



CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION

Monday, February 17, 2025 at 6:00 p.m.
Council Chambers and YouTube Livestream

Website: www.forestparkga.gov
YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3c28p0A>
Phone Number: (404) 366.4720

FOREST PARK CITY HALL
745 Forest Parkway
Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Angelyne Butler, MPA

The Honorable Kimberly James
The Honorable Hector Gutierrez

The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells
The Honorable Allan Mears

Ricky L. Clark Jr, City Manager
Randi Rainey, City Clerk
Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

DRAFT MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME: Mayor Butler called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK: A quorum was established.

Attendee's Name	Title	Absent	Present
Angelyne Butler, MPA	Mayor, At-Large		X
Kimberly James	Council Member, Ward 1		X
Hector Gutierrez	Council Member, Ward 3		X
Latresa Akins-Wells	Council Member, Ward 4		X
Allan Mears	Council Member, Ward 5 -		X

Pauline Warrior, Chief of Staff; Joshua Cox, IT Director; Rodney Virgil, Level 2 Support Engineer; Javon Lloyd, PIO; John Wiggins, Finance Director; Jeremi Patterson, Deputy Finance; Shalonda Brown, HR Director; Diane Lewis, HR Deputy Director; Nicole Dozier, PDC Director; Marsellas Williams, Economic Development Director; Dorthy Roper-Jackson, Municipal Court Director; Tarik Maxwell, Rec and Leisure Director; Alton Matthews, Public Works Director; Nigel Whatley, Public Works Deputy Director; David Halcome Deputy Fire Chief; Brandon Criss, Police Chief, Derry Walker, Code Compliance Director, and Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS:

It was motioned to approve the agenda as printed.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears

NEW BUSINESS:

1. **Council Discussion regarding the distribution of a publication to all residents via mail showcasing the happenings within the City of Forest Park. - Mayor Angelyne Butler**

Background/History:

A publication is being requested for distribution to all residents, showcasing the meaningful advancements and positive strides our community is making across each member department. As highlighted by various council members, while our social media platforms and email distribution lists serve as key channels for communication, they do not reach everyone comprehensively. This publication aims to bridge that gap by providing residents with an in-depth, accessible, and visually engaging overview of ongoing initiatives, achievements, and plans, ensuring they remain well-informed and connected to the progress shaping their community.

Mayor Butler- noted that this is something that she wants to do and was open to any comments.

2. **Council Discussion regarding the use of 696 Main Street by the Downtown Development Authority – Councilwoman Latresa Akins-Wells**

Background/History:

The Downtown Development Authority has utilized 696 Main Street as a film studio for several years, highlighting aspects around the city and other photography uses. As the City has taken over ownership of the space, it has been requested to discuss the future of the existing rooms within 696 Main Street.

Councilmember Akins-Wells- had requested to use the 696 Main Street building, which is currently used by the Downtown Development Authority, as a location for the community closet. The community closet is in a small space in the council building, but it has already outgrown that space. Councilmember Akins-Wells felt that the 696 Main Street building would provide a more welcoming and larger space for the community closet.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Councilmember James- Inquired if there was a community closet at the council house. Councilmember Akins-Wells noted yes.

Councilmember Gutierrez- expressed that it is a great idea and noted that the room's location on the second floor should be considered and that the stored equipment should be put up.

3. **Council Discussion on Opting-Out of HB 581 (public hearing to follow in regular session)- Executive Offices**

Background/History:

House Bill 581, passed during the 2024 legislative session and signed by Governor Kemp, introduces key changes impacting local government revenue. This bill includes procedural modifications to property tax assessments and appeals, a new statewide homestead exemption (which local governments can opt out of), and a local option sales tax to provide property tax relief.

The first Public Hearing will be on February 17, 2025, at 7 p.m. during the regular session meeting.

The second Public Hearing will be on February 20, 2025, at noon, and the third Public Hearing will be at 6:00 p.m. If approved by the council, the adoption will follow.

Tax Commissioner Danielle Smith- explained that HB 581 includes procedural modifications to property tax assessments and appeals and introduces a new statewide homestead exemption that local governments can opt out of. It includes a local option sales tax aimed at providing property tax relief.

