, and inferior location attributes. A city staff memo indicated that approximately sixty-six percent of the Bank of America buildings, 17,240 square feet, would be utilized for city operations. Mr. Goman estimated an acquisition cost of approximately \$110 per square foot for the main building alone (or \$95 per square foot including the drive-through), and with an estimated \$1,200,000 renovation, the total project cost of approximately \$3,100,000 would yield a cost of approximately \$164 to \$180 per square foot, which is well below new construction costs.

Mr. Goman also argued that the acquisition would return the property to productive use, preventing the building from being backfilled with uses inconsistent with the city's downtown vision, protect the long-term strategic waterfront value consistent with the master plan, and provide the city with future redevelopment flexibility consistent with Ferran Park and lakefront objectives.

Commissioner Asbate pushed back on the framing, noting the building had been on the market for years without achieving a sale at anything close to the asking price, and cited specific examples of downtown properties including a Lake Mechanical building and a vacant parking lot that ultimately sold at a public auction at dramatically lower prices than initial asking. He questioned whether paying the proposed price was premature relative to the city's stated priority of Sharps Park. He referenced an opportunity with the Wells Fargo building across the street, noting its owner, George Warren, had purchased it at auction for less than half of its original \$1,800,000 asking price and had indicated willingness to sell it to the city on his cost basis and carrying costs, with another interested party creating urgency. He further described the building as a clean-slate opportunity with two floors, approximately 15,000 square feet, over sixty parking spaces, and a recently completed interior demo with CAD drawings already

prepared, which he felt better addressed city operational needs and the gateway to the downtown.

Commissioner Holland concurred that spending \$1,800,000 plus an estimated \$2,000,000 in renovation would be fiscally irresponsible when another option may exist. He stated he would prefer to enter negotiations for the Wells Fargo building, potentially relocating customer-facing services there, and revisiting the Bank of America property. He also reiterated that addressing Sharp's Park remained the highest priority.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked whether any other comparable properties had been evaluated. City Manager Carrino confirmed that discussions with Mr. Warren about the Wells Fargo building had begun and described a broader portfolio of strategic properties the Commission had identified, including Sharp's Park, the helipad, the Women's Club, and the community center site. He emphasized that the Bank of America property served dual purposes: short-term office relief and long-term waterfront/Ferran Park redevelopment potential. Commissioner Hawkins expressed openness to the Wells Fargo alternative.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 8:11 p.m.

Daniel DiVenanzo, a local business owner who had previously been involved with the Bank of America building, recommended against the city owning lakefront property in that location, asserting that the building's rear face reads poorly from the park. He advocated letting the market determine value for the Bank of America property and enthusiastically endorsed the Wells Fargo building as the superior option. He confirmed that he had performed the interior demolition work, reviewed the floor plans, and estimated the building at 15,000 square feet on two floors with an elevator, over sixty parking spaces, and a spectacular structure already cleared and ready for redevelopment.

City Attorney Garcia closed the public hearing at 8:15 p.m.

The Commission reached consensus that the Bank of America acquisition was not appropriate at the current proposed price. City Manager Carrino clarified that staff would move forward engaging Mr. Warren for the Wells Fargo building and asked whether the Commission was completely uninterested in the Bank of America building or whether there was a price threshold that would revive interest. The general sentiment was that the property may have merit at the right price, and that the market, not the city, should first determine that value. However, it was not the right time for that conversation.

Motion by Commissioner Asbate; Seconded by Commissioner Holland to deny Resolution Number 2026-20. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

Following the vote, Commissioner Holland requested that the Mayor or Commissioner Asbate work with city staff to initiate negotiations with George Warren regarding the Wells Fargo building without delay, citing concern that the opportunity could be lost to another buyer. The Commission expressed consensus for the City Manager to advance those discussions promptly.

7.5 Resolution Number 2026-27: City Manager's Employment Agreement

City Attorney Garcia asked for consensus to continue giving the two-hour mark for the meeting. The Commission agreed to continue.

