

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

321 WALNUT STREET, GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 09, 2025 – 6:00 PM



MINUTES

Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag - **Pastor Travis Ivey**

Roll Call

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT: Mayor Matt Johnson, Vice Mayor Ed Gaw, Council Member Glee Glisson, Council Member Cheryl Starnes, Council Member Darren Stutts

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT: L.J. Arnold, III, City Attorney, Mike Null, Interim City Manager, Kimberly Thomas, Executive Assistant

Mayor to call on members of the audience wishing to address the Council on matters not on the Agenda.

1. Tom Centracchio 605 Myrtle Ave. GCS advised of his concern about the conduct at the prior council meeting and encouraged respectful dialogue.
2. Felecia Hampshire 508 Franklin St. GCS spoke about a recent VIA Club pop-up event at the Augusta Savage building, where children participated in a cupcake decorating activity, and thanked the City for its continued support of programs at the facility.
3. Larianne Stutts thanked the City for its support of the community program that has been held for two and a half years, advising the recurring holiday events for children promote community bonding and positive engagement.
4. Henrietta Francis spoke about holiday activities at the center and ongoing efforts to support homeless families through clothing, supplies, and literacy initiatives, including book donations from community organizations.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

1. Police Department Swearing-In **Chief Hines**
Officer Nguyen
Chief Hines speaks and swears-in Officer Nguyen.

PRESENTATIONS

2. FMPA - December 2025 **Bob Page**
Mr. Page presents the December report.

CONSENT AGENDA

All matters under the consent agenda are considered to be routine by the city council and will be enacted by one motion in the form listed below. There will be no separate discussion on these items. If discussion is desired, that item will be removed from the consent agenda and will be considered separately. Backup

documentation and staff recommendations have been previously submitted to the city council on these items.

Vice Mayor Gaw pulled item 12

Motion to approve Consent Agenda items 3 through 13 minus 12.

Motion made by Council Member Stutts, Seconded by Council Member Glisson.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutts

3. City Council approval of the Martin Luther King, Jr Day Proclamation. *Erin West*
4. City Council approval of the Arbor Day Proclamation. *Erin West*
5. City Council approval of Minutes. *Erin West*
Regular Session: 10/7/2025, 10/21/2025
6. City Council approval of Resolution No. R-31-2025 designating certain positions within the organization as Authorized Agents for the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. *Scott Schultz*
7. City Council approval to continue quarterly agreements with Hawkins, Inc. for water and wastewater treatment chemicals. *Scott Schultz*
8. City Council approval of Resolution R-34-2025 authorizing staff to submit a Loan Application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) for funding in the amount of \$5,346,000 for the North Water Service Territory / Harbor Road Water Treatment Plant (WTP) Potable Water System Improvements Project. *Scott Schultz*
9. City Council approval of Resolution R-33-2025 authorizing staff to submit a Loan Application to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) for funding in the amount of \$8,742,000 for the Harbor Road Water Reclamation Facility Phase III Improvements. *Scott Schultz*
10. City Council approval of New Telephone Vendor and Cloud-Based VoIP Solution. *Angel Alicea*
11. City Council approval of invoice # 107840 in the amount of \$32,015.00 and invoice # 108013 in the amount of \$18,605.75 to Accurate Power & Technology for installation of the upgraded generator at City Hall. *Scott Schultz*
12. City Council approval of the request for additional Tariff cost on Circuit Switcher. *Andy Yeager*
Vice Mayor Gaw asked about the inclusion of tariff-related costs on the consent agenda, advising it was the first time tariffs appeared in the City's official minutes, and asked whether this signaled a broader shift in purchasing practices, potential increased costs, or budget impacts related to imported goods.

Electric Director Andy Yeager advised the tariff-related cost was the first instance encountered and is tied to a long lead item with uncertain future pricing. While the City generally prioritizes U.S. made products, some materials are sourced internationally, and vendors may include potential tariff impacts to protect against future changes.

Water Utilities Director Scott Schultz advised that most City purchases do not involve long lead times and that many capital projects already require American Iron and Steel materials, which are more expensive and factored into current costs. Any tariff impacts on short lead items would likely already be included in pricing, and while costs may increase in the short term, increased domestic manufacturing could have long term benefits.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda item 12.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Gaw, Seconded by Council Member Starnes.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutt

13. City Council approval of Resolution No. R-32-2025 which adopts by reference the conditions and requirements of section 177.071, Florida Statutes, as it relates to administrative approval of plats or replats. *City Attorney Arnold*

COUNCIL BUSINESS

14. City Council approval of nominee for CRA Board Member for Seat 2. *Lisa Walsh*
Development Services Director Lisa Walsh advised this is for the Community Redevelopment Agency board member Seat 2. Mr. Van Royal currently holds the seat and is willing to serve an additional four-year term.

