



# MINUTES

## City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, April 16, 2026 – City Hall

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**Invocation:** Mayor Emily A. Lee

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Students from Eustis Elementary, Eustis Heights Elementary and Seminole Springs Elementary Schools

Mayor Lee recognized Oakley Stevens and Silas Greiner for volunteering to lead the Pledge of Allegiance and presented each with a formal recognition certificate acknowledging their civic participation and leadership at the City Commission meeting. She commended them for their involvement and encouraged continued engagement in community service and civic life. She then explained that April is Autism Month and highlighted the importance of inclusion across the community, from youth to seniors. She encouraged residents, particularly retirees with available time to become involved by volunteering in schools by reading and spending time with students. She emphasized the importance of intergenerational support and mentorship, noting that today's students will become our future caretakers and leaders in the community. She concluded by expressing pride in the participating students and reinforcing the value of community involvement and inclusion.

**Call to Order:** 6:32 p.m.

### **Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice**

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

### **1. Agenda Update**

Interim City Manager, Rick Gierok informed the Commission that Items 4.7, 4.8, and 4.9 (Ordinances 2026-14, 2026-15, and 2026-16), as well as Items 4.11, 4.12, and 4.13 (Ordinances 2026-21, 2026-22, and 2026-23), were removed from the agenda because they were not transmitted from the Local Planning Agency (LPA).

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

2.1 Approval of Minutes for April 2, 2026, City Commission Meeting

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve the Minutes for April 2, 2026. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

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

Daniel DiVenanzo, a local business owner, raised concerns about the City's handling of a proposed purchase of the former Bank of America building. He questioned the transparency of the process presented by the previous City Manager and suggested the information provided to the Commission may have been incomplete or misleading. He alleged the property was in foreclosure and raised potential conflict-of-interest concerns involving the City Attorney's firm.

Commissioners pushed back on some of his claims, particularly regarding the legal representation of the bank.

Martin Honeychuck, representing Country Club Manor, spoke about a suspected water leak near a pond along County Road 19A that has persisted since utility work by Duke Energy. Despite dry weather conditions, the area remains saturated and is causing flooding issues around the pond. He expressed concern that it may involve a significant loss of city water. The Interim City Manager responded by committing staff to follow up and contact him directly.

Brian Kirstein, a city resident, addressed the Commission regarding severe damage to his home caused by a sewage backup in October, which he said resulted in over \$67,000 in out-of-pocket repair costs. He expressed frustration over a lack of communication and clarity from the city and disputed the explanation that the incident was caused solely by extreme rainfall. Commissioners discussed the complications and whether he is legally represented, ultimately indicating a willingness to meet with him and staff if it is confirmed he does not currently have legal representation in the matter.

Pamela Rivas highlighted positive developments in the City's economic ecosystem, particularly the success of the Mega Workplace and its partnerships with organizations such as UCF and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC). She announced that the SBDC at UCF was recently named the top center in the nation by the U.S. Small Business Administration, emphasizing the growth in entrepreneurial support and collaboration in Eustis. Commissioners acknowledged the achievement and expressed pride in the recognition.

Lindsay Briones spoke about concerns over ongoing development and the loss of agricultural land in Eustis and the surrounding area. She urged the Commission to consider the long-term impacts of growth on local resources, infrastructure, and food sustainability, emphasizing the importance of preserving farmland and the City's rural character rather than continuing to approve new subdivisions.

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

##### **4.1 Resolution Number 2026-22: General Fund Entering into a Loan Agreement with Stormwater Utility Fund for Thousand Year Flood Repairs**

City Attorney, Sasha Garcia, introduced Resolution 2026-22. A Resolution by the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, approving a Promissory Note to document interfund financing from the City's General Fund to the City's Stormwater Utility Fund, authorizing execution of said note, and providing for an effective date.

