



**TAVARES CITY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
JANUARY 15, 2025 – 4:00 PM
TAVARES CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
201 EAST MAIN STREET, TAVARES**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

**Walter Price, Mayor
Lori Pfister, Vice Mayor
Sandy Gamble, Council Member
Bob Grenier, Council Member
Troy Singer, Council Member**

STAFF PRESENT

**John Drury, City Administrator
Lindsay Holt, City Attorney
Susie Novack, City Clerk
Antonio Fabre, Community Development Director
Scott Aldrich, Community Services Director
Bob Tweedie, Economic Development Director
Lori Houghton, Finance Director
Richard Keith, Fire Chief
Crissy Bublitz, Human Resources Director
James Dillon, Public Works Director
Mark O'Keefe, Support Services Director
Sarah Coursey, Police Chief
Phil Clark, Utilities Director**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Price called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. He asked those who wished to speak on an agenda item to complete and submit a Request to Speak form.

II. INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Tab 1. Deacon Paul Gaucher, St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church

Deacon Paul Gaucher, St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church, provided the invocation and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mayor Price asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. Mr. Drury said the staff had no changes.

Mayor Price said he received a Request to Speak form for Tab 6 and pulled the item off the Consent Agenda for discussion. Council Member Grenier said he also planned to pull Tab 6 for discussion.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve the Agenda with Tab 6 pulled for discussion from the Consent Agenda [Seasons at Waterstone – Final Plat], seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

IV. PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

Tab 2. Proclamation – Tavares 8th Annual Arbor Day Celebration

Mayor Price read a Proclamation declaring January 18, 2025, as City of Tavares Arbor Day in recognition of the City's Tree City USA program requirements established by the Arbor Day Foundation, U.S. Forest Service, and National Association of State Foresters.

Mr. Dillon noted the City's 7th Annual Arbor Day event would be held on Saturday, January 18, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. in Wooton Park.

MOTION

Bob Grenier moved to approve the Proclamation, seconded by Troy Singer. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Mayor Price presented the Proclamation to Mr. Dillon.

V. SWEARING IN BY CITY ATTORNEY AND DISCLOSURE OF EXPARTE COMMUNICATIONS

Attorney Holt stated there were no quasi-judicial matters before the Council for consideration.

VI. READING OF ALL ORDINANCES/RESOLUTIONS INTO THE RECORD

Ms. Novack read the following ordinances and resolutions by title only:

RESOLUTION 2025-01

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF TAVARES CITY COUNCIL, LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA; AUTHORIZING THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR TO SUBMIT, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS OF LAKE COUNTY, FLORIDA, AND THE CITY OF MOUNT DORA, TO SUBMIT A 2025 REBUILDING AMERICA GRANT APPLICATION FOR THE WEKIVA TRAIL EXTENSION PROJECT – SEGMENT 1 AND SEGMENT 5 TO THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION; AUTHORIZING THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR OR DESIGNEE TO EXECUTE SUPPLEMENTS TO THE APPLICATION; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

RESOLUTION 2025-02

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF A FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION GRANT FROM THE STATE OF FLORIDA TO COMPLETE STORMWATER VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Price asked if anyone wished to pull an item from the Consent Agenda for discussion, noting that Tab 6 was previously pulled for discussion.

MOTION

Bob Grenier moved to approve the Consent Agenda [Tab 3 – Approval of the December 18, 2024, City Council Meeting Minutes, Tab 4 – Approval of the 2025 City Council Meeting Dates, and Tab 5 – Broad Budget Goals], seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 3. Approval of the December 18, 2024, City Council Meeting Minutes

Approved on the Consent Agenda.

Tab 4. Approval of the 2025 City Council Meeting Dates

Approved on the Consent Agenda.

Tab 5. Broad Budget Goals

Approved on the Consent Agenda.

Tab 6. Seasons at Waterstone – Final Plat

Mayor Price said he received a Request to Speak form from Wilson Lima. He invited Mr. Lima to the podium.

Wilson Lima, 12347 Tavares Ridge Lane, Tavares, asked the Council to consider conducting a fiscal impact analysis for the plat before approving the project. He said it was his understanding that the cost to construct and maintain infrastructure on similar subdivisions outweighed the property tax benefit to the City.

Council Member Grenier said he wanted to pull the agenda item for comment, noted his disappointment with the project, and wished for the record to reflect that he would not have supported the project when approved in 2018 had he been on the Council, nor would he currently support the project. He said it was a bad use of land and discussed the condition of Dead River Road, including potholes and cracks.

