



MINUTES

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING FEBRUARY 26, 2026 1:00 P.M.

The City of Madeira Beach Board of Commissioners held a regular workshop meeting at 1:00 p.m. on February 26, 2026, in the Patricia Shontz Commission Chambers at City Hall, located at 300 Municipal Drive, Madeira Beach, Florida.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Anne-Marie Brooks, Mayor
Ray Kerr, Vice Mayor/Commissioner District 2
David Tagliarini, Commissioner District 1
Eddie McGeehen, Commissioner District 3
Housh Ghovae, Commissioner District 4

MEMBERS ABSENT: None.

CHARTER OFFICERS PRESENT: Clint Belk, Acting City Manager
Clara VanBlargan, City Clerk

1. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Brooks called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

City Clerk Clara VanBlargan called the roll. All were present.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Nazary Ivanchuk, 431 Virginia Avenue, requested that the Board consider reducing the accrued code enforcement fines for his property at 431 Virginia Avenue, Madeira Beach. He provided the City Clerk with documents to share with the Board.

Chuck Dillion, 529 Lillian Drive, asked the Board to consider making the four free parking spaces at Kitty Stuart Park resident-only.

4. CITY MANAGER CANDIDATES

A. Five Recommended City Manager Candidates by Consultant

Renee Narloch, with S. Renee Narloch & Associates, the recruiter for the city manager candidate selection, praised the city staff for their cooperation throughout the process, especially highlighting the City Clerk, the Acting City Manager, and Megan Powers. She explained that they had conducted extensive outreach, contacted hundreds of people, and received about 56 applications for the position. Timing is critical in recruitment, as candidates who are available now may not be later. After the interviews, they begin calling references and conducting background checks. If a candidate starts discussing an agreement with them, the language must be included. This is contingent on everything clearing.

The following are the five recommended candidates for the Board to consider interviewing for the city manager position:

1. Stanley Hawthorn - City Manager, City of Pine Lake, GA

Stanley Hawthorne was described as highly experienced and very intelligent, especially for his eight or nine years as assistant city manager in Fort Lauderdale under a city manager with very high expectations, whom Narlock had recruited. She pointed out that Hawthorne was carefully chosen, handpicked, for that position and gained important city management skills in what she called a challenging environment. Since then, he has done consulting work and supported smaller towns in Georgia, but as a Florida native, he wanted to return home. He could definitely contribute valuable skills.

2. Michael Helfrich – Former Assistant City Manager/Public Works Director, City of Treasure Island, FL

Michael Helfrich was identified as a local candidate who owns property in Madeira Beach, has worked for neighboring Treasure Island for many years as a public works director, and has also served as assistant city manager when the city manager was unavailable. She did not know him, but she did like that he has a P.E. and a public works background, is familiar with the area, and owns property in Madeira Beach. It would be his first actual city manager role, which she saw as having both upsides and downsides - the upside being that he has something to prove not only to himself, but to everyone, and would work extra hard to do a great job.

3. Debbie Manns – City Manager, City of New Port Richey, FL

Debbie Manns has served as the city manager of Newport Richey since 2014, marking a long tenure. When she first started in Newport Richey, not much was happening. She encouraged the Commission to visit Newport Richey if they haven't been there in a while to see the transformation that has taken place under Debbie's leadership. Her background is in community development, and typically, whatever her background is, that becomes the focus, which is what Newport Richey wanted. They wanted someone to come in and make things happen there. Debbie has achieved that and done an excellent job. About three months ago, she helped hire an economic development director, and they selected a very good one. Not long ago, the commission granted her a multi-year contract, one of the longest she's seen in recent years, showing they want to keep her. Things are still moving

forward in Newport Richey. Debbie isn't leaving; she probably seeks a new challenge because she's accomplished so much there. Madeira Beach offers different opportunities, so she's excited about that.