Finance Director, Lori Carr, introduced a series of three resolutions related to the Stormwater Utility Fund, explaining that it operates as a special revenue fund supported by user fees charged to developed properties. Currently, residential properties pay a flat monthly fee of \$6, while non-residential properties pay \$12, and these rates have not been increased since 2014. She noted that a major flood event in October caused significant infrastructure damage, requiring emergency repairs across multiple city funds. While many projects were completed in-house, at least one major repair at 509 Pine Lane required outside contractors due to its complexity.

Finance Director Carr explained that prior emergency spending had depleted the stormwater fund's reserves, leaving no buffer for additional unexpected costs. To address this, the first resolution proposes a loan of \$174,810 from the General Fund to the Stormwater Fund. The loan would carry an interest rate of 2.875% over a ten (10) year term, with monthly payments of approximately \$1,677. This measure is intended to provide immediate financial relief for emergency repairs while contributing to the system's long-term stability. She emphasized that

the broader set of resolutions, including a forthcoming rate study presentation, aims to strengthen the financial sustainability of the stormwater system.

During Commission discussion, Vice Mayor Ashcraft inquired whether the General Fund was the only available source for the loan, to which Finance Director Carr responded that other City funds are also special revenue funds restricted to specific purposes, limiting available options.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:59 p.m. Daniel DiVenanzo asked for clarification on the monthly nature of the stormwater fees and how the proposed loan payments would align with projected revenues. Finance Director Carr responded that those details would be addressed in an upcoming rate study presentation. With no further public comments, City Attorney Garcia closed the public hearing at 7:00 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution 2026-22. Motion passed on the following vote:

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

4.2 Resolution Number 2026-23: Budget Amendment to recognize loan between General Fund and the Stormwater Utility Fund and to establish a budget for Debt Service payments through the end of the Fiscal Year

City Attorney Garcia presented Resolution Number 2026-23. A Resolution by the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, amending the budget for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026, for the general fund and the stormwater utility fund and by adjusting expenditures; repealing all resolutions or parts of resolutions in conflict herewith; and providing for an effective date.

Finance Director Carr explained that the second resolution is primarily administrative. It establishes the necessary accounting adjustments to implement the internal loan from the General Fund to the Stormwater Fund, and because the loan represents an unbudgeted expense, a General Fund amendment is required. The adjustment records the Stormwater Fund's obligation to repay the loan, including covering debt service payments for the remainder of the current fiscal year and ensuring funds are available to pay the outstanding repair costs.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:01 p.m., and with no public comments offered she immediately closed the public hearing at 7:01 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution 2026-23. The motion passed on the following vote:

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

4.3 Resolution Number 2026-36: City Stormwater Utility Fees Increase Approval

City Attorney Garcia introduced Resolution Number 2026-36. A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, establishing stormwater utility rates pursuant to Chapter 94, Article 3, Division 1 of the City Code of Ordinances; providing for legislative findings; setting monthly stormwater service rates of \$8.00 for residential customers and \$16.00 for nonresidential customers; superseding all prior resolutions establishing stormwater rates; providing for an effective date; and providing for related matters.

Finance Director Lori Carr presented three resolutions related to the Stormwater Utility Fund, explaining that it is a special revenue fund supported by user fees charged to developed properties that directly benefit from stormwater services. She noted that residential properties are currently assessed a flat \$6 monthly fee and non-residential properties a \$12 monthly fee, rates that have remained unchanged since 2014. Carr explained that following the significant flooding event in October, the stormwater fund experienced substantial depletion of its reserves due to necessary infrastructure repairs, including emergency and contracted work such as the Pine Lane project. As a result, the proposed resolutions include an interfund loan from the general fund in the amount of \$174,810 at 2.875% interest over a 10-year term, with monthly payments of \$1,677, to stabilize the fund and provide immediate funding for stormwater repairs.

