

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

321 WALNUT STREET, GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2026 – 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, Erin West, City Clerk

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

1. Linda Hobbs 1092 Buccaneer Blvd. GCS questioned if the recently approved pay raise applied to all employees and supports increases for general employees but questioned raises for higher level staff.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

1. Police Department Swearing-In *Chief Hines*

Sergeant Andrew Shore
Sergeant Kristy Whitney
Sergeant Matthew Waller

Chief Hines speaks and swears-in the three new Sergeants.

Chief Hines advised that it was reported several items were stolen from trees during the Christmas Parade of Trees event at Spring Park in December. After learning of the incident through social media, staff reviewed park camera footage and identified suspects and a vehicle. Using investigative tools, officers located the individuals in Jacksonville and recovered the stolen items, along with additional property.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

2. Second and Final reading of Ordinance No. O-01-2026 which is attached and will allow City electors to vote on proposed Charter Amendments. The Ballot Title verbiage cannot exceed 15 words per section 101.161, Florida Statutes. *City Attorney Arnold*
City Attorney Arnold reads Ordinance No. O-01-2026 by title and presents the amendments.

Mayor Johnson opens the public hearing.

Tom Centracchio 605 Myrtle Ave. GCS advised that the question of whether the City Manager or City Attorney should be elected or appointed has been presented to voters multiple times and voted down.

Following no further comments, Mayor Johnson closed the public hearing.

It was advised that the current proposal would not remove the residency requirement but would allow the City Council, by a majority vote, to grant an exception in special cases to avoid losing otherwise qualified candidates.

Motion to approve Ordinance No. O-01-2026 on second and final reading.

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

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

Voting Nay: Council Member Glisson

The wording on the ballot title for amendment one had 16 words so the word “the” was removed from the title and the Council was notified at the February 3, 2026 meeting

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.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda items 3 through 5.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Gaw, 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 Minutes. *Erin West*
Regular Session: 11/18/2025
Special Sessions: 12/2/2025
4. City Council review and approval of Resolution No. R-01-2026 regarding approval of Maintenance Bond, release of performance bond and acceptance of parking lot and stormwater facilities for Gustafson Regional Park, Rookery subdivision. *Lisa Walsh*
5. City Council approval of Final Pay Application including retainage and change order #1 for the Bayard Stormwater Improvements to DB Civil Construction in the amount of \$73,276.75. *Greg Bauer*

COUNCIL BUSINESS

6. Community Care Day 2026 *Mike Null*
Interim City Manager Mike Null presented a request from Mount Zion AME Church to host a community resource event at Vera Francis Hall Park in June. He advised that staff support the event and recommends waiving rental and permit fees but does not recommend waiving approximately \$1,100 in off-duty law enforcement fees, as those costs are not budgeted.

Lynn Martinez with Mt. Zion AME Church spoke in support of the proposed Community Care Day event and requested that the City waive the off-duty law enforcement fees.

Chief Hines recommended two officers for security and traffic at Vera Francis Hall Park during the event. The \$1,100 cost for off-duty officers is unbudgeted and would impact the overtime budget.

Kelly Hartwig advised that he help with outside sources to cover the off-duty officer cost.

Motion to approve the event, waiving the rental fee and the permitting fee with the outside sources paying the police fee.

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

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

7. Review of Bid RFP 2025-04 – Rivers House Interior Buildout and Council discussion of Rivers House disposition. *Mike Null*

Interim City Manager Mike Null updated the Council on the Rivers House project, advising the City purchased the property in 2020 and completed asbestos abatement and structural improvements with construction finished in January 2025. An RFP issued in June 2025 received one proposal from former Mayor Steven Kelley for a Welcome and Adventure Center. This update is to close the RFP process and begin discussion on the preferred future use of the property to support potential grant funding.

Steven Kelley 101 Park St. GCS presented a proposal to establish the Rivers House Welcome and Adventure Center, a nonprofit-operated facility featuring local history displays, tourism information, small retail and snack sales, educational programming, and outdoor recreation rentals. The concept would rely on grants, partnerships, fundraising, and earned revenue while maintaining City ownership.

Discussion followed showing support for the proposal, historic preservation, community access, and collaboration with the Preservation Society.

Sandi Dunnivant 303 N. Magnolia Ave. GCS President of the Green Cove Springs Preservation Society proposed operating the Rivers House at no cost to the City, preserving its historic integrity, and using it as a visitor and community center. She spoke about fundraising, tours, and programming, and collaborating with Steven Kelley to create a combined, sustainable community asset.

Joe Sobotta 212 North St. GCS advised the Rivers House should remain period-sensitive, preserving its historic appearance while being brought up to modern codes. The building should be flexible for multiple community uses while maintaining its historic character.