City Manager Mr. Clark Jr. noted that looking at the total impact figure, the city currently has a \$150,000 homestead exemption, which is the highest in the county. Mr. Clark Jr. expressed that in 2023, the growth tax digest was \$1.96 million, with residential property making up roughly 25% of the total, which is a relatively low concentration. According to the tax digest, Mr. Clark Jr. noted that the homestead property is valued at about \$44.7 million. Mr. Clark Jr. stated looking ahead to 2025, the tax assessor estimates that property values will increase by roughly 8 to 10%, based on numbers provided by the financial advisor. Mr. Clark Jr. noted given these projections, he believes it is in their best interest to opt out again to retain local control. Mr. Clark Jr. further explained that all other cities will opt out if one city opts out.

Ms. Smith -stated that HB 581 does not remove the current homestead exemptions but rather introduces a "floating" FLOST (Floating Local Options Sales tax) exemption that would be in addition to what's already in place. Ms. Smith noted that there are pros and cons to opting out of HB 581. Opting out would allow the city to maintain local control and potentially implement its own property tax relief measures. However, opting out would also mean the city cannot take advantage of the local option sales tax provision.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Mayor Butler- noted that the House bill would not stop property taxes from increasing; it would simply dictate how those increases are determined—whether through inflation or market changes, as was the case before the bill became effective. Ms. Smith noted that there are a couple of key points to address regarding this. First, the bill will not prevent property values from rising. However, it will impact how much of that increased value is subject to taxation.

Ms. Smith- explained that the value of a property could still increase by whatever percentage it is projected to rise. For example, if the value were to go up by 8%, what HB 581 states is that the tax commissioner can only tax a portion of that growth based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) at that time. Currently, the CPI is estimated to be around 3%. This means that of the 8% growth, only 3% would be taxable. Ms. Smith then clarified that this does not affect the actual values of properties within the city or county, as those values will continue to increase as they normally would. Instead, it only affects the taxable amount of that growth. She also noted that the CPI, which is determined annually by the state's revenue commissioner, plays a key role in this process. However, this provision of HB 581 will not go into effect until 2026. This is because the legislation just went into effect in 2025, and a full year of data is needed to determine the growth rate and apply the CPI adjustment. Therefore, the impact of this piece of the bill cannot be fully implemented until 2026.

Mr. Clark Jr. noted the recommendation for the city to opt-out. Mr. Clark Jr. included another important point that is often overlooked: if property tax values increase, it should be assumed that such increases are based on the growth within the city. However, this potential increase would not directly connect to the city's decision to opt out of the legislation. Mr. Clark Jr. also noted that the state was very specific about this decision's requirements for public advertisements, as there is a strict March 1 deadline to meet. Mr. Clark Jr. included that the city has to follow the state's guidelines and run the advertisements as specified. This ensures compliance with the state's requirements while allowing the city to maintain local control over its tax policies.

Mayor Butler- acknowledged that many employees do not live within the city of Forest Park. However, she emphasized that this issue is statewide, so it is important for everyone to stay informed about their local jurisdiction's plans. Mayor Butler encouraged individuals to reach out to their local elected officials, attend public meetings, and stay engaged in decision-making.

4. **Council Discussion on the March 18, 2025, Special Election Voting Locations-** Executive Offices

Background/History:

The County will conduct a county-wide election along with the Special Election for Ward 2 to fulfill the unexpired term ending December 31, 2025.

Early voting will begin February 24-March 14, 2025 at the provided times and locations below.

Early Voting Details:

Dates: February 24 – March 14, 2025

Hours:

Monday–Friday: 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Saturday: 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM

Locations:

Election & Registration Office – 121 S. McDonough St., Jonesboro

Lake Spivey Recreation Center – 2300 Walt Stephens Rd., Jonesboro

South Clayton Recreation Center – 1837 McDonough Rd., Hampton

Forest Park Senior Center – 5087 Park Ave., Forest Park

Carl Rhodenizer Recreation Center – 3499 Rex Rd., Rex

Virginia Gray Recreation Center – 1475 E. Fayetteville Rd., Riverdale

Morrow City Hall – 1500 Morrow Rd., Morrow

Election Day Voting:

Voters must vote at their assigned polling location on March 18, 2025. Voters can confirm their polling location on the My Voter Page or by contacting City Clerk Randi Rainey at (404) 366-4720.