Tristan Townsend of Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc., presented the findings of a two-year stormwater rate study covering fiscal years 2026 and 2027. She explained that the utility serves approximately 12,000 customers and that rates have not been adjusted since 2014 despite significant inflation and rising construction costs. She noted that the study was initially intended to coincide with a broader master planning effort, but the urgency created by the recent flooding necessitated a more immediate, short-term financial strategy. The study evaluated operating expenses, debt service, and capital improvement needs, including approximately \$1.1 million in projects over the two-year period.

Ms. Townsend reported that current rates are insufficient to meet funding requirements and recommended increasing residential rates from \$6 to \$8 per month and non-residential rates from \$12 to \$16 per month, effective May 1, 2026. She explained that while the proposed rates would not fully stabilize the current fiscal year without the interfund loan, they would be sufficient in the following year and would help restore cash reserves to approximately 120 to 150 days of operating cash. She noted that even with the proposed increases, Eustis would remain competitive compared to surrounding municipalities.

During Commission discussion, Commissioner Hawkins and Interim City Manager Gierok acknowledged that significant storm-related damage required both in-house repairs and contracted emergency work, and that while in-house efforts reduced overall costs, external contracting was still necessary for major failures such as road washouts and culvert damage. Finance Director Carr clarified that the fund's starting balance prior to the storm was approximately \$600,000, which had been reduced substantially after emergency expenditures, leaving insufficient reserves for additional incidents. She also noted that a rate study was already underway prior to the flooding due to stormwater rates not being increased in over a decade.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:16 p.m. and with no public comments offered, she immediately closed the public hearing at 7:16 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Hawkins, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution 2026-36. Motion passed on the following vote

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

4.4 Resolution Number 2026-40: Authorization to Proceed to Closing – 21 North Grove Street

City Attorney Garcia introduced Resolution Number 2026-40. A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, confirming compliance with Section 166.045, Florida Statutes, for the acquisition of real property located at 21 North Grove Street; making detailed

legislative findings; approving the purchase price as fair and reasonable; confirming completion of due diligence; appropriating funds; authorizing the interim city manager, city attorney, and finance director to finalize all conditions precedent and closing requirements; authorizing the execution and delivery of closing documents and disbursement of funds; approving permitted title exceptions; providing for implementation; and providing for an effective date.

Interim City Manager Gierok reported that since the initial presentation, city staff completed due diligence on the proposed property acquisition, including obtaining a second independent appraisal, which confirmed a valuation of approximately \$1.4 million. There were no unexpected issues identified during the review, the survey was accepted, and only routine title-related matters remained, which will be resolved prior to closing. He requested authorization to release funds and proceed with finalizing the purchase. City Attorney Garcia confirmed that the city has verified available budgeted funds within the building inspection fund and completed title review, noting that an existing mortgage will be satisfied at closing. She confirmed that both required appraisals were obtained and deemed acceptable for city reliance, including one independent certified appraisal. Vice Mayor Ashcraft confirmed that funding sources extend beyond the general fund, and Interim City Manager Gierok clarified that the purchase will be funded through the building department fund.

Commissioner Hawkins inquired whether renovation work would be completed in-house, and Interim City Manager Gierok responded that design work would be handled internally, while certain remediation and waterproofing work would require outside expertise, likely through a Construction Manager at Risk (CMAR) delivery method. He explained that CMAR would allow the city to negotiate construction services and return for Commission approval of associated fees at a later date. He noted that renovation funding would be shared between the building fund and contributing departments, including fire administration and engineering, which will fund their respective buildouts.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:21 p.m. Daniel DiVenanzo expressed support for the purchase, stating that the property represents strong value based on its construction quality, location, and parking capacity. He noted that the building's appearance is well-suited for municipal use. There being no further public comments, City Attorney Garcia closed the public hearing at 7:21 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution 2026-40. The motion passed on the following vote:

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

#### 4.5 Resolution Number 2026-43: Consideration of Fine Reduction/Release of Lien for 209 West Badger Avenue, Code Case 20-01284

City Attorney Garcia presented Resolution Number 2026-43. A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, providing for Commission determination of a Code Enforcement Lien of property located at 209 West Badger Avenue; authorizing implementing actions; and providing for an effective date.

