

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

321 WALNUT STREET, GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA
TUESDAY, AUGUST 05, 2025 – 6:00 PM



MINUTES

Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag - **Youth Pastor Travis Ivey, Hickory Grove Baptist Church**

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, Steve Kennedy, City Manager, Mike Null, Assistant 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. Felicia Hampshire 508 Franklin St. GCS spoke about the 24th Annual Green Cove Springs Soul Food and Music Festival being held Saturday, October 4, 2025. This year's theme is "*Saddle Up for Boots on the Ground, Stomping Good Time.*" Festivities include a parade, followed by the main event from 1:30–7:00 p.m. featuring food, live music, games, children's play zone, foam party, horseshoe tournaments, softball games, giveaways, and on-site medical and dental services. Ms. Hampshire also requested an update on the auditorium project.

Assistant City Manager Mike Null advised the design is complete and awaiting state approval for the CDBG grant. Once approved, the project will go to bid, with an estimated timeline of two months for bidding/contracting and six months for construction.

2. Jeff Short 1212 Travers Rd. GCS proposed creating a family-friendly park at Reynolds Park, with activities like drag racing, BMX biking, RC car racing, and other recreational events. He has prior experience building local racing facilities and believes the site layout will help deflect sound toward the river.

Council Member Stutts spoke with Jeff and Ted and advised that past profits from drag racing were about \$15,000 per weekend. He believes the project could be low-cost to restart, requiring minimal infrastructure, and could provide family-friendly entertainment while keeping youth engaged in safe activities.

City Manager Steve Kennedy advised he would contact Mr. Short and others to get a plan.

3. Art Yeaman 151 West St. GCS spoke about his concern with the city archives not being showcased despite having historical materials preserved by city staff. He spoke about past efforts and commitments to establish a dedicated city archive space in the current building.
4. Larianne Stutts 25 S. Palmetto Ave. GCS thanked the city for its involvement in the Augusta Savage Gala, which showcased local youth talent through art, dance, singing, and a play based on The Secret River.

REORGANIZATION

1. City Council election of a Mayor and Vice Mayor to serve from August 5, 2025 to May 19, 2026. **Erin West**

City Clerk Erin West advised the City Charter states that after an election or special election a new Mayor and Vice Mayor need to be selected.

Motion to approve keeping Mayor Johnson as Mayor and Vice Mayor Gaw as Vice Mayor.

Motion made by Council Member Stutts, Seconded by Mayor Johnson.

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

PRESENTATIONS

2. FMPA - August 2025 **Bob Page**

Mr. Page presented the August 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 7.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda items 3 through 11 minus 7.

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 the Lineman Appreciation Day Proclamation. **Erin West**
4. City Council approval of Resolution No. R-17-2025, revising Council Meeting dates due to holidays. **Erin West**
5. City Council approval to purchase fuel for the life of the contract (3 years) from Gate Petroleum, and authorize the mayor to execute, Cooperative Bid No. 22-BA-128, effective December 1, 2025 through November 30, 2028, to provide unleaded and diesel fuel for all City Departments, and to issue a Purchase Order to Gate Petroleum in the amount of \$200,000 for FY 2026, and at the amount allocated in the approved budgets for FY 27 and FY 28. **Scott Schultz**
6. City Council approval of the Sawcross (Tender Contractor) Pay Request #14 (already approved) in the amount of \$413,725.00, Pay Request #15 in the amount of \$84,783.41 and **Final** Pay Request #16 in the amount \$240,123.24, and authorization for the mayor to execute Disbursement Request # 26 which closes the construction of the Harbor Road Advanced Wastewater Treatment Facility (HRAWWTF), as part of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), State Revolving Fund (SRF), Harbor Road Water

Reclamation Facility (WRF) Expansion, Phase 2, SRF Agreement No. WW1000420. **Scott Schultz**

7. City Council approval of Pay Application #3 for the Bayard Stormwater Improvements to DB Civil Construction in the amount of \$142,759.24 **Greg Bauer**
Vice Mayor Gaw advised the project appears to be completed and asked Assistant Public Works Director Greg Bauer if the project is complete.

Mr. Bauer advised the project is about 95% complete, pending substantial completion approval. An issue at Bayard and Myrtle, where the new road is collecting water, still needs to be addressed. Clay Street will be put out to bid in a few weeks, using the same headwall design as other outfalls, but with a longer layout and a smaller headwall.

Vice Mayor Gaw asked if it was within the \$10 million borrowing.

Assistant City Manager Mike Null advised the project is funded by the \$10 million allocation. A fence or railing will be added due to the drop-off height, and this requirement will be included in future projects with headwalls over 30 inches high.

Motion to approve Consent Agenda item 7.

