



**TAVARES CITY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
APRIL 2, 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
Amanda Boggus, 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. Pastor Kevin Honeycutt, First Baptist Church of Tavares

Pastor Kevin Honeycutt of First Baptist Church of Tavares 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.

MOTION

Sandy Gamble moved to approve the Agenda, seconded by Lori Pfister. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

IV. IMPACT FEE WORKSHOP

Tab 2. Second Council Workshop to discuss Draft City of Tavares 2025 Municipal Impact Fee Study for Police, Fire, Parks, and General Government

Mayor Price welcomed those present to the second public workshop to discuss the Draft City of Tavares 2025 Municipal Impact Fee Study for Police, Fire, Parks, and General Government.

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

By way of background, the following information is provided to assist the City Council as they review the City of Tavares 2025 Municipal Impact Fee Study Draft Report for Police, Fire, Parks and General Government Facilities Impact Fees. The Draft Study Report is dated February 13, 2025.

- *The prior study for City of Tavares Police, Fire and Park Impact Fees was dated September 12, 2006.*
- *The City Council adopted Ordinance 2007-02 on February 21, 2007, which implemented the 2006 study recommendations.*
- *On June 4, 2021, CS/CS/CS/HB337, known as the Florida Impact Fee Act, was signed into law which brought several changes to Impact Fee requirements.*

Some changes for Impact Fees provided in the Florida Impact Fee Act (F.S. § 163.31801) include the following:

- *The law provides an introduction of definitions for the term infrastructure and public facilities.*
- *The law also creates a cap on the amount local governments can increase impact fees. This cap limits the increase to no more than 12.5% in a given year and no more than 50% over a four-year period.*
- *An increase greater than 50% requires a two-thirds vote of the City Council and provides at least two publicly noticed workshops.*

- *Local Governments will be required to credit developers or builders on a dollar-for-dollar basis when they contribute toward public facilities or infrastructure.*
- *The law requires that impact fees be split out into their own accounting fund.*
- *Local governments must limit administrative charges for the collection of impact fees to actual costs.*
- *Changes to the Financial Statement Audit Affidavit requirements by the CFO.*

The Draft Impact Fee report has been prepared by the City's Rate Consultant, Joe Williams of Raftelis, and discusses the following for each impact fee: Police, Fire, Parks, and General Government Facilities. The Draft Report has been prepared within the constraints of the Florida Impact Fee Act.

- *An Introduction*
- *Existing Impact Fees*
- *Incremental Costs*
- *Impact Fee Development*
- *Impact Fee Comparisons*

Discussions at the workshop are required to have dedicated discussions related to the extraordinary circumstances necessitating the need to exceed the phase-in limitations set forth in FS 163.31801.

The Draft Report identifies the following extraordinary circumstances:

- *Recent large inflationary cost increases*
- *Additional capital improvements based on a significant increase in population growth.*

On March 19, 2025, the City Council held the first of two publically noticed Workshops to discuss the Draft Impact Fee study proposing updated impact fees.

This workshop represents the second of two required publically noticed workshops to be held by the City Council for the Study and proposed rates as required by FS 163.3801. This report is delivered to the City Council for their review for workshop discussions.

Upon consensus of the City Council (at this second workshop), a Final Report and proposed Ordinance will be brought to the City Council at the next City Council meeting for First Reading.

Michelle Galvin of Raftelis, Consultant, said the impact fees are one-time fees for new development to pay for growth-related capital. The fees were last updated in 2006, and

since then, there have been significant rises in construction costs, materials, and vehicles. She said the increased costs put a burden on the City's infrastructure needs as people continue to develop Tavares.

Ms. Galvin presented a PowerPoint presentation on the Draft Impact fee report, including the following highlights:

- Existing and Proposed Single-Family Residential Impact Fees
- Local Comparison
- Proposed Impact Fees and Cost Factors
 - Updated Police Impact Fees
 - Updated Fire Impact Fees
 - Updated Parks and Recreation Impact Fees
 - New General Government Impact Fees
- Revenue Forecast
- Next Steps
- First Impact Fee Workshop held on March 19, 2025

Council Member Singer asked if there would be any effect moving forward if some of the numbers in the agenda packet were inaccurate, as the Council pointed out previously. Ms. Houghton said a draft report was presented to the Council. Once the Council approves moving forward, a final report would be returned for two ordinance readings. At that time, all corrections would be made. Attorney Boggus stated that Florida Statutes require the City to hold two workshops and confirmed that the City was legally covered. As long as the City was on record, everyone was aware of the corrected information, and they had an opportunity to engage, the City should be okay.

Ms. Galvin said the next step would include two public hearings for an ordinance and a 90-day waiting period before implementation.

Mayor Price asked for the deficit if a phased-in schedule was implemented. Ms. Galvin stated there would be a \$1.4 million dollar difference utilizing a phased-in approach.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the Council. There were none.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the audience. There were none.