Code Enforcement Supervisor Eric Martin presented Resolution 2026-43, which would reduce an outstanding code enforcement lien of \$108,000 to zero for the vacant property at 209 West Badger Avenue. He explained that the lien resulted from two violations, an unsafe structure and ongoing nuisance conditions stemming from a 2021 code enforcement board order that imposed a \$250 per day fine. The city demolished the unsafe structure and completed

nuisance abatement in February 2023 at a cost of approximately \$16,500. The property was later sold at a tax deed sale in January 2025, allowing the City to recover nearly all associated costs through surplus funds, with the remaining balance paid by the new owner. Because the City has been fully reimbursed, the code enforcement board reviewed the case in March 2026 and recommended reducing the remaining fines to zero.

Commissioner Hawkins asked for clarification on why fines continued to accrue after the structure was demolished. Code Enforcement Supervisor Martin explained that fines accumulated only until the violation was abated and ceased once demolition was completed. Commissioner Hawkins inquired about delays in the process, and Mr. Martin noted that time was spent attempting to allow a third-party buyer to resolve the issues before the City proceeded with demolition, followed by necessary steps such as asbestos abatement, bidding, and Commission approval. Mayor Lee asked whether any violations continued after demolition, to which Mr. Martin responded that minor issues such as overgrown grass and dumping were quickly addressed by the new property owner. Mr. Martin further explained that lien reduction could not be processed until the city secured reimbursement through the tax deed surplus process.

Commissioner Hawkins confirmed that the city had been made whole financially, which Mr. Martin affirmed. City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:30 p.m., with no public comments offered she immediately closed the public hearing at 7:30 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution 2026-43.

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

#### 4.6 Second Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-20: Amendment to the Land Development Regulations – Prohibition of Medical Marijuana Treatment Center Dispensing Facilities

Prior to discussion of Ordinance 2026-20, Commissioner Asbate stated for the record that he had consulted with the Commission on Ethics regarding his ability to vote and confirmed he would be participating in the item.

City Attorney Garcia introduced Ordinance Number 2026-20. An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, amending the City of Eustis Land Development Regulations; providing for the prohibition of Medical Marijuana Treatment Center Dispensing facilities within the City pursuant to Section 381.986(11)(b), Florida Statutes; providing legislative findings in support thereof; providing for definitions, nonconforming uses, and enforcement; providing for conflicts, severability, codification; and providing for an effective date.

City Attorney Garcia noted the ordinance had been previously presented at the April 2, 2026, City Commission meeting and remained unchanged in its intent to restrict future locations while allowing existing legally established uses to continue as non-conforming uses.

During Commission discussion, City Attorney Garcia provided clarification on the distinction between legally non-conforming uses and conditional uses. She explained that non-conforming use status would allow existing facilities to continue operating but would prohibit new establishments, whereas a conditional use framework could introduce legal and procedural complications, including potential due process and property rights concerns. Commissioners Ashcraft, Hawkins, and Asbate engaged in discussion regarding potential alternative approaches, including hybrid models and whether additional flexibility could be incorporated into the ordinance. City Attorney Garcia reiterated that the governing state statute establishes

a largely binary framework, limiting the City's ability to regulate these facilities differently from pharmacies without legal risk.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:41 p.m. Daniel DiVenanzo, a licensed real estate broker, spoke in favor of protecting property rights and raised questions regarding how the ordinance would impact business transfers, rebuilding after damage, and compliance with building code requirements such as ADA standards. Attorney Sherry Sutphen, representing MEGA 2901, LLC., provided extensive legal commentary, warning that the ordinance as drafted could be vulnerable to legal challenge under state law, including provisions related to disaster recovery legislation and vested rights protections. She advised that the ordinance could potentially be deemed unenforceable if challenged and recommended that the City delay adoption to further refine the legal structure, particularly in relation to vested rights procedures and consistency within the ordinance. The public hearing portion was closed at 8:04 p.m.