Mr. Clark Jr.- wanted to clarify a few points regarding the upcoming elections. Mr. Clark Jr. stated that Councilmember Akins-Wells pointed out that historically, city elections have been held in the gymnasium on Election Day. Because of this, the item was placed on the agenda to address the differences this year, as the county will be conducting the election. Mr. Clark Jr. stated to ensure that voters are not inconvenienced or discouraged from voting, the goal is to avoid having residents go to two different polling locations. Instead, voters will be able to cast their ballots for both the county-wide election and the municipal election at their designated precincts.

5. **Council Discussion on the FY2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR)- Finance Department**

Background/History:

The City of Forest Park's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, provides an in-depth look at the city's financial health and operations. This report is a key tool for ensuring transparency and accountability to the public, detailing the city's financial status in compliance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP).

The requirement to issue this report within six months of the fiscal year-end ensures timely and accurate financial information for citizens and government stakeholders. The report will be audited by Mauldin & Jenkins, a certified public accounting firm, following auditing standards generally accepted in the United States of America. The audit verifies the financial statements' accuracy and integrity, reinforcing trust in the city's financial management.

Ryan Jones, a representative of Mauldin & Jenkins, gave a brief overview of the 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR). Mr. Jones stated that there were no significant accounting policy changes this year. However, a new Governmental Accounting Standards Board statement (GASB) will need to be implemented over the next few years. Mr. Jones said they plan to work closely with staff over the next several years to ensure the city is well-prepared to implement the new standards.

Mr. Jones- noted that some accounting estimates are included in the financial statements. One of the most significant estimates is the OPEB (Other Post-Employment Benefits) liability, which is listed on the statement of net position at approximately \$3 million. Actuaries determine this figure, which is subject to change but reflects the liability as of June 30, 2024. Mr. Jones emphasized that the city has a good working relationship with management and that no significant issues during the audit needed to be addressed in this forum.

Mr. Jones- mentioned that looking back at the fiscal year 2020, the audit was not completed, and the financial statements were not issued until May 2021, well past the December 31, 2020, deadline. This trend continued through fiscal years 2021 to 2023, with the fiscal year 2023 report being issued in April 2024. However, Mr. Jones was pleased to announce that for the fiscal year 2024, the financial statements were issued by the December 31 deadline. This was a significant achievement, and they congratulated the city for submitting the report on time to the GFOA (Government Finance Officers Association) and the state.

Mr. Jones- stated over the last five years, they observed positive trends within the General Fund. Mr. Jones noted that in the fiscal year 2024, the general fund revenues were \$39.5 million, up from \$34.5 million in the fiscal year 2023. Expenditures for the fiscal year 2024 were \$36 million, compared to \$31.9 million in the fiscal year 2023. Mr. Jones also highlighted the fund balance, which represents the residual amount left after revenues are collected and expenditures are incurred. Mr. Jones expressed that the fiscal year 2024 fund balance for the general fund was \$14.6 million, a significant increase from \$14.6 million and \$11.1 million in the fiscal year 2023. Mr. Jones states that when combining the general fund with all other governmental funds, the total fund balance at the end of the fiscal year 2024 was \$36.3 million, up from \$29.3 million as of June 30, 2023. This demonstrated strong financial growth and stability for the city.

Mr. Jones- stated that as of June 30, 2024, the city's total net position for governmental and business-type activities was approximately \$89.4 million, a significant increase from fiscal year 2023, when the total net position was \$74.3 million. Mr. Jones noted that the \$15.1 million increase in the government-

wide net position reflects strong financial growth and effective management of the city's resources over past years.

Mr. Jones- noted the city has had multiple audit findings for various reasons. However, staff was pleased to report that for the fiscal year 2024 audit, there was only one instance of what they considered a significant deficiency in internal controls. Mr. Jones noted they tested 60 randomly selected journal entries and found that 31 of them lacked solid evidence of review and approval by someone other than the preparer. Mr. Jones stated that this poses a risk because only one set of eyes may have reviewed the transaction, increasing the likelihood of errors. Mr. Jones recommended implementing a documented audit trail and ensuring a second set of eyes reviews all journal entries. They noted that the finance team has already begun taking measures to address this issue.