Vice Mayor Pfister expressed her support for moving forward at the whole level of funding, as the City had not raised impact fees in many years. She said the residents were bearing the cost of growth, and adopting the impact fee increase was being a responsible steward to the taxpayers.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to move forward with the Ordinance phase with a full increase, seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Gamble concurred with Vice Mayor Pfister and requested confirmation that only new construction and particular renovations would be subject to impact fees, not buildings currently owned by anyone. He said if the Council does not implement the impact fee increase, then in years to come, they would have to increase taxes to maintain the same level of service.

Vice Mayor Pfister noted that no local builders or developers were in the audience for comment.

Council Member Singer said growth should pay for growth. He stated that the average price of a new home was \$380,000, and the impact fee would be less than 1% of the home's price. Council Member Singer noted his support for moving forward and said that if the City implemented a phase-in, it would cost \$1.5 million dollars. He said that if conditions changed, the Council could suspend or reduce the impact fees.

Council Member Grenier concurred with the Council's comments and expressed his support for moving forward. He stated that he would not be available to attend the April 16 City Council meeting and would be present for the final vote on an ordinance in May.

Council Member Singer asked if a new study would be planned in four (4) to five (5) years. Mr. Drury confirmed five (5) years.

Mayor Price asked Mr. Fabre when renovation impact fees would be applied. Mr. Fabre stated that interior renovations, such as a bathroom, would not be applicable, and impact fees would be incurred if a wing was added to a home.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

V. PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

Tab 3. Tavares Chamber of Commerce Update

David D'Agostino, Board Chairman of the Tavares Chamber of Commerce, provided an update on upcoming events, chamber news, and current member and visitor statistics.

Council Member Gamble asked if the Chamber would consider seeking sponsorships for future drone shows, such as the 4th of July and Christmas celebrations. Mr. D'Agostino said the Tavares Chamber would do everything possible to help.

Council Member Singer said the Taste of Tavares is a great event and hoped the Chamber would continue to host the event.

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

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

VII. READING OF ALL ORDINANCES/RESOLUTIONS INTO THE RECORD

Ms. Novack stated there were no Ordinances or Resolutions before the Council for consideration.

VIII. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Price asked if anyone wished to pull an item from the Consent Agenda for discussion. There were no requests.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve the Consent Agenda [Tab 3. Approval of the March 5, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes], seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 4. Approval of the March 19, 2025, City Council Impact Fee Workshop and Regular Meeting Minutes

Approved on the Consent Agenda.

IX. RESOLUTIONS

X. ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING

First Reading

Second Reading

XI. GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Tab 5. Tavares Public Library Program Overview

Rebecca Campbell, Library Director, said April 6 - 12, 2025, marked National Library Week in the United States. National Library Week is a celebration that highlights the valuable role that libraries, librarians, and library workers play in transforming lives and strengthening communities. Ms. Campbell provided a presentation highlighting some programs and events scheduled for National Library Week.

Tab 6. Police Pension DROP Program

Chief Coursey made the following presentation:

Some of the police officers are under the local city pension plan (closed for new employees), while other, more recent hires, are under the Florida Retirement System (FRS) which is open to new employees. Once eligible for retirement, an officer can elect to participate in the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Plan). This allows the employee to defer their retirement benefits and continue working while accumulating their pension payments in a special interest-bearing account. The FRS allows for an 8-year DROP, while the local city plan currently allows for only 5 years. The Police pension board is making a request to amend the closed local City plan to reflect an increase from a 5-year DROP to an 8-year DROP to mirror FRS.

An Ordinance would need to be crafted and approved by the City Council to effectuate this change.

Staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve the City staff working with the City attorney to craft an Ordinance to be brought back to the City Council for its approval along with any actuarial and fiscal impact.

Mayor Price asked if the request would benefit the employees who were on the City plan by switching from a five-year DROP to an eight-year DROP. Chief Coursey confirmed and said the officers could work longer and still accumulate that money. She said they were in favor of the DROP extension.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve Option 1, seconded by Troy Singer.

Council Member Gamble noted his support.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Council Member Gamble asked if any other employees were on a similar plan. Mr. Drury noted that the general employees were on the extended plan. He said it was an additional benefit to employees, which allowed them to build up their retirement savings over eight years instead of five. The Fire Department was also eligible to extend its DROP program.

Tab 7. 2025 Projects and Initiatives Status Report

Mr. Drury said he provided the Council with a list of projects and initiatives staff worked on each mid-year. He said the Council had been provided a comprehensive list of some, not all, projects and initiatives as an opportunity to be updated on what the Department Directors were working on and to give a quick reference guide when the Council talks with their constituents. Mr. Drury highlighted the following projects and initiatives:

- West Main Street Gateway (Phase I - Sign/Arch)
- David Walker Drive – Intersection with US441
- Trails Partnership between Lake County, Mount Dora, Tavares, Trust for Public Lands, Florida Central Railroad, and CSX
- Regional Park – East Campus (YMCA) and West Campus (Woodlea Sports Park)
- Technology Initiatives throughout departments

Council Member Gamble asked if the City could approach the County regarding putting a traffic signal at the intersection of David Walker Road. He said he would like to see the County