Following public comment, Commissioners discussed potential legal risks, including exposure to litigation under property rights statutes and state law. Commissioner Holland expressed concern about prior litigation experience stemming from land use changes. He would like to see this item tabled for further review. Vice Mayor Ashcraft agreed he would like Ordinance 2026-20 tabled for further legal review and clarification, citing the need for additional analysis of conditional use versus non-conforming use structures. Commissioner Hawkins also supported tabling, emphasizing caution and the need to avoid potential legal exposure. City Attorney Garcia offered to prepare a legal memorandum addressing vested rights implications and to coordinate further review, including consultation with outside counsel if needed.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Holland to table Ordinance 2026-20 pending further review and clarification.

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

Following the vote, City Attorney Garcia informed the Commission that, while a discussion item was being tabled, any future applications would continue to be processed under the City's existing code without any suspension of review. She addressed concerns raised regarding a potential conflict of interest related to a municipal property transaction involving Bank of America and referenced mortgage-related interests involving First National Bank, Bowen and Schroth. Attorney Garcia stated that her involvement in the transaction was strictly limited to reviewing the matter for compliance with statutory requirements governing municipal property sales, and that she did not participate in negotiations, pricing discussions, or any decision-making authority, which remained with the City Manager and staff.

Commissioner Asbate questioned City Attorney Garcia regarding whether the Commission had been informed of her relationship with the lending institution, expressing concern that disclosure had only been made to staff and not to the elected body. City Attorney Garcia responded that she did not believe a conflict of interest existed, that she had consulted the Florida Bar for ethical guidance, and that she had informed City staff and the City Manager out of an abundance of caution. Vice Mayor Ashcraft raised concerns regarding the appearance of selective caution in disclosure practices and asked whether the firm or the individual attorney had a conflict, to which City Attorney Garcia reiterated that she had no direct involvement in negotiations and that her role was limited to legal compliance review. Deputy City Manager, Miranda Burrowes confirmed that the transaction had been negotiated by former City Manager Tom Carrino and Mike Goman, and that the matter had been disclosed internally early in the process to staff involved.

Commissioners continued to question whether the Commission would have acted differently had the information been disclosed earlier, while Commissioner Hawkins and others noted that the Florida Bar had not identified a conflict requiring action. Commissioner Asbate maintained that the disclosure was insufficient and expressed diminished confidence in the City Attorney's handling of the matter. Mayor Lee ultimately intervened to halt further debate, stating that the matter should be resolved in a separate setting, and directed the Commission to move forward with the agenda.

4.7 Explanation of Ordinances Numbers 2026-14, 2026-15, and 2026-16 for Annexation, Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Future Land Use, and Design District Assignment of Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1307104

First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-14: Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternate Key Number 1307104

This item was not transferred from the Local Planning Agency for consideration of the City Commission.

4.8 First Reading for Ordinance Number 2026-15: Consideration of Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Future Land Use Amendment for Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1307104

This item was not transferred from the Local Planning Agency for consideration of the City Commission.

4.9 First Reading for Ordinance Number 2026-16: Design District Assignment for Annexation of Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1307104

This item was not transferred from the Local Planning Agency for consideration of the City Commission.

4.10 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-19: Consideration of Comprehensive Plan Amendment for Parcel Alternate Key 1761310

City Attorney Garcia presented Ordinance Number 2026-19. 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 0.2 acres of real property at alternate key number 1961310, located at 1430 Morin Street, from Suburban Residential to Residential Office Transition.

