



# MINUTES

## City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, February 05, 2026 – City Hall

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**Invocation: Mayor, Emily A. Lee**

**Pledge of Allegiance: Commissioner Willie Hawkins**

**Call to Order: 6:00 p.m.**

**Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice**

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Willie L. Hawkins

### 1. **Agenda Update**

Tom Carrino, City Manager, noted Item 3.1 for the Proclamation declaring February Black History Month would be moved to February 19, 2026.

Mr. Carrino noted an addition to the Other Business Section of the agenda for discussion of the City Manager position to provide staff with direction.

### 2. **Approval of Minutes**

December 9, 2026, City Commission Meeting

January 22, 2026, City Commission Meeting

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, seconded by Commissioner Asbate, to approve the meeting minutes. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

### 3. **Audience to be Heard**

City Attorney, Sasha Garcia requested comments from the audience. There were none.

### 4. **Presentations**

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

This item was moved to the February 19, 2026, City Commission meeting.

#### 4.2 Targeted Industry and Smart Growth Study Presentation

Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, introduced the Targeted Industry and Smart Growth Study, which was conducted in partnership with the Economic Development Administration. The goal of the study was to identify businesses that matched well with Eustis's resources and would help diversify the local economy.

Gary Swoope, President and CEO of Vision First, thanked the Commission for the opportunity to work with the City of Eustis. He explained that Vision First is a Florida-based firm with

offices throughout the state and team members across the country. Mr. Swoope provided context for the study methodology, which included data analysis, stakeholder input, and analysis of existing industry sectors.

Meghan DiGiacomo, Senior Consultant with Vision First, presented the five recommended target industries for Eustis as follows: 1) Food Processing and Manufacturing: A recession-resilient industry that aligns with regional strengths. For the City of Eustis, the focus should be on low-water and low-power impact uses like dry foods and specialty foods. 2) Information Technology, including smaller-scale data centers that would be appropriate for the City's infrastructure limitations. Edge data centers and modular facilities were recommended rather than large hyperscale operations. 3) Distribution with a focus on small-scale and niche distribution, such as last-mile delivery, fleet maintenance, and supporting local manufacturing. 4) Aerospace Manufacturing leveraging Florida's leadership in aerospace and defense, focusing on component manufacturing, precision machining, and composite parts production. 5) AgTech/Agribusiness - Blending Eustis's agricultural heritage with innovation, focusing on controlled environment agriculture, precision ag technologies, and specialty agriculture.

Ms. DiGiacomo emphasized that these recommendations would allow the City of Eustis to grow intentionally without losing its community character or overextending infrastructure.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about marketing these targeted industries. Ms. DiGiacomo explained that the report includes recommendations for specific industry events to attend and marketing strategies. He also noted similarities with a study done by Lake County's LEAD department and asked what made this report unique to Eustis. Ms. DiGiacomo and Mr. Swoope explained that while there might be some overlapping with county initiatives, this report specifically analyzed Eustis's data and selling points.

Following the presentation, Mr. Carrino stated that the next step would be to put together marketing materials and branding to target these industries, using approximately \$56,000 that was budgeted for economic development marketing. The Commission also expressed interest in being involved in the prioritization of these marketing efforts.

## **5. Consent Agenda**

### 5.1 Historic Preservation Board Annual Report for FY 2024-2025

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

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

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

### **6.1 Explanation of Ordinance Numbers 26-02, 26-03, and 26-04 for Annexation, Future Land Use Designation and Design District Designation for Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1197309**

City Attorney, Sasha Garcia explained that all three ordinances related to the same property (Alternate Key 1197309) and had received their first reading on January 22.

### **SECOND READING**

#### Ordinance Number 26-02: Voluntary Annexation of Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1197309

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 26-02 by title on final reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, Voluntarily Annexing

approximately 0.31 acres of real property at Alternate Key Number 1197309, located at 77 West Seminole Avenue.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:42 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 6:42 p.m.

Due to the absence of Commissioner Hawkins, Mayor Lee took a straw poll, which showed all Commissioners present supportive of the ordinance.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Holland, to adopt Ordinance Number 26-02 on final reading. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

## **6.2 SECOND READING**

### **Ordinance Number 26-03: Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Alternate Key 1197309**

Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 26-03 by title on final reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; amending the City of Eustis Comprehensive Plan pursuant to 163.3187 F.S.; changing the future land use designation of approximately 0.31 acres of recently annexed real property at alternate key numbers 1197309, located at 77 West Seminole Avenue, from Urban Low in Lake County to Residential Office Transition in the City of Eustis.

Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:44 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 6:44 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, to adopt Ordinance Number 26-03 on final reading. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

## **6.3 SECOND READING**

### **Ordinance Number 26-04: Design District Assignment for Alternate Key 1197309**

Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 26-04 by title on final reading: An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; assigning the Urban Neighborhood design district designation to approximately 0.31 acres of recently annexed real property at Alternate Key Number 1197309, 77 West Seminole Avenue.

Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:45 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 6:45 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, to adopt Ordinance Number 26-04 on final reading. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

## **6.4 FIRST READING**

### **Ordinance Number 26-05: Burger King Restaurant New Noncompliant Pylon Sign – SR 19 N**

Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 26-05 by title on first reading: An Ordinance of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida; approving a conditional sign permit for the property located at the outparcel of the Publix Shopping Center at SR 19 and CR 44 (Burger King#13907); allowing a freestanding pylon sign with a maximum height of thirty (30) feet and

a sign cabinet with a copy area of eighty-eight point eighty-eight (88.88) square feet; providing for conditions of approval; providing for conflicts, severability and an effective date.