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

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

8. City Council approval of Minutes. **Erin West**
Regular Session: 6/3/2025
9. City Council approval of CPH (formerly Mittauer) **Final** Invoice # 168902 in the amount of \$152,140, and authorization for the mayor to execute Disbursement Request #7 (to follow) which closes the project for the permitting and design services for the Magnolia Point Reclaimed Water System & Potable Water System Improvements. **Scott Schultz**
10. City Council authorization to piggyback the City of Atlantic Beach RFP 21-01 Annual Contract for Environmental Laboratory Services with AEL for water and wastewater laboratory services through calendar year 2025 and extending through FY 2026 pending renewal by the city of Atlantic Beach. **Scott Schultz**
11. City Council approval of a final invoice payment for the Palmetto Street stormwater point repair to Jax Utilities Management in the amount of \$119,917.38 based off City of Jacksonville contract #71555-25. **Greg Bauer**

COUNCIL BUSINESS

12. Discussion and approval of the 2024/2025 Red Light Camera Intersection Safety Report. **Chief Hines**
Chief Hines advised that starting July 1, 2024, Florida law requires counties and municipalities to prepare an annual red light camera report, which must be presented at a regular or special meeting, read aloud, allow for public comment, and then submitted to the state. For the City of Green Cove Springs, covering July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025, the city issued 10,649 red light violation notices. Of these, 6,944 were paid, 1,811 were converted to uniform traffic

citations, four were contested and dismissed in court, and no vehicle registration holds were issued. All collected funds were deposited into the City's General Fund, in compliance with the reporting requirements.

Vice Mayor Gaw asked Chief Hines his opinions on the following: if he believed the red light cameras were providing a public safety function, if the movement of the camera from the front of CVS down to the corner 16 and 17 has helped, and spoke about the contrary argument, and you've heard it as well, everyone up here has heard it too, is that it's just a random generator.

Chief Hines advised the city relocated a red light camera from Houston Street to Leonard C. Taylor due to multiple serious accidents involving 18-wheelers caused by speeding and running red lights. Since the move, only one serious accident has occurred, showing the camera acts as a deterrent. The Ferris and Orange intersection is particularly dangerous for police enforcement due to traffic and nearby businesses, making the camera a safer method to enforce the law without risking officer or citizen safety. He advised the cameras reduce serious accidents, contribute to overall traffic safety, and generate revenue, while also serving as a calming mechanism for high-risk intersections.

Motion to accept the Red Light Camera Intersection Safety Report.

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

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

13. City Council update on the Requests for Inclusion (RFI) to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) Clean Water State Revolving Fund (SRF) for the following projects:

\$4,537,000 for the Harbor Road WWTF Phase III (Pine Avenue Force Main – mothball of the South WWTF).

\$24,245,000 for construction of the Magnolia Point Reclaimed Water System

Scott Schultz

Assistant Water Utilities Director Scott Schultz advised on July 22, the City Council approved submitting requests for two wastewater projects: Harbor Phase Three, redirecting all waste to the Harbor plant, and Magnolia Point Reclaimed Water to comply with SB 64. Due to insufficient grant funding for Magnolia Point's \$24 million cost, staff withdrew that RFI and will focus on Harbor Phase Three while exploring other compliance options. Combined, the projects cost \$27 million, with a \$10.5 million grant leaving a significant funding gap.

Council Member Stutts questioned if the city had looked into what Orange Park was doing and selling the clean water.

Mr. Schultz advised that discussions regarding connecting to the neighboring reclaimed water system have been ongoing for three years. With only 1,500 feet separating the systems and 2,100 homes currently using drinking water instead of reclaimed water, this connection would be a cost-effective option.

Art Yeaman 151 West St. GCS spoke about the city's water department and the progress being made with reclaimed water. He spoke about the complexity of operations, from legal and financial matters to project management, and spoke about the community's need for education and reassurance. He sees an opportunity to engage the public, schools, and science students through tours and demonstrations, showcasing the city's advanced and safe water practices.

Mike Kelter 630 Myrtle Ave. GCS spoke about how even a small error rate, like 8%, can be significant when managing reclaimed water for large developments. He spoke about his concerns about how much reclaimed water CCUA can handle, given evolving minimum flow and level requirements in regional river basins, which affect mitigation costs.

Mr. Schultz advised the city is working with CCUA to manage growing reclaimed water demand, advising that Magnolia Point alone won't meet needs. Multiple projects and users will be needed to comply with state law and protect drinking water.

Motion to approve staff to withdraw the request for inclusion to the Department of Environmental Protection plain water state revolving fund for funding the construction of Magnolia reclaimed water system.

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 Stutt

14. City Council discussion of proposed rates for Water, Wastewater, and Reclaimed Water for Fiscal Year 2026. **Mike Null**

Assistant City Manager Mike Null advised the city is proposing utility rate adjustments for FY 2026 based on prior studies and updated audited numbers. For water, instead of the 20% increase called for in the previous study, staff recommends a 12% increase to fund capital improvements and align with the budget. Reclaimed water rates would mirror this 12% increase, as no retail customers currently exist. Wastewater, previously projected for a 3% increase, is proposed at 5% by phasing out \$500,000 in capital projects from the CIP to reduce the increase from 19%. The purpose of tonight's discussion is to authorize sending a flyer to all utility customers announcing these proposed rates, with public hearings and ordinance adoption scheduled for September 2nd and 16th, and rates effective October 1, 2025.