Senior Planner, Kyle Wilkes presented Ordinance 2026-19, a request for a Future Land Use Map amendment for the property located at 1430 Warren Street, Alternate Key 1761310, owned by Janice Wilson and represented by Julie Cavallaro of Patriotic Mortgage. He stated the 0.2-acre parcel is currently used as a hair and beauty salon that has been operating since 2002. The request seeks to change the land use designation from Suburban Residential to Residential Office Transition to allow for additional uses permitted under that category. Continuing, he explained that the site is located along Warren Street and Barnes Avenue in a transitional area between more intensive commercial uses and the surrounding residential neighborhood, noting that Residential Office Transition designations already exist nearby to the east and north. He further reported that utilities are available to serve the site, there are no wetlands or floodplain issues, and there are no soil constraints due to the property's existing urbanized condition. Staff reviewed the request under Chapter 163 of the Florida Statutes, the Future Land Use Element Appendix, and Chapter 102 of the Land Development Regulations and found the proposal consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and surrounding land use pattern. The application was properly advertised on April 6th and April 13th in the Daily

Commercial and mailed to adjacent property owners on April 3rd. Staff recommended approval of the amendment.

Commissioner Hawkins asked whether any comments or objections had been received from nearby property owners, and Mr. Wilkes responded that no feedback had been submitted. City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 8:21 p.m. and with no public comments offered she immediately closed the public hearing at 8:21 p.m.

Motion made by Commissioner Holland, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2026-19. The motion passed on the following vote:

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

4.11 Explanation of Ordinance Numbers 2026-21, 2026-22 and 2026-23 for Annexation, Future Land Use and Design District Assignment of a Parcel of Land with Alternate Key 1212685

First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-21 for Annexation of a Parcel of Land with Alternate Key 1212685

The applicant withdrew this application at the Local Planning Agency meeting.

4.12 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-22: Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment for Consideration of Assignment of Future Land Use to a Recently Annexed Parcel with Alternate Key Number 1212685

The applicant withdrew this application at the Local Planning Agency meeting.

4.13 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-23: Design District Assignment for Recently Annexed Parcels with Alternate Keys 1212685

The applicant withdrew this application at the Local Planning Agency meeting.

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

### **5.1 City Commission**

Commissioner Holland stated he had no comments on the item.

Commissioner Asbate raised questions regarding the City's continued engagement with consultant Mike Goman, noting his attendance at a recent workshop. Interim City Manager Gierok confirmed that Goman attended the workshop independently and was not directed or compensated by the city for attendance. Deputy City Manager Burrowes clarified that Goman remains engaged with the city for limited work, including assistance with data gathering for Sharps Park. Commissioner Asbate expressed concern regarding the scope of work and associated costs, stating the city has expended approximately \$90,000 to \$100,000 and referencing additional costs and damages she attributed to the consultant's involvement. He requested that the contract be discontinued and referenced a preference for continuing work with Dr. Levy on ongoing initiatives.

Commissioner Hawkins provided updates on several community and infrastructure matters. He inquired about the Lake Yale project, and Interim City Manager Gierok confirmed the city currently has no agreement in place related to that project. Commissioner Hawkins also referenced prior discussions regarding Estes Road and the stormwater project and noted communication received from Congressman Byrne's office suggesting potential funding pathways without state or county involvement. He requested staff review the information for feasibility. He also expressed appreciation for community engagement, highlighting recent

youth participation in a citywide cleanup effort involving local schools, ROTC, cheer, and athletic groups, as well as the special needs prom event held over the weekend. Additionally, he announced upcoming community events, including an autism awareness walk, a volunteer expo at the community center, and a motorcycle event scheduled downtown.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft requested an update on the City's marketing RFP. Interim City Manager Gierok confirmed the RFP has been issued and that a selection committee has been established, with follow-up pending on its current status. Commissioner Asbate inquired whether the marketing effort could be integrated into broader planning efforts involving Dr. Levey and other consultants, noting potential synergies with external marketing firms engaged in similar work elsewhere. Interim City Manager Gierok acknowledged that the consultant had been made aware of the opportunity but did not indicate additional proposals at this time. The Commission concluded with no further discussion.