4. Timothy Owens – Former Interim Public Works Director/Interim Planning Director, Town of Zebulon, NC

She was unfamiliar with him and had not worked with him before. She is familiar with the areas he worked in in North Carolina. She had done a city manager search for the Town of Holden Beach about eight months to a year ago. Holden Beach is in the same area as Wrightsville Beach and Carolina Beach. These were described as upscale beach communities similar to Madeira Beach, with Carolina Beach having about 90 FTEs, similar in size. Mr. Owens had been a manager in Carolina for about six years and in Wrightsville for 10-12 years. He had reached retirement eligibility in North Carolina but was not done working, so he was exploring opportunities outside the state. His experience included challenges in beach communities, such as renourishment, dredging, working with FEMA, and hurricanes. His recent roles had been interim positions as planning director and public works director due to work restrictions related to his retirement status. He has a broad range of skill sets, and she found him to be a very professional candidate. He was excited about Madeira Beach and had many questions that she answered. He is certainly worth talking to. He brings something that the other candidates do not.

5. Raymond Palmer – Township Manager, Silver Spring Township, PA

She was not familiar with or had never worked with him before, but she was impressed after their preliminary conversation. She described him as very active, running marathons and half marathons, with a positive outlook. He came to the profession through a non-traditional path, having worked for large private-sector companies in customer-service-oriented roles. This gave him an understanding of the city's customers and made him sensitive to community connections. He believed in connecting with people as a way to fix problems. He had done well in his current position for a long time and had served in various capacities as needed, including as interim public works director. Really, in a city that size, he kind of served in every capacity as needed. He is a little different from the other candidates, but a very good one and a very good option to look at.

Ms. Narloch said those were the five candidates she selected. There are other candidates in the group, but at some point, you have to grab a group, evaluate them, put them forward, meet them, see what you like about them, ask them tough questions, and find out if they are the next city manager in the mix.

Ms. Narloch explained the process moving forward:

1. Within the next three weeks, each commission member will have a one-on-one interview with each candidate on the same day on-site. There will be only two of them in the room,

and they will rotate throughout the day. The commission will get to know the candidates, which is important for them. They know them as a board but need to know them as individuals to know how they would work with the commission.

2. That same day, around 5:30 p.m., they have an after-hours gathering, possibly at an off-site location. It will be a casual social event where everyone can talk. They might have cold drinks and some food. Everyone is invited, including city staff, department directors, and the media. If the commission wants to attend, they can; it will not require any action on their part. They can simply observe how people interact with the candidates. A notice would need to be put out to everyone in the community to come meet the candidates. Informal feedback might also be received at the event.
3. At the following meeting, they will hold a public meeting to give the candidates a chance to come up and make their case on why they should be the next city manager. That includes talking about their experience, why they want to come here, what they have seen while here, what they have observed, what they like best about the community, etc. The candidates orchestrate it, come up one at a time for about 15 or 20 minutes, and make their case. The commission can ask some follow-up questions.
4. Following the public meeting, they have a debriefing session to discuss the terms and negotiations of the contract. She will speak with the candidates and provide them with the information. The Commission will discuss whom they want to move forward and why, where they are going with it, the terms, negotiations, and who will be the point person for that.

Ms. Narloch responded to the Board's questions and comments:

- The five candidates were made aware that they are the top five candidates. They have been following this, listening to the meetings, and checking public documents. She did not want them to get a call from someone other than her that their name was being put forth in this meeting.
- There is no obligation for the Commission to interview any of the candidates.
- The department heads will be invited to the meet and greet, and hopefully they will attend so they can interact with the candidates and introduce themselves as department directors. Candidates want to see them. They do not have any formal plans for the department directors during the interview process. However, those who move forward will return for another meeting very soon after being named finalists. They will come on-site and bring their families or others, as they will be looking for a place to live. She will make sure they come to City Hall, sit in a room full of department directors, and do a Q&A with them as part of an introduction.
- The Commission is the one to decide who they want to interview, not her. Candidates can be removed from the five selected, and new candidates can be added. Right now, they have a well-rounded group that brings many different things to the table. When the Commission meets with the recommended candidates, they will discover there is a lot of depth.
- Sometimes when she gets into a pool of candidates, especially 56 of them, she will find that there are 10 or more strong candidates. Based on what she learned from whom she spoke to at the city, what the needs are, and the challenges, she narrows it down to the strong candidates that fit those needs. In this case, five was a good landing spot for the folks that she pulled out. She did not feel there were an additional four candidates. She looks for different things that would bring them to the forefront or not. She wants them to