Motion to approve the nomination of Mr. Royal to serve another four-year term the CRA board.

Motion made by Council Member Stutt, Seconded by Council Member Glisson.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutt

15. City Council approval on First Reading of Ordinance No. O-20-2025 adjusting Capacity Connection Fees (formerly Trust Fund / Impact Fees) for the Water and Wastewater Funds. *Scott Schultz*

City Attorney Arnold reads Ordinance No. O-20-2025 by title.

Water Utilities Director Scott Schultz explained that capacity connection fees fund only water and wastewater system capacity expansions and are calculated using ERUs based on updated usage data developed under American Water Works Association standards. The updated study increased water fees from \$1,000 to \$2,372 per ERU and wastewater fees from \$2,000 to \$2,531, with water seeing a larger increase due to prior grant-funded wastewater expansions.

Vice Mayor Gaw spoke about a recent Jacksonville Business Journal article regarding increased construction impact fees in St. Johns County and questioned whether statutory limits exist for connection fees. He asked why the City would not consider setting connection fees at the statutory maximum.

Mr. Schultz explained that connection fees are intended to charge new users only the actual cost of the water and wastewater capacity they consume, calculated using ERUs based on estimated usage, and that the fees will be periodically updated to reflect true service costs. While there is pressure to shift more costs to new development, he cautioned that excessive fees could invite legal challenges, which is why legal counsel was involved in the evaluation to ensure the fee structure is defensible and equitable.

Motion to approve on First Reading Ordinance O-20-2025, and set January 6, 2026 at 6:00 PM as the second and final reading.

Motion made by Council Member Glisson, Seconded by Council Member Stutts.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutts

16. City Council award of bid # 2025-08 – CDBG 22CV-S28 – Augusta Savage Cafetorium Rehab to ARKEST LLC in the amount of \$1,583,424.67. (Updated 12/8/25) *Mike Null*

Interim City Manager Mike Null advised the construction bid for the Augusta Savage Cafeteria and Rehabilitation project following a competitive process that received seven bids ranging from approximately \$1.6 million to \$2.6 million. The lowest responsive and responsible bid, in the amount of \$1,583,424.67, was submitted by Arkist LLC of Jacksonville, which staff and the project architect determined to be qualified. He requested Council award the bid contingent upon state approval of additional CDBG funding and authorization to execute necessary documents, advising the project timeline requires construction to begin promptly to meet the June 30 grant deadline.

Discussion followed that supported the Augusta Savage project, advising the value to the community, particularly for children, and encouraged proceeding even if grant funding is not fully secured. Staff confirmed the facility will include an auditorium, stage, and fully equipped kitchen, and may be used for classes, productions, and rentals to generate revenue.

Award bid # 2025-08 – CDBG 22CV-S28 – Augusta Savage Cafetorium Rehab to ARKEST LLC in the amount of \$1,583,424.67, pending (1) approval of the award by FloridaCommerce and (2) award of additional grant funding from FloridaCommerce. Authorize the Mayor and City Manager to sign all contracts and forms required to facilitate award of this bid and commencement of construction.

Motion made by Council Member Starnes, Seconded by Council Member Stutts.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutts

17. City Council consideration of directing the City Attorney to prepare an ordinance to place three (3) proposed Charter amendments before the voters at the next City election. *City Attorney Arnold*

City Attorney Arnold advised that, at Council's request, draft referendum language was prepared and previously distributed for review regarding up to three potential ballot items for voter consideration at a future election. No feedback was received on the proposed language. Council was advised that it may choose whether to place one or more items on the ballot, subject to future decisions regarding election timing and associated costs.

Tom Centracchio 605 Myrtle Ave. GCS opposed amending the City Charter residency requirement for the City Manager advising Council should focus on other City priorities.

Council Member Glisson asked Mr. Arnold to explain the amendments.