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-27 by title: A Resolution by the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, approving the employment agreement between the City of Eustis and Rick Gierok, as set forth in Exhibit "A".

City Manager Carrino introduced the item, noting that the Commission had previously directed staff to bring forward an employment agreement for Rick Gierok, Director of Public Works, to serve as City Manager. He provided context that the agreement before the Commission included salary, severance, and benefits for a permanent city manager role.

Commissioner Asbate opened the commission discussion by disclosing that he had met with Mr. Gierok individually in recent weeks and offered fulsome praise, calling him "our Tom Brady" and an MVP-level contributor to the city in education, experience, and knowledge. However, he stated that best practice standards for municipalities require a competitive search process so the full range of candidates can be evaluated before a decision is made. He proposed that Mr. Gierok be designated as Interim City Manager immediately with no impact whatsoever on City Manager Carrino's remaining compensation or terms and that the formal city manager search proceed with Mr. Gierok's participation as a candidate. He further requested that the interim contract be brought before the Commission at the March 5th meeting and that Mr. Gierok remain in a protected role within the city even if the search ultimately yielded a different hire, calling him "our franchise player."

Vice Mayor Ashcraft agreed, stating that after reflection and a personal meeting with Mr. Gierok, the Commission owed it to citizens to conduct an open process. Commissioner Holland echoed this view emphatically, drawing on input from the League of Cities and multiple peer municipalities. He stated he expected the interim period to last a year to a year and a half before a qualified permanent applicant was identified. He called Mr. Gierok one of the best employees the city had seen since 2008. He expressed his desire that if Mr. Gierok serves as interim, the handcuffs be entirely removed so that Mr. Gierok and Deputy City Manager Burrowes can operate with full authority to run the city without interference from commissioners in day-to-day management.

Commissioner Hawkins expressed strong personal support for Mr. Gierok, praising his ability to complete projects in record time and his evident passion for the city's future. He concurred that interim was likely the appropriate path, while expressing the wish that Mr. Gierok would ultimately be selected as the permanent city manager.

Mayor Lee added her emotional support, drawing an analogy to the Lake-Sumter State College Foundation Director who served as interim president and was subsequently selected as the permanent hire after a full national search concluded she was the best candidate. She expressed confidence that the same outcome would occur here.

Mr. Gierok addressed the Commission directly, explaining that his original reluctance about the interim role stemmed from concerns about whether he could drive major initiatives including the strategic plan, which Dr. Levy had recommended deferring until a permanent city manager was in place within the constraints of a short-term role. After further reflection and discussions with commissioners earlier that week, he stated he was willing to accept an interim appointment and would do his best to maintain forward momentum on the city's priorities. He estimated the search process would likely run to the end of the calendar year at a minimum.

City Manager Carrino confirmed that Strategic Government Resources had already been engaged for the city manager search and placed on hold; they would be reengaged immediately. The next step would be scheduling individual meetings with each commissioner to develop an ideal candidate profile, followed by advertising.

Motion by Commissioner Holland; Seconded by Commissioner Asbate to direct the City Attorney to work with Rick Gierok on an interim city manager employment agreement to be brought before the

Commission at the March 5 meeting, with an effective date upon passage, no impact on City Manager Carrino's current terms or compensation, and with Strategic Government Resources reengaged to conduct the city manager search. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.6 Explanation of Ordinance Numbers 24-05A, 24-06A, and 24-07A: Repeal of Previously Adopted Ordinance Numbers 24-05, 24-06, and 24-07 and Adoption of Replacement Ordinance Numbers 24-05A, 24-06A, and 24-07A for Annexation, Assignment of Future Land Use, and Assignment of Design District for Property with Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 And 1213347

First Reading of Ordinance Number 24-05A: Repeal of Previously Adopted Ordinance Numbers 24-05

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 2024-05A by title on first reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; repealing Ordinance Number 24-05 and adopting a replacement ordinance providing for the voluntary annexation of certain real property into the corporate limits of the City of Eustis pursuant to Section 171.044, Florida Statutes; providing legislative findings and recitals; providing for the incorporation of a complete metes-and-bounds legal description and location map; providing for filing and notice requirements; providing for severability; and providing an effective date.