have a good energy level, a great knowledge base, answers, and longevity. She has an eye and instinct for things, and sometimes she learns about them by calling them on the phone.

- She does not know the city's policy or if there is a policy about reimbursing candidates, but most cities do reimburse for reasonable airfare, one or two-day hotel stay, depending on their travel schedule, and maybe for a rental car or Uber to get around. Based on the five recommended candidates, the total travel expense would be about \$2,500 based on their location.

Discussion on which candidates to interview

Mayor Brooks clarified to the Commission that they are there to decide and discuss the five candidates Renee has brought forward for interviews, and whether there are any other candidates the Commission might want to interview or eliminate a candidate from the interview. She went through every candidate to prepare to explain why she chose not to add to the list. She personally felt they hired a professional to go out and vet candidates and bring them the ones who met their criteria: they had to be a city manager, have coastal experience, and have certain certifications. Of the five that were chosen, she dug deep into them in addition to the conversation she had with Ms. Narloch. She noticed that among the other applicants who did not get chosen, many had never been a city manager. Many had been fired or jumped around a lot. She felt like the five they were given were a solid five and she will not be adding to the list. But others might want to add to the list.

Commissioner Tagliarini expressed a strong interest in interviewing Michael Helfrich and Debbie Manns, with Raymond Palmer as a potential third choice if needed.

Vice Mayor Kerr identified Helfrich and Manns as his top two after conversations with Ms. Narloch.

Commissioner McGeehan identified Mr. Helfrich and Ms. Manns as the top candidates and added Lynne Ladner to the list. She was a city manager, citing her 18 years of coastal experience with municipalities under commission-manager government, her transparent financial management, and her Florida residency.

Commissioner Ghovae added Adrian Jones, the town manager of Atlantic Beach, whom he felt had good qualifications.

Mayor Brooks identified Mr. Helfrich and Ms. Manns as her top candidates. She explained why she opposed adding either candidate, Lynne Ladner or Adrian Jones. Commissioner Tagliarini said he would have no problem adding them.

After discussion, the Board's consensus was to interview Ms. Narlock's five recommended candidates, plus the two additional candidates requested by commissioners, Lynne Lader and Adrian Jones, bringing the total to seven candidates for the interview process:

1. Stanley Hawthorne
2. Michael Helfrich
3. Debbie Manns
4. Timothy Owens

5. Raymond Palmer
6. Lynne Ladner
7. Adrian Jones

Mayor Brooks opened to public comment. There were no public comments.

5. RESPOND TO PUBLIC COMMENTS/QUESTIONS

1. Nazary Ivanchuk, 431 Virginia Avenue, requested that the Board consider a reduction of accrued code enforcement fines for his property at 431 Virginia Avenue, Madeira Beach.

Mayor Brooks said the Virginia Avenue property would follow proper processes.

2. Chuck Dillion, 529 Lillian Drive, asked the Board to consider making the four free parking spaces at Kitty Stuart Park resident-only.

The Acting City Manager provided an update on Kitty Stuart Park, noting that the south side is not ready to open. The Board was interested in making the four parking spaces available only to residents, with parking enforcement monitoring usage. If residents do not use them, they could reconsider charging.

6. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Brooks adjourned the meeting at 2:08 p.m.

Anne-Marie Brooks, Mayor

ATTEST:

Clara VanBlargan, MMC, MSM, City Clerk