Council Member Stutt questioned why this was being done before the budget meetings.

Mr. Null explained that statutory notification requires mailing rate increase flyers which will be included with the August bills. Reductions of the rate are allowed, similar to the millage rate procedures, a simple majority is needed for the ordinances in September, and tonight's vote only authorizes the flyer and sets public hearings to stay on schedule.

Council Member Stutt spoke about his concerns about committing to rates before budget data is finalized and potential public pushback, preferring to review the rates through the budget process first.

Mike Kelter 630 Myrtle Ave. GCS acknowledged the need to send out rate increase notices but advised the importance of thoroughly reviewing and discussing water, wastewater, and reclaimed water data before finalizing decisions. He spoke about rising debt service and advised providing realistic information to maintain public confidence.

Council Member Glisson asked Mr. Kelter to advise why the figures didn't make sense.

Mr. Kelter advised that after reviewing and totaling data from Jason Shappell's extensive wastewater studies, their calculations do not align with the anticipated results, suggesting discrepancies compared to historical outcomes since advanced wastewater treatment began around 2006–2007.

Mr. Null explained that the proposed rate increases are based on current audited numbers to support the FY 26 budget, advising that previous studies used pre-audit data that no longer align due to changes over the years, including a \$25 million swing in the CIP and other factors like COVID. Updated rate studies will be completed in October, but the current proposals are intended to maintain the budget as currently calculated.

Mayor Johnson clarified that the original water rate study recommended a 20% increase for FY26 and 3% for FY27, while staff is proposing a 12% increase. For wastewater, the study suggested a 19% increase, but current proposals are 5%. He advised that some project funds are being adjusted and recommended moving forward with the proposed rates to allow the mail-out, with the option to adjust during the budget meeting.

Vice Mayor Gaw questioned why wastewater increases are lower than water increases, advising that wastewater expenses often exceed water delivery costs. He spoke about the importance of considering both systems together and expressed concern over the decoupling of rate increases.

Mr. Null explained that the 19% wastewater figure was for next year and acknowledged a disconnect in the studies. He advised that the proposed rates are intended to support the current budget and that each utility operates as a separate system with distinct infrastructure, staffing, regulatory requirements, and capital needs. Mr. Null provided the cost impact to average customers: \$3.32 per month for water (12%) and \$3.01 per month for wastewater (5%).

Assistant Water Utilities Director Scott Schultz advised that in 2016, the city planned and funded a new wastewater treatment plant and supporting infrastructure through three phased loans totaling \$25 million, supplemented by \$12 million in federal and state grants, which reduced the need for rate increases at times. Recent legislative changes, such as Senate Bill 64, have introduced new compliance requirements, affecting wastewater planning. On the drinking water side, the city is pursuing SRF-funded improvements to the Harbor Road Water Treatment Plant to eventually replace Reynolds Plant, with rate increases needed to cover these loans. Grant availability is limited by population thresholds.

Vice Mayor Gaw clarified that the increase is 19% for wastewater.

Mr. Null advised that initial budget did, but \$538,000 worth of capital projects and collection system improvements were removed to bring it down to where we only had 5%.

Vice Mayor Gaw questioned if this is putting projects in jeopardy.

Mr. Schultz explained that while the department manages budgets carefully to minimize rate impacts the department still needs reserve funds for emergencies, such as a recent \$500,000 street repair. Aging infrastructure, like lift stations and trucks, requires ongoing maintenance, and future SRF loans may address larger repairs. The focus is on completing FY26 with accurate financial data, then using that information to plan and budget effectively for the next five years.

Vice Mayor Gaw advised that a key responsibility of the council is ensuring the delivery of services to the Green Cove community. He advised that the proposed water increase is approximately \$3 per month and wastewater is \$3.01 per month for the average customer. He spoke about the decision to approve these increases directly supports maintaining current service levels.

Mr. Null confirmed the average monthly increases.

Art Yeaman 151 West St. GCS discussed the distinction between city managed water services and homeowner responsibilities. While the city ensures delivery to the meter, homeowners are responsible for plumbing beyond the meter. He advised that residents could request detailed water flow data from the city to monitor usage.

Motion to approve distribution of the attached flier to utility customers through their normal utility bill delivery method with their August 2025 bills. Direct staff to prepare ordinances to effect each proposed utility rate as of October 1st 2025. Set September 2nd 2025 at 6pm as the first reading of each proposed utility rate of ordinance reviewed in this staff report. September 16 2025 at 6pm as the second final reading of each proposed utility rate ordinance reviewed in this staff report.

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 Stuttts

15. City Manager & City Attorney Reports / Correspondence

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

16. 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 8:14 p.m.

CITY OF GREEN COVE SPRINGS, FLORIDA

Daniel M. Johnson, Mayor

Attest:

Erin West, City Clerk