Development Services Deputy Director Richardson explained that the replacement ordinances for this set of items were necessitated by a change in property ownership. Grand Island LLC. is now the owner, replacing the original Susan Venable Trust and correcting a deficiency in the original ordinances by incorporating complete meets and bounds legal descriptions in place of truncated descriptions. No substantive changes to the underlying actions were made. Commissioner Asbate asked whether the property, located at the corner of Fish Camp Road and SR 44, had water and sewer availability. Development Services Deputy Director Richardson confirmed that only water service was currently available, noting that a forcemain serving the area is located a significant distance away at the entrance to Grand Island, with connection costs in the millions. The anticipated use is commercial outparcels, consistent with the Dollar General, 7-Eleven, and grocery store uses across the street.

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

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve on first reading. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.7 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2024-06A: Repeal of Ordinance 24-06 and Re Adoption of 2024-06A -Assignment of Future Land Use for Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 2024-06A by title on first reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; repealing Ordinance Number 24-06 and adopting a replacement small-scale amendment to the City of Eustis Comprehensive Plan pursuant to Section 163.3187, Florida Statutes; providing legislative findings and recitals; changing the future land use designation of certain real property generally identified by Lake County Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347; providing

for incorporation by reference of a complete metes-and-bounds legal description and future land use map amendment on file with the City Clerk; providing for severability; and providing for an effective date.

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

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve on First Reading Ordinance Number 2024-06A. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.8 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2024-07A: Repeal of Ordinance 24-07 and Re Adoption of 2024-07A Assignment of Design District for Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternat Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 2024-07A by title on first reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; repealing Ordinance Number 24-07 and adopting a replacement ordinance assigning a design district designation to certain real property generally identified by Lake County Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347; providing legislative findings and recitals; providing for incorporation by reference of a complete metes-and-bounds legal description and design district map on file with the City Clerk; providing for severability; and providing for an effective date contingent upon annexation.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 8:44 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 8:44 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Ordinance Number 2024-07A. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.9 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-05: Burger King Restaurant New Noncompliant Pylon Sign – State Road 19 North

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 2026-05 by title on first reading: An Ordinance of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; approving a conditional sign permit for the existing freestanding sign located at the Burger King Restaurant at 1909 State Road 19 North; allowing a maximum height of 42 feet and an 89 square foot sign cabinet; authorizing the City Commission to establish conditions of approval at adoption, including but not limited to beautification or maintenance commitments; providing for conflicts; providing for severability; and providing for an effective date.

Development Services Director Mike Lane presented Ordinance 2026-05, providing context that he had reached out directly to the Burger King franchisee, Mr. Alvarez, who had been cooperative and receptive. As a result of those conversations, the franchisee agreed to expand their maintenance and landscaping scope to include the right-of-way along the property, addressing longstanding issues with tall weeds in adjacent ditches. The franchisee also committed to exploring drought-tolerant flowering plants, noting that year-round flower maintenance in the Florida heat is challenging potentially mimicking the aesthetic seen on nearby corridors. Mr. Alvarez was unable to attend the meeting but communicated his willingness to work with the city on any beautification and maintenance commitments. Director

Lane indicated the franchisee was open to working with city landscaping staff on appropriate plant selection. Commissioner Asbate expressed enthusiasm for turning a code issue into a beautification win, while cautioning that plant selections needed to be hardy enough to survive long-term.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 8:46 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 8:47 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Ordinance Number 2026-05 on first reading. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

7.10 Explanation of Ordinance Numbers 2026-06, 2026-07, and 2026-08 for Annexation of Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1040141