## **5.2 City Manager**

Interim City Manager Gierok reported that earlier in the day he and the Deputy City Manager observed a coordinated law enforcement operation involving the Eustis Police Department and multiple partner agencies. He described the operation as highly organized and effective, and invited Captain Fanning to provide further details on the activity.

Captain John Fanning, Commander of the Criminal Investigations Division and SWAT Commander, explained that the operation was conducted through Mid Florida SWAT in coordination with the Lake County Sheriff's Office. He reported that a month-long investigation culminated in the execution of a search warrant at approximately 7:00 a.m. at 1022 and 1024 Moran Street, locations associated with a longstanding drug operation that also extends to a nearby motel. During the search, officers recovered multiple controlled substances, including methamphetamine, cocaine, fentanyl (including fentanyl pills), morphine, and marijuana, as well as three firearms. Five adults were arrested on felony drug possession charges, with additional charges anticipated as the investigation continues.

Captain Fanning emphasized the strong interagency collaboration, noting that a Eustis Police detective assigned to the Lake County Special Investigations Bureau played a key role in developing the case. He credited Lake County Sheriff's Office personnel and SWAT team for their coordination and planning, and highlighted the use of modern tactical methods, including drones, robots, and rehearsed "dry runs," to reduce risk to officers and the public. He contrasted current practices with older, more aggressive entry tactics, noting that modern procedures significantly improve safety outcomes.

Following the execution of the warrant and arrests, Captain Fanning stated that code enforcement and building officials were called to the scene due to observed violations. As a result, both properties were condemned and utilities, including power, were disconnected to prevent further illegal activity. He expressed optimism that the operation would significantly disrupt ongoing drug activity in the area and reduce related community complaints.

Captain Fanning acknowledged support from city leadership, including Interim City Manager Gierok and Deputy City Manager Burrowes, who were present at the scene. He thanked all participating agencies and city personnel for their coordination in what he described as a complex, months-long investigation.

Following the presentation, Commissioner Hawkins and Mayor Lee commended the police department and partner agencies for the successful operation, recognizing the professionalism and effectiveness of the coordinated effort. Interim City Manager Gierok echoed these sentiments, praising the teamwork, precision, and overall execution of the operation.

### 5.3 City Attorney

City Attorney Garcia had no further items to address.

### 5.4 Mayor

Mayor Lee began by describing her participation in a community prayer initiative organized by Pastor Renee, which involved groups positioned at multiple city entrances to pray for the city. She noted that she participated in the event along with Commissioner Hawkins and characterized it as a meaningful and reflective experience.

She highlighted ongoing downtown and public space enhancements, specifically referencing “butterfly wings” installations at Liberty Circle, Elizabeth Circle, and Palmetto Plaza. Mayor Lee commended staff members Marissa and Michelle for developing a brochure and accompanying map identifying the locations of these installations. She shared that visitors from Wisconsin had expressed interest in visiting all the butterfly wing locations, reinforcing the value of providing accessible informational materials for residents and tourists.

Mayor Lee shared information obtained from a Lake County Sheriff’s Office community outreach presentation. She noted several public safety and engagement programs, including a camera registration program that allows residents to register doorbell and security cameras to assist law enforcement if incidents occur nearby. She also referenced a “safety net” tracking program designed to assist individuals who may become lost or wander, along with a lockbox program that provides emergency responders access to residences during emergencies, and a “911 Smart” program that allows residents to provide critical household and medical information to dispatchers and first responders. She expressed interest in increasing public awareness of these programs through brochures and other outreach materials.

Additionally, Mayor Lee followed up on a prior discussion regarding utility compatibility and requested an update. Interim City Manager Gierok responded that staff was preparing a letter for the Commission; however, there are minor revisions still needed before distribution.

Mayor Lee concluded by thanking attendees for their patience, acknowledging the Eustis Police Department for their work, and expressing appreciation for the efforts of city staff and public safety personnel.

## 6. Adjournment: 8:40 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