Mike Lane, Development Services Director, presented a conditional sign permit request for the Burger King restaurant located at State Road 19 and County Road 44. The request stemmed from a code enforcement violation where a sign company installed new signage without permits. The existing pole sign is 42 feet high, while the code requires a maximum height of 15 feet. The applicant requested to lower the sign to 30 feet and maintain the current 89 square foot copy area.

The Commission expressed that they did not see the need to lower the sign at all, as there were other signs of similar height in the area and the restaurant had invested \$1,250,000 in renovations. The Commission suggested allowing the sign to remain at its current height with the condition that the business contributes to the beautification of that corner.

Attorney Garcia advised that the ordinance as advertised specified the 30-foot height, and allowing the sign to remain at 42 feet would require readvertising. She also noted that the Commission needed to address the underlying code enforcement violation.

Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:03 p.m. There being no public comment, the hearing was closed at 7:03 p.m.

Alan Paczkowski, Chairman of the Code Enforcement Board, clarified that while code officers may have identified the violation, the case had not yet been brought before the Code Enforcement Board for a ruling.

The Commission advised staff that they would prefer to table the item and have staff bring it back with revised language that would allow the sign to remain at its current height with the added beautification requirements.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, to table Ordinance Number 26-05 (Burger King), to allow staff time to bring back revised language that would allow the sign to remain at its current height with the beautification requirements. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

## **7. Other Business**

### 7.1 Discussion on City Manager Position

Mr. Carrino explained that he had given notice and would be with the city through mid-March. He noted that the Commission had previously directed staff to work with a consultant on finding a new city manager but had also unanimously directed staff to work with Rick Gierok on an interim city manager contract.

Mr. Carrino requested some direction about whether to proceed with the consultant (which would cost approximately \$29,000) or focus on negotiations with Mr. Gierok for a more permanent position.

Commissioner Holland expressed support for Mr. Gierok, noting his knowledge of the City and ability to keep the Commission focused on current initiatives. Vice Mayor Ashcraft agreed but indicated he would like to have further discussions with Mr. Gierok. Commissioner Asbate suggested continuing with the consultant process to ensure due diligence, while acknowledging Mr. Gierok's advantages.

Mayor Lee emphasized the importance of maintaining momentum in City initiatives and expressed concern about the time that would be lost going through the search process.

Mr. Gierok clarified that he was willing to commit to a 5-year term as city manager. However, he would need time to secure housing in Eustis to meet the residency requirement. He proposed serving as interim city manager for up to two years while he arranged to purchase property within city limits.

Attorney Garcia confirmed that the city charter allows flexibility regarding the timeline for meeting the residency requirement for a permanent city manager.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus of the Commission to pause the consultant search and proceed with negotiating an agreement with Mr. Gierok for the city manager position.

## **8. Future Agenda Items and Comments**

### **8.1 City Commission**

Commissioner Holland thanked the Commission for the trip to Tallahassee, noting that years of working with the legislature would hopefully pay dividends in the current session. He would also provide updates as they go through.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft inquired about tables in the park and was informed by City Manager Carrino that two more picnic tables would be added to the existing concrete slab, with further additions to be considered as part of a Ferran Park master plan. Vice Mayor Ashcraft then asked for updates on Spring Ridge Estates and the bridge, and Attorney Garcia reported ongoing communications with their attorney. Finally, Mr. Ashcraft asked about City-owned lots, which did not make it to the agenda. Mr. Carrino indicated that it was not scheduled for this meeting and Attorney Garcia added that they were still working on title searches. Those searches were underway and they have three of four completed.

Commissioner Holland wanted to thank the police department for their quick response to the recent stabbing incident in Ferran Park. The quick reaction shows why they put that money into the Police Department.

Commissioner Asbate agreed and commented that it is time to move forward with the relocation of the Open Door/Lifestream facility from downtown Eustis. Police Chief Capri strongly agreed, describing the current situation as creating problems downtown rather than effectively helping people experiencing homelessness. Commissioner Asbate suggested working with other municipalities to find a more appropriate location and potentially exchanging buildings with Lifestream. Mr. Carrino indicated staff would discuss the issue and consider initial conversations with Open Door/Lifestream about their willingness to relocate.

### **8.2 City Manager**

Mr. Carrino asked Chief Swanson to provide an update on the Tri-City Food Drive. Fire Chief Swanson reported that the Eustis department had won the food drive. They raised about twelve thousand pounds of food and did a lot better than they thought they were going to do.

Mr. Carrino reported on the successful Tallahassee trip, noting that Continental Strategy had arranged meetings with the governor's office and other key officials regarding the City's appropriations and legislative priorities. He requested approval for Rick Gierok to serve as acting city manager during his upcoming brief absence, which the Commission granted.

### **8.3 City Attorney: None**

#### **8.4 Mayor**

Mayor Lee expressed concern about legislators' focus on BTR (Business Tax Receipt) taxes in cities and suggested that Eustis prepare for the potential changes that could come. The City needs to work as a business-friendly community.

She also complimented Police Chief Capri on the police department's awards banquet, noting the impressive community work being done by officers.

#### **9. Adjournment: 7:00 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](http://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.*

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CHRISTINE HALLORAN  
City Clerk

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EMILY A. LEE  
Mayor/Commissioner