Ordinance Number 2026-06 – Voluntary Annexation

Ordinance Number 2026-07 – Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Ordinance Number 2026-08 – Design District Assignment

First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-06: Voluntary Annexation of Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1040141

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

7.11 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-07: Comprehensive Plan Amendment for a Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1040141

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

7.12 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-08: Design District Assignment for Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1040141

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

7.13 Explanation of Ordinances Numbers 2026-09, 2026-10, and 2026-11 for Annexation of Parcels with Alternate Key Number 3959037

Ordinance Number 2026-09 – Voluntary Annexation

Ordinance Number 2026-10 – Comprehensive Plan Amendment

Ordinance Number 2026-11 – Design District Assignment

First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-09: Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternate Key Number 3959037

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

7.14 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-10: Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Parcel with Alternate Key Number 3959037

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

7.15 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-11: Design District Assignment for Parcel with Alternate Key Number 3959037

This item was removed from the agenda by the action taken under Item 1, Agenda Update.

8. Other Business

8.1 Discussion on Buildable Lots

City Attorney Garcia presented the framework for an Affordable Homeownership Initiative utilizing city-owned surplus residential lots, noting that this effort grew from earlier Commission direction and discussions led by Vice Mayor Ashcraft as the designated contact for the project. She explained that most of the subject lots fall within the CRA component of the city.

The program structure would involve a competitive solicitation process. The Commission, sitting as the CRA Board, would authorize issuance of a Request for Proposals (RFP). Eligible applicants would be qualified 501(c)(3) affordable housing providers required to partner with a licensed residential builder. The solicitation would incorporate tiered affordability criteria with income eligibility up to one hundred and twenty percent of area median income to avoid being overly exclusive and require a thirty-year recorded affordability covenant. Protections for the city would include conveyance of land through a development agreement with recorded restrictions, a requirement to obtain a building permit within nine months of deed recordation, and a certificate of occupancy within eighteen months, with property reverting to the city upon failure to perform. Impact fees would be deferred to closing but not waived, preserving that revenue stream for the city. All homeowner qualifications and financing administration would be handled by the nonprofit partner. The city would retain audit and enforcement rights.

Finally, she identified four to five available lots confirmed through title search: one on Gould Street, two on Getford Street (separate addresses), and one on Pinkney Street.

Commissioner Hawkins raised the idea of creating a preference point system favoring Eustis residents and first responders, teachers, police officers, and nurses, as those workers frequently struggle with affordability and their presence strengthens neighborhoods. City Attorney Garcia advised that outright exclusivity by residence or profession risked housing discrimination concerns, but that a preference point system could be incorporated. Vice Mayor Ashcraft, who had been central to developing the framework, expressed a preference for allowing the selected nonprofit partner to handle qualification, noting that the partner already maintains waiting lists and conducts background checks. He argued against over-engineering the criteria and noted that since the homes would be within the city limits, buyers would by definition become Eustis residents. He emphasized the primary goal: to take long-vacant lots that had sat unused on the city's books for years and do something genuinely good with them.

After discussion, the Commission reached consensus to proceed without a formal point system, directing City Attorney Garcia to prepare a resolution declaring the lots as surplus and an RFP for commission approval at a future meeting.

Consensus reached to proceed with the Affordable Homeownership Initiative framework without a preference point system. The City Attorney was directed to prepare a formal surplus property declaration resolution and RFP for Commission approval.

Financial Impact & Community Benefit: The lots involved carry no current revenue-generating value to the city. Conveying them to a qualified nonprofit partner at no cost in exchange for construction of owner-occupied affordable housing would convert nonperforming vacant parcels into taxable residential properties a recurring fiscal benefit in the form of increased Ad valorem tax revenue. Impact fees will be deferred to closing rather than waived, preserving that one-time revenue. The city bears no financing exposure, as all construction and homeowner qualification costs are administered by the nonprofit partner. The concrete benefit to residents is the creation of affordable, owner-occupied housing units within established city neighborhoods (infill development), providing homeownership access to income-qualifying Eustis families, including working households who

may struggle with market-rate housing costs. Oversight is maintained through the development agreement, the thirty-year affordability covenant, permit and certificate-of-occupancy milestones with reversion clauses, and the city's retained right to audit and enforce all conditions.