Mr. Arnold advised that Council action would only determine whether proposed Charter amendments are placed on the ballot for voter consideration, not approve the changes themselves. Three potential referendum items were presented: (1) expanding who may administer the oath of office beyond a judicial officer, (2) allowing Council to waive the City

Manager residency requirement within the City utility service area, and (3) allowing Council to waive the residency and office-location requirement for the City Attorney.

Council Member Stutts advised that after observing the interim City Manager's performance, he reconsidered his support for a residency requirement and supported allowing the interim manager the opportunity to serve permanently.

Council Member Starnes advised the proposed change would provide flexibility rather than mandate action, allowing Council the option to act if appropriate, subject to voter approval, without requiring its use in every case.

Vice Mayor Gaw advised that residency requirements may limit qualified candidates and that the proposed language preserves voter choice and flexibility, particularly for hiring a City Manager or City Attorney. Mr. Gaw also read a letter into the record from Mr. Van Royal.

Van Royal 3688 LaCosta Court GCS supported placing the three Charter items on the ballot, advising limited housing availability could deter qualified candidates and believes the changes would benefit the City long term.

Mayor Johnson supported placing the residency issue on the ballot to allow voter consideration, advising the need for flexibility in hiring qualified candidates while acknowledging arguments in favor of a residency requirement.

Motion to direct the City Attorney to present an ordinance for Council consideration for the voters to consider Charter Amendments as set forth herein.

Motion made by Council Member Starnes, Seconded by Vice Mayor Gaw.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutts

Voting Nay: Council Member Glisson

18. Council consideration of first reading of Ordinance No. O-21-2025 which amends the retirement plan for the Police Officers of the City of Green Cove Springs. *City Attorney Arnold*
City Attorney Arnold reads Ordinance No. O-21-2025 by title.

Human Resources Director Dee Jones advised the proposed amendment to the pre-retirement death benefit would allow a surviving spouse to receive benefits immediately upon an employee's death rather than waiting until retirement eligibility. A cost study determined the added benefit would cost approximately 2.05% of law enforcement salaries, or about \$1,000 annually.

Motion to approve the ordinance No. O-21-2025 on first reading as to form only.

Motion made by Council Member Glisson, Seconded by Vice Mayor Gaw.

Voting Yea: Mayor Johnson, Vice Mayor Gaw, Council Member Glisson, Council Member Starnes, Council Member Stutts

19. Continued discussion and direction if needed of the Fence Ordinance. *Council Member Stutts*
Council Member Stutts advised this a continued discussion and supports removing the fence permit requirement while retaining all existing fence standards, advising that neighboring jurisdictions do not require fence permits and he is concerned that permitting is unnecessary and burdensome for residents.

Hope Chessel 1310 North Street spoke about Florida law and case law to argue that fence permitting does not create municipal liability, that property line disputes are civil matters, and

that fence regulations should be limited to public safety rather than private construction quality or consumer protection.

Brandon Leino 518 Meadowbrook Farms Rd. GCS opposed the fence permit requirement due to cost and requested changes to the “pretty side” fence rule, advising it should apply only to street-facing fences and allow flexibility when neighbor access is denied or the fence is not visible from the public right-of-way.

Discussion followed regarding concerns with the City’s fence regulations and permitting process. Concerns for faster fence permit approvals, ideally within 24 hours, advising safety concerns for residents with children or pets. There were questions about the necessity of survey requirements for fence replacements. City staff explained that permitting requirements are established by ordinance and that municipal liability related to inspections is limited under Florida law.

Development Services Director Lisa Walsh advised that fence permits are generally processed quickly when applications are complete, but review times are limited by staffing constraints. The permit process is intended to educate applicants and ensure fences are installed as approved and in compliance with ordinance standards, which prohibit materials that detract from community appearance.

Discussion followed about the City’s fence permit ordinance, including whether the permit requirement should be modified or eliminated due to cost, administrative burden, and delays for residents, particularly in emergency repair situations. Council spoke about the permit’s role in educating property owners and preventing code enforcement disputes, while identifying potential revisions such as clarifying fees, exempting minor repairs, and addressing non-street-facing fences.

20. City Manager & City Attorney Reports / Correspondence

The City Manager and City Attorney made comments regarding various city activities, events, operations, and projects.

21. City Council Reports / Correspondence

The City Council made comments regarding various city activities, events, operations, and projects.

Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the City Council, the meeting was adjourned at 8:33 p.m.

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA

Daniel M. Johnson, Mayor

Attest:

Erin West, City Clerk