Discussion followed with Council agreeing to move forward with the combined proposal from Steven Kelley and the Preservation Society. The City will maintain the building's exterior and essential systems, while the groups pursue funding through grants, donations, and CRA support to finance operations and interior improvements.

8. Council discussion regarding golf cart use. *Mike Null*

Interim City Manager Mike Null discussed the use of golf carts within city limits. The current ordinance allows golf carts on city streets but does not permit sidewalk use, consistent with Florida law. Staff and police recommend continuing to prohibit sidewalk operation due to safety concerns on narrow sidewalks.

City Attorney Arnold reviewed state statute provisions for golf cart operation on sidewalks. He advised that while the City could permit sidewalk use, doing so requires strict compliance with state law and safety considerations.

Linda Hobbs 1092 Buccaneer Blvd. GCS shared that she frequently uses her golf cart for local travel and often rides on sidewalks for safety on narrow or busy streets like Houston Street. She spoke about her concerns of being prohibited from sidewalks.

Council and police discussed safety issues with golf carts on sidewalks. State law requires carts on streets, except at wide, designated areas like Governor's Creek Bridge. Golf carts over 23 mph are low-speed vehicles requiring registration and insurance. E-bikes also present safety challenges, as laws haven't fully caught up with high-speed models. Police recommend following state law, limiting sidewalk use, and updating signage/ordinances to clarify rules.

Joe Sobotta 212 North St. GCS spoke about certain wide sidewalks, like the route to Reynolds Park, being rarely used by pedestrians and could safely accommodate golf carts at low speeds.

Steven Kelley 101 Park St. GCS supports golf carts primarily on streets, advising city streets are generally safe. For narrow or busy streets like Houston, alternative routes are recommended. Regarding the Governor's Creek Bridge, he suggested signage directing golf carts to exit at the first safe opportunity after crossing.

Diane Whiteman 723 N. Magnolia Ave. GCS spoke about safety and road conditions concerns, especially in the section from 17 and 16 down to Reynolds. It has damaged pavement that's hazardous for bicycles. She also raised concerns about e-bikes traveling too fast on sidewalks.

Lynn Martinez shared she sold her golf cart after a serious accident occurred on a raised sidewalk in their subdivision. She spoke about the importance of repairing sidewalks.

Discussion concluded that golf carts should stay on streets, as per the law, and people need to follow existing regulations. The police chief will use discretion to handle violations. The council agreed to take no new action and continue enforcing the current ordinance.

9. Consideration of increasing the previously approved outside legal counsel fees of \$10,000 to \$25,000 for defense of the Huntley v. City litigation initiated by Huntley. **City Attorney Arnold** City Attorney Arnold discussed raising the outside counsel spending cap for the Huntley lawsuit from \$10,000 to \$20,000. He advised that while a settlement offer had been received from Mr. Huntley, the city should allow staff and outside counsel to continue research and negotiations.

Ward Huntley spoke about his concern for the time and cost the city will incur handling the lawsuit, including depositions and discovery of historical ordinance information. He spoke of his desire to resolve the matter amicably without prolonged litigation to avoid excessive legal expenses.

Mike Kelter 630 Myrtle Ave. GCS spoke about Mr. Huntley and his approach in the stormwater ordinance dispute. He spoke about gaps in the ordinance and mitigation resolution, advising some properties aren't fairly assessed.

Linda Hobbs 1092 Buccaneer Blvd. GCS questioned why the situation can't simply be investigated and resolved directly, rather than engaging in prolonged legal battles.

Interim City Manager Mike Null advised the city is conducting a comprehensive review of all utility ordinances, policies, and property assessments, ensuring legal compliance and proper

implementation. He is coordinating with engineering and legal experts and plans to present a complete report with recommendations for all city properties.

Discussion followed with the council discussing settling Mr. Huntley's stormwater fees, as his property doesn't use the city system. He's offered to pay a small amount, while the city reduced his bill 50% after his mitigation application. The city is reviewing all stormwater assessments for fairness and legal compliance.

Motion to accept counsel's recommendation of increasing the funds available for the legal fee for the defense of Huntley versus the city in the amount not to exceed 20,000.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Gaw

Motion died due to no second.

Council discussed considering mediation as a way to reach an agreement efficiently while limiting legal costs. The plan is to review and discuss updates at the next council meeting, aiming to balance a timely resolution with protecting the city.

10. City Manager & City Attorney Reports / Correspondence

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

11. 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 9:17 p.m.

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA

Daniel M. Johnson, Mayor

Attest:

Erin West, City Clerk