Vice Mayor Pfister said she voted against the project as well. She asked for confirmation that the project initially started as another development that would pay for SR 19 intersection improvements. Mr. Drury confirmed and said Lake County ultimately made the intersection improvements.

Mr. Drury noted the Board previously approved a plat where the developer said they would build roads, fire hydrants, water, and sewer to the City's standards in the development. What is before the Council is a final plat. The staff has reviewed the original and final plat and determined that both are consistent. If the two plats were inconsistent, the Council could identify the inconsistencies and deny the final plat. When the project was approved in 2018, the City allowed smaller lot sizes. The Comprehensive Plan and Land Development Regulations have since been updated, and all new projects meet the new requirements. Mr. Drury noted the project before the Council was one of the final projects under old regulations. He said it has been a long project and took many years to accomplish the intersection improvements.

Council Member Singer asked Mr. Fabre to provide background information on the project.

Mr. Fabre said the Planned Development was initially approved for 111 lots with a combination of lot sizes. When the developer submitted the construction plans, the City staff and engineer provided a review, and the lots were further reduced to 93. He discussed the condition of Dead River Road and said a right-of-way was needed on the road. The project dedicated more than four acres of right-of-way to smooth out a turn, including a right-turn lane into the development.

Council Member Singer asked if the Planning and Zoning Board reviewed such projects before they came before the Council. Mr. Fabre confirmed.

Council Member Singer asked if the project could have been developed with more homes. Mr. Fabre confirmed. Council Member Singer asked if 111 lots would be the

highest and best use that could be made on the property. Mr. Fabre confirmed. Council Member Singer stated projects go through the Community Development Department and Planning and Zoning Board before coming to the Council for consideration. When the project was presented to the Council in 2018, it was a worthwhile project. It had fewer homes than allowed to develop, so the Council voted in favor of development. He said what is before the Council is a vote on the final plat. He favored moving forward and said the developers did everything they should do. Mr. Fabre confirmed. He noted the development had conservation areas and open space between wetland conservation areas and all around the development, and the developer met the criteria.

Council Member Singer asked who was responsible for Dead River Road. Mr. Fabre said Lake County as Dead River Road was a county road.

Vice Mayor Pfister said the project was initially approved because of the traffic issues on Dead River Road. She said traffic would back up at the light, and Lake County had no intention of resolving the road issues. The developer came to the city and said that if they could put in 143 homes, they would improve the intersection to accommodate the new homes. The development was approved to improve Dead River Road. The developer did not complete the project, and someone else came before the Council and asked for the same deal without improving the road because Lake County had agreed to make the upgrades. She said it took a while for the county to fix the road, which held up the development. Vice Mayor Pfister said Dead River Road could not accommodate additional traffic or homes.

Council Member Gamble asked if the development was already underway. Mr. Fabre confirmed.

Council Member Gamble asked the City Attorney what liability the City would incur if not approved. Attorney Holt said the developer could appeal the decision, and entitlement, density, and units were vested entitlement that had been approved. What the Council was voting on was the final plat. Council Member Gamble noted the plat had been approved, and the number of homes was reduced. Council Member Gamble asked if the City would be placed at fault if the final plat was not approved. Attorney Holt confirmed the City could be challenged.

Mr. Drury said he concurred with the Council on the condition of the road, which needed to be updated, repaired, maintained, widened, and shouldered with sidewalks. Mr. Drury noted Dead River Road was a county road on their 20-year plan for maintenance. Mr. Drury said staff would contact Commissioner Smith to see if he can move the road maintenance up on their list. Council Member Gamble noted that Woodlea Road and Lane Park Road were county roads that were not maintained to city standards. Mr. Drury said the City works well with the County; for example, the County brought David Walker Road up to standards, and the City then took over maintenance. Thus, the city residents were not burdened with the costs of upgrading the county roads.

A discussion was held regarding older developments that took many years to complete. Mr. Drury noted the Council now has rules in place where a developer has two years before the opportunity to develop sunsets. Whereas decades ago, the City wanted growth and allowed approvals without sunset.

MOTION

Troy Singer moved to approve the Seasons at Waterstone Final Plat, seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried 3-2 as follows:

Walter Price:	Yes
Lori Pfister:	No
Sandy Gamble:	Yes
Bob Grenier:	No
Troy Singer:	Yes

VIII. RESOLUTIONS

Tab 7. Resolution 2025-01 – RAISE Grant Application

Mr. Dillon made the following presentation:

On December 4, 2024, Tavares City Council authorized staff to pursue a \$25 million RAISE grant for the planned Wekiva Trail Extension Project, specifically for Segment 1 and Segment 5. To apply for the FY-25 RAISE grant program, a new resolution is needed to officially authorize staff, in partnership with Lake County, Florida, and the City of Mount Dora, to submit a \$25 million grant application to the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) for the Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) initiative concerning the Wekiva Trail Extension Project.