Mr. Jones- discussed SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax) projects, noting that the city has funds from three (3) different referendums: 2008, 2015, and 2021. Mr. Jones stated that the city has struggled to spend some of these funds in the past, with certain projects showing minimal progress. However, Mr. Jones acknowledged that the city has made significant progress with the older SPLOST funds (2008 and 2015). For the 2021 SPLOST referendum, which is still active, Mr. Jones pointed out that a substantial amount of money remains unallocated and should be spent in accordance with the referendum's approved projects.

Mr. Jones- highlighted the upcoming Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) statements that will impact the city. Mr. Jones noted that GASB 101, which addresses compensated absences, will be required for implementation this year. For fiscal year 2026, GASB 103 and GASB 104 will introduce changes to the financial reporting format, making it slightly more robust.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Councilmember James- expressed gratitude and extended congratulations to the city's finance team and department for their efforts in improving financial processes and meeting audit deadlines. Councilmember James inquired about the recommendation for addressing the issue of segregation of duties, which was identified as a significant deficiency; she confirmed that they believe the finance team has already begun implementing measures to resolve this. Mr. Jones acknowledged that the issue of segregation of duties was more significant in the fiscal year 2023 audit than in the fiscal year 2024 audit. He noted that there have been several changes within the finance department over the past year, which have likely contributed to the improvement.

Director. Wiggins provided an update on the progress made regarding the issue of the segregation of duties. Mr. Wiggins noted that Mauldin & Jenkins had previously reported about four (4) findings. Currently, the finance team is in the process of implementing policies to address this by ensuring more eyes are on each transaction, particularly those entering the system. Mr. Wiggins stated that this involves breaking up responsibilities so that no single individual is responsible for inputting and approving transactions. Mr. Wiggins noted, for example, that while one person may input the information, another will review it, and a third (such as the deputy or another authorized individual) will provide final approval. This approach is designed to strengthen internal controls and reduce the risk of errors or oversight. Mr. Wiggins emphasized that these improvements are already underway and are part of the ongoing effort to enhance the city's financial processes.

Mr. Clark Jr.- noted that for years, the finance department had not been handling journal entries internally, requiring the auditors to step in and complete this work during the audit process. This year, however, marked a significant shift as the department took on this responsibility internally, contributing to the first on-time audit in several years. Mr. Clark Jr. also highlighted the financial savings achieved by

reducing reliance on external consultants. Mr. Clark Jr. stated that in previous years, the city had employed around three to four (4) consultants on-site to assist with the audit. This year, the finance team managed the audit process largely in-house, eliminating the need for external consultants and saving the city an estimated 80,000to80,000to100,000. Despite this reduction in external support, the team could still complete the audit on time, which they emphasized as a major accomplishment. Mr. Clark Jr. acknowledged Senior Accountant Nina Robinson's critical role in ensuring the timely audit.

Councilmember James- inquired about the SPLOST projects. Mr. Clark Jr. explained that the funds allocated for SPLOST projects will be spent quickly once the associated projects break ground. Mr. Clark Jr. noted that key projects include the City Center, Star Park, and various ongoing transportation initiatives. Mr. Clark Jr. mentioned Wall Drop, which is part of the four-foot sidewalk projects, noting that there have been discussions regarding the acquisition of easements for this project. He also acknowledged that Director Matthews is addressing some issues related to Wall Drop, which have caused delays. Director Matthews noted the plans are under review.

Councilmember James- asked if there was a deadline for spending SPLOST funds. Mr. Clark Jr. noted there is no set deadline for allocating the funds. However, the finance team has expressed a preference for extending the tracking of these dollars for record-keeping and accountability purposes. The projects to which these funds will be directed were clearly identified when the referendum was passed, ensuring transparency in how the dollars are spent. Mr. Clark Jr. noted that a formal process allows a local municipality to modify its project list if necessary. Based on the information provided by the department, the projects on the current list are either already underway or sufficiently defined—particularly in the case of transportation projects, which are not limited to specific streets. Mr. Clark Jr. expressed that the council has approved certain individual street projects for this broader initiative. Attorney Matricardi clarified that there is a deadline within five (5) years after the expiration date of the SPLOST.