9. Future Agenda Items and Comments

9.1 City Commission

Commissioner Hawkins invited all commissioners and residents to attend the 32nd Annual African American Heritage Parade and Festival on Saturday morning, proceeding down Bates Avenue and ending at Carver Park. He noted that immediately following the parade, the Daughters of the American Revolution would be dedicating a Little Free Library at Farren Park, adjacent to the playground. The library structure was built by the construction academy at the high school. Commissioner Hawkins further reported receiving glowing reviews from principals at Eustis Heights and Eustis Elementary regarding the City Manager's education initiative, noting that children were reading more, parents were enthusiastic about the continued teacher involvement, and early score improvements had been observed. He offered kudos to City Manager Carrino and Police Chief Capri on developing the program.

Commissioner Holland encouraged all residents to participate in the upcoming Georgefest and heritage celebrations. He reported that city landscaper Tim had recently been diagnosed with cancer and was being hospitalized at Waterman Hospital after the most recent chemotherapy round affected his heart. Commissioner Holland asked the Commission and community to keep Tim in their thoughts and prayers and invited anyone wishing to send a note to do so through City Hall.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft requested that a discussion item regarding the potential search for an in-house city attorney be placed on a future agenda, citing potential cost savings for taxpayers in the context of anticipated financial challenges.

9.2 City Manager

City Manager Carrino advised that logistics information regarding staging and transportation for both the African American Heritage Parade and Georgefest would be distributed to commissioners. He also reported on a joint meeting held with Lake County and other municipalities regarding planning and land use, with discussions touching on Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) as a planning tool to concentrate development in appropriate areas while preserving others. He noted that the county had hired a consultant to conduct a countywide land use analysis projecting developable land capacity and future population growth. He indicated that municipalities may be asked to enter into a TDR agreement with the county in the future, and that further updates would follow.

9.3 City Attorney

No items were presented.

9.4 Mayor

Mayor Lee raised the need to finalize workshop dates with Dr. Levy, noting that the doodle poll circulating had a different format than prior polls and was causing confusion. Deputy City Manager Miranda Burrowes acknowledged the issue and committed to correcting the format so commissioners could see each other's availability. Mayor Lee and the Commission requested that only three date options be offered to keep the process simple and actionable. Commissioner Asbate expressed his ability to respond immediately once the corrected poll was distributed. Mayor Lee raised the matter of formalizing the engagement with Dr. Levy

through a retainer agreement, noting that Clermont was reportedly interested in engaging him, and that his time is limited. The Commission reached unanimous consensus to lock into a retainer with Dr. Levy to prevent the city from losing access to his services to a competing municipality.

Mayor Lee also recognized the collaborative and productive tone of the evening's meeting. She thanked the Commission for working through a complex agenda in a constructive spirit. Continuing, she recognized staff member Elis and the Eustis in Bloom team for organizing Valentine's Day card exchanges between schoolchildren and homebound seniors. She praised city landscaper Tim's recent beautification work including newly planted lilies near City Hall and at Clifford House noting that Tim had grown all the plants in the city greenhouse.

Police Chief, Craig Capri addressed the Commission regarding recent confusion about the Police Department's Forfeiture Fund. He clarified that the fund was never in a deficit position and provided the current account balances of \$31,316.32 in the federal account and \$51,289.93 in the state account, for a total of \$82,606.25. He reiterated that the Police Chief does not write checks or manage the accounts directly because those functions are handled by the Finance Department. He stated that his intentions are to distribute all funds to charitable causes benefiting children's education and community programs.

10. Adjournment: 9:12 pm.

**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