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Pub. L. 117-58, November 15, 2021), authorized and appropriated \$1.5 billion annually to be awarded by the Department of Transportation (“DOT”) 2022 – FY 2026 for Local and Regional Project Assistance Program Grants under National Infrastructure Investments to fund eligible surface transportation projects with significant local or regional impact. As of June 2024, the program has awarded more than \$15 billion over sixteen rounds to local governments, Tribes, transit and port authorities, states, and other entities.

Staff recommends Option 1, for the Council to Approve Resolution No. 2025-01 to apply and accept, in partnership with Lake County Florida and City of Mount Dora to submit to the Department of Transportation (DOT) a \$25 million 2025 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant application for the planned Wekiva Trail Extension Project - Segment 1 and Segment 5.

Mr. Dillon recognized Lou Buigas in the audience and noted she presented a letter supporting the City's RAISE grant application from Representative Nan Cobb.

MOTION

Sandy Gamble moved to approve Resolution 2025-01, seconded by Troy Singer. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Council Member Gamble and Mayor Price commended Mr. Dillon for all his hard work.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Council Member Gamble thanked Ms. Buigas and asked her to relay his appreciation to Representative Cobb.

Tab 8. Resolution 2025-02 – Acceptance of State of Florida Department of Environmental Protection Grant for Stormwater Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

The Department of Environmental Protection Resilient Florida Program has awarded the city \$160,500 to complete a Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment for Stormwater.

Details of the grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection include the following:

- *Agreement Number: 25PLN26.*
- *DEP Grant Manager: Drew Begley*
- *Pass-through Entity: N/A.*
- *Awarding Entity: Florida Department of Environmental Protection.*
- *Recipient: City of Tavares.*
- *Grant Award: \$160,500.*
- *No grant match required.*
- *Award Period: Date of Execution – to be determined.*

Staff recommends Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2025-02, authorizing the City Administrator to accept and execute all FDEP grant agreements for the Stormwater Comprehensive Vulnerability Assessment project.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the Council.

Council Member Gamble asked for confirmation that the grant amount was \$160,000. Ms. Houghton confirmed.

Council Member Singer asked for confirmation that the grant did not require a match. Ms. Houghton confirmed and said if anything changed with the grant it would be brought back to the Council immediately.

MOTION

Sandy Gamble moved to approve Resolution 2025-02, seconded by Bob Grenier. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

IX. ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING

First Reading

Second Reading

X. GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Tab 9. Discussion to name new St. Clair Abrams Stormwater Pond

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

In 2023, the City received 3 stormwater grants from Lake County Water Authority, Florida Legislation Appropriation, and FDEP Stormwater. The 3 grants totaled \$753,910. The project was delayed a year due to the proximity of the nesting season of a neighboring eagle. Up until now, both the Utilities Department and the Engineer have referred to the pond as Eagle Park. The Council will need to decide on a name for the pond. The Utilities Department suggests it be named Eagle Park. It's at the Council's discretion.

Staff recommends Option 1, to name the pond Eagle Park.

In a brief discussion, the Council expressed their support to name the pond Eagle Park.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to name the stormwater pond Eagle Park, seconded by Bob Grenier. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 10. Community Grant Awards

Ms. Novack made the following presentation:

The Council budgeted \$2,000 in the current Fiscal Year 2025 for community grants. The City advertised at the beginning of the fiscal year an invitation to submit community grant applications for area not-for-profit organizations with a 502C3 designation for up to \$500 in funding for community and social service projects.

The City received four grant applications (attached) as follows:

- *Lake Cares, Inc.*
- *Educational Foundation of Lake County, Inc.*
- *Lake County Museum of Art*
- *Triangle Community Alliance, Inc.*

A ranking committee consisting of the City Clerk, Finance Director, and Community Services Director met on January 6, 2025, and reviewed the applications to determine if they met the criteria for the Community Grant Program. It was determined that each request met the criteria.

Staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to award \$500 Community Grants to Lake Cares, Inc., Educational Foundation of Lake County, Inc., Lake County Museum of Art, and Triangle Community Alliance, Inc., leaving a zero balance for any further grant requests in FY 2025.

Council Member Singer said the Community Grant was a great program for the local community.

Council Member Gamble stated that the Educational Foundation representatives could not attend the meeting and that, if awarded, their grant would go toward seniors at area high schools.