Councilmember Gutierrez- inquired if the audit covers expenses too. Mr. Jones noted that one of the first steps in the auditing process is to conduct a random sample of issued payments. Mr. Jones explained that the team carefully reviews the transactions to ensure they have been properly approved, supported by corresponding invoices, and aligned with reasonable city functions. Mr. Jones included that while examining 100% of payments is not feasible, the auditors employ extensive analytical procedures to monitor expenses and expenditures. For instance, Mr. Jones said that if a significant spending spike is noticed during a particular year, they proactively investigate by requesting supporting documentation and explanations. Additionally, the team scrutinizes the approval process, verifies who is authorized to sign checks, and assesses how transactions are recorded in the accounting system. This comprehensive approach helps maintain accountability and ensures financial integrity across all city operations. Mr. Wiggins included that's one of the reasons why the finance team emphasizes the importance of clearly outlining what goods or services are being purchased and ensuring proper documentation for every transaction. Mr. Wiggins noted that documentation is critical, providing a clear trail of accountability and supporting the legitimacy of expenses. Over the years, the team has worked closely with Mauldin & Jenkins, and their auditors have demonstrated an uncanny ability to identify even one or two expenses that may not align with city policies or priorities.

Councilmember Akins-Wells- inquired who could adapt or make the necessary adjustments to ensure proper segregation of duties. Mr. Wiggins noted the finance department is actively implementing a segregation of duties process to ensure accountability and reduce risks by breaking up tasks so that no single individual can both initiate and approve a transaction, such as submitting a Purchase Order or reporting an injury. Mr. Wiggins noted that staff is emphasizing proper documentation, including signatures or initials, to ensure that multiple parties review and verify every step, with final oversight provided by systems like Mauldin & Jenkins or auditors to flag any discrepancies or missing approvals.

Councilmember Akins-Wells- inquired if the city holds everyone accountable for every dollar spent. Mr. Wiggins noted that the staff looks at all expenses.

Mr. Clark Jr- included that the segregation of journal entries is consolidated within one department. Secondly, when reviewing financial statements, such as bank or accounting statements, it is important to examine the supporting documentation for purchases from vendors like Amazon or Waffle House, as these are often tied to city events or initiatives. Mr. Clark Jr. noted that since implementing the P-card system under Director Wiggins' leadership, receipts have been uploaded directly into the system, which is managed by each department's executive assistant or secretary. Mr. Clark Jr. stated that further refinement is needed, as the transition to this system in August 2024 shifted the approval process from directors signing off on credit card transactions to finance handling the verification directly. Mr. Clark Jr. included that previously, directors signed off on all credit card transactions, but now receipts are uploaded directly and verified by the finance team.

Deputy Director Patterson, Deputy Finance Director- included that Department heads, as cardholders, are responsible for entering the general ledger number (which ties to their budget) and uploading receipts into the system. This process serves as the first two checks. Once submitted, the transaction undergoes a third approval, whether by an administrative assistant or another designated individual. Ultimately, the responsibility for the transactions lies with the cardholder. Mr. Patterson noted that a second set of eyes ensures accountability, as finance staff remind directors to submit receipts on time. These receipts are critical for the audit process, as samples are pulled from ENCODE to verify transactions. Mr. Patterson explained that if a \$35 charge appears, auditors will review the general ledger number, the purpose of the expense, and its alignment with the budget. Charges such as Chick-fil-A for new employee lunches or Amazon for employee appreciation are common and fall within departmental budgets for such purposes. All expenditures, while varied, are directly related to City of Forest Park operations and are documented accordingly.

Councilmember Akins-Wells- asked if the city has any cards besides the P-Card. Mr. Wiggins noted there are two (2) other cards with Truist, one to keep the account open and one for emergencies. Mr. Clark Jr. included that even though receipts are not uploaded directly to Bank of America for P-card transactions, there is still supporting documentation for every transaction made on the credit card. Mr. Clark Jr. added this system was in use in the city until August 2024. Additionally, on the reconciliation side, supporting documentation is still maintained and organized by the individuals responsible for reconciling the accounts, ensuring that every transaction is properly documented and accounted for.

6. **Council Discussion of Budget Amendment for General Fund- Finance Department**

Background/History:

The City of Forest Park's FY24-25 Operating Budget was unanimously adopted by the city council on June 26th, 2024. Before adopting the budget, city staff advised that funding and revenues would continuously be monitored for accuracy and reporting purposes. Staff is recommending that the understated funds be added to the operating budget, for General Fund, Special Funds, Capital Funds, City Authorities, and Sanitation yearend closure procedure for the Annual Audit, which will decrease/increase the current revenues to amend the decrease/increase of expenditures. Once the funds have been added to the operating budget, it is also recommended that the City Council approve a budget amendment to accurately reflect the corrected operating revenue budget amount for the General Fund - \$43,624,652 for FY24-25.

Director Wiggins, Finance Director- noted that this budget amendment will have a financial impact by increasing the state general fund revenue, which was previously amended on December 15, 2023,

from \$42,665,003.74 to \$43,000,006.24. Mr. Wiggins included that it will also increase expenditures accordingly. Mr. Wiggins noted that this mid-year budget amendment aims to clean up the general fund, providing departments with accurate and balanced numbers as they prepare for the upcoming budget cycle. This cleanup will ensure that the city has reliable figures for the next six months and will also improve the city's audit readiness for the general fund in the upcoming fiscal year.

7. **Council Discussion on the MAINTSTAR Upgrade – IT Department**

Background/History:

MAINTSTAR is the application used by fleet services for work orders, inventory management, and vehicle records. The application is currently hosted in our data center on a server that is end of life (EOL). The version of the software currently licensed is about 10 years old. We are requesting approval from council to purchase licensing for the latest version that is much more feature rich and easier to use. We are also seeking to move to the hosted version of the application. This will allow us to move the software off the EOL server and make the application more accessible to staff. The total cost of the project is \$19,500 which includes the annual licensing fee, the hosting fee, the upgrade/migration of current data, as well as training for all users on the new version. This project was included in this year's IT budget. Account number - 100-24-1535-53-2401.

Director Cox, IT Director- noted that the total project cost for this year is \$19,500, including the annual recurring subscription fee of \$10,000 per year. Mr. Cox noted moving forward, the city will only need to pay for data migration from the current version to the new version and the upgrade costs, making the annual expense approximately \$10,000 in subsequent years. This upgrade addresses a significant issue for the fleet staff, who cannot access the system while working on vehicles and must return to their computers. Mr. Cox included the new version, allowing them to access the system via tablets while performing repairs, greatly improving efficiency. A demo of the new version was conducted with the fleet department, and they believe it will resolve many of the challenges they currently face.

8. **Council Discussion to approve Text amendment to amend such section updating Banquet Halls and adding definitions for Brown Bagging, Banquet Halls, and Brewpubs. - Planning and Community Development (public hearing in regular session).**

Background/History:

Staff have worked with the city attorney to update the ordinance for clarity. After a careful review of the ordinance, several changes were proposed to safeguard the community, prohibiting brown bagging, covering front windows in banquet halls, and updating operating hours. These items were suggested to clarify and to ensure safe business operations and practices within the City of Forest Park. If the Mayor and the Council proceed with approval of this Text Amendment, the proposed amendments will be enforced.

Director Dozier- noted that the amendment is designed to ensure public safety and can enforce regulations to the greatest extent possible, ultimately benefiting the citizens. The changes to the ordinance aim to provide clear and specific guidelines regarding the practices allowed at banquet halls, enhancing enforcement and compliance.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Councilmember James- inquired if the covering of windows applied to businesses or, specifically, banquet halls. Councilmember James noted that the concern stems from observations of other businesses with covered windows that may appear unkempt or unattractive. Councilmember James

inquiry seeks to understand why the ordinance is focused solely on banquet halls and not extended to other types of businesses that may also contribute to similar concerns. Director Dozier stated that this regulation's focus is on banquet halls due to concerns raised about the inability to see inside during large events, which poses potential safety and compliance issues. However, under the existing sign ordinance, businesses cannot cover windows entirely with signage or other materials that obstruct visibility. Director Dozier included this allows code enforcement to ensure that standard commercial windows remain unobstructed, maintaining safety and compliance across all businesses.

Councilmember James raised the question of banquet halls needing privacy during their events. Director Dozier noted that banquet halls that are not storefront facilities typically do not have their main event spaces located at the front of the building, so window visibility is less of an issue. Director Dozier included in storefront banquet halls that internal solutions such as curtains or shades can provide privacy during events. She also noted that these temporary measures can be adjusted as needed, ensuring that privacy is maintained without permanently obstructing windows or violating visibility regulations.