Iliana Buigas, Lake County Museum of Art, said state grants were not funded in the current fiscal year. She said the museum would be grateful for the grant, which would be utilized for kids and outreach programs.

Debby Weinert, Triangle Community Alliance, thanked the Council for their consideration. She said Tavares had 1100 children eligible for the free book program, and 338 were enrolled. She said the books were free to the families, and the grant would move the program forward. Ms. Weinert noted that it costs \$36 a year per child to receive a book monthly.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve [Option 1], seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

XII. OLD BUSINESS

Mayor Price said he and Council Member Grenier had previously mentioned a preference to keep the blue and white lights at the gateway sign on US 441 year-round. He said he received the same request from citizens as well. Mr. Drury said staff would research options and report back to the Council.

XIII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

Lou Buigas, District Aide for Representative Nan Cobb, said Representative Cobb was in Tallahassee and wanted to relay that she was available and accessible to the Council. She would have one of her team members attend each Council meeting in her district.

XIV. REPORTS

Tab 11. City Administrator Report

Mr. Drury said the Mayor's Youth Council members would like to be photographed with their paired Council members for the Tavares High School yearbook after the meeting. He asked those Council members who wished to participate to remain in the Council Chambers for photographs.

Vice Mayor Pfister introduced Mayor's Youth Council member Kelly Lopez, who was shadowing her at the dais during the meeting.

Chief Keith provided an update on the Fire Department, including the following:

- Captain Willis' position was reclassified to Division Chief due to growth in the department for fire safety and life safety.
- Chief Keith provided Marion County Fire Department promotional calendars to the Council, which featured area fire departments, including Tavares.

Mr. Fabre said the new Chipotle restaurant was opened and noted a new Starbucks was being built next to Heartland Dental on State Road 19.

Tab 12. City Council Member Reports

Vice Mayor Pfister asked Ms. Lopez if she would like to make any comments. Ms. Lopez introduced herself and said it was a great opportunity to be selected to participate in the Mayor's Youth Council. She looked forward to the Mock Mayor's Youth Council Meeting in April.

Vice Mayor Pfister commended and thanked Mr. Dillon for all his project efforts. Mr. Dillon thanked the Council and leadership team for their support.

Council Member Grenier said the City had terrific staff and commended Mr. Dillon and Solid Waste Manager Jeff Henderson. He stated Mr. Henderson was quick to respond to a recent call.

Council Member Grenier said a Lake Sumter documentary team came to the Tavares Research Center the previous year to research the history of Lake Sumter College and Johnson College. He was interviewed during the visit, where cameras were set up, and they did their research at the Tavares Research Center utilizing old newspapers. Council Member Grenier said the director and producer recently called him and said the film was complete and selected by the Central Florida Film Festival as one of their entries and would premier at the Epic Theatre in Mount Dora in the upcoming days. He was proud the documentary team conducted the Tavares Research Center.

Council Member Singer recognized the Mayors Youth Council members in the audience. He noted that most students had attended more meetings than required in the program syllabus. Council Member Singer said he looked forward to the Mock Mayors Youth Council Meeting.

Council Member Gamble said Pastor Watkins asked him to convey that he could not attend the meeting and wanted to promote an upcoming B.E.T.T.E.R. meeting. He also wished to invite those present to a Martin Luther King breakfast on January 18 at the Civic Center.

Council Member Gamble inquired about a 'closed' sign at the Tavares Nature Park. Mr. Dillon said the staff placed two large signs at the park, which he would confirm.

Council Member Gamble commended the Public Works Department on their quick responses.

Council Member Gamble said he recently attended a meeting with the Board of County Commissioners, where there was a discussion on the county's Land Development Regulations (LDRs). He said Lake County was considering giving their inspections and building department more teeth to enforce violations. The county commissioners recommended FEMA building elevation standards for height regarding water intrusion. He asked if the City could get a copy of the county's recommendations to mirror to help with site plan approvals so that watershed situations are not created on neighboring properties. He said it was mentioned during the meeting that if all Lake County cities developed similar or the same regulations, everyone would be on the same page with no deviation when someone came to get their permits.

Mayor Price congratulated Division Chief Willis on his promotion.

Mayor Price noted the City's Arbor Day event would be held on Saturday, January 18, in Wooton Park. Mr. Dillon said the City would have 1000 trees to give away.

Mayor Price noted the Rhythm on Ruby Event would be held on Saturday, January 25.

XV. ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business, and Mayor Price adjourned the meeting at 5:07 p.m.

Respectfully,

Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM
City Clerk