Mr. Clark Jr- included for clarity the concerns raised by Councilmember Gutierrez that prompted this review, which involved banquet halls where windows and entrances were completely covered, obstructing access and visibility. Mr. Clark Jr. also mentioned that it was discovered that the city of Forest Park had not previously prohibit 'brown bagging,' a practice where patrons bring their own alcohol to venues. Mr. Clark Jr. stated this ordinance addresses these issues by preventing such practices, such as allowing patrons to bring their own alcohol and operate beyond specified hours. This essentially turns these venues into unregulated after-hours establishments, which conflict with city codes and safety standards.

Councilmember Gutierrez- noted that complaints from other businesses highlighted instances where banquet halls were being rented out for weekend events, and the operators were charging admission, selling alcohol, and engaging in other activities without proper oversight. Councilmember Gutierrez included that the front entrances and windows were often blocked to avoid detection, preventing police officers from monitoring the events. When authorities arrived, the doors would be unlocked, windows uncovered, and any evidence of unauthorized activity hidden. Mr. Clark Jr. added for additional clarity that while the ordinance prohibits 'brown bagging,' state law still provides a pathway for banquet halls to serve alcohol legally. They can obtain a special event license or hire a licensed alcohol caterer to provide alcohol for events. This ensures that alcohol service remains regulated and compliant with state laws, even as the city enforces stricter local regulations.

Councilmember Akins-Wells- noted it is a great adjustment to the ordinance, and the suggestion was made to enhance the ordinance by requiring banquet halls to hire Forest Park police officers as security for their events. This would provide an additional layer of oversight to ensure compliance with regulations and generate revenue for the officers. Councilmember Akins-Wells noted by mandating police presence, the city could build stronger relationships with banquet hall operators, encourage compliance, and more effectively identify and address those who violate the law. This approach would balance enforcement with collaboration, ensuring that events are conducted safely and legally while supporting the local police force. Mr. Clark Jr. noted that Councilmember Wells raised an excellent point about encouraging local institutions to use Forest Park police officers for security whenever possible. However, liability concerns and other factors sometimes prevent this. Mr. Clark Jr. noted that the proposed ordinance adjustments address issues such as unauthorized activities, including the concealment of alcohol during police inspections. Mr. Clark Jr. added that while it may not be feasible to mandate the exclusive use of Forest Park officers due to liability and logistical challenges, the city can explore ways to incentivize or prioritize local law enforcement for security, ensuring better oversight and

compliance while supporting the community. Attorney Matricardi included that the only way to mandate the use of Forest Park police officers would be through a judicial order, as the city cannot create an ordinance requiring private entities to hire specific security personnel. For special events with a certain number of attendees, police presence can be required, but this does not typically apply to banquet halls, as they host events frequently, often every weekend. Therefore, while the city can encourage local law enforcement, it cannot legally enforce such a requirement without a judicial ruling.

9. **Council Discussion on the 696 Main Street Special Usage Request** – Recreation & Leisure Services Department

Background/History:

Clayton County District 1 Commissioner Alaina Reaves is hosting a community meeting on Thursday, March 13, 2025. This meeting aims to provide an opportunity for the community to receive updates, share ideas, and discuss concerns. A portion of Commissioner Reaves' district is located in the City of Forest Park. To reach those residents better, she plans to hold the meeting at 696 Main Street at no charge from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 PM. Hosting the meeting in Forest Park will enable legacy residents and those with limited transportation options to participate in the discussion while eliminating travel concerns.

Director Maxwell- noted that the District 1 Commissioner, who represents constituents in the city of Forest Park (districts 1, 3, and 5), is planning to host a meeting to inform residents about ongoing county initiatives and updates relevant to their districts. The meeting aims to provide transparency and inform the community about county-level developments that may impact them.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: (When an Executive Session is required, one will be called for the following issues: Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate).

ADJOURNMENT: Mayor Butler adjourned the meeting at 7:05 pm.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, those requiring meeting accommodation should notify the City Clerk's Office at 404-366-4720 at least 24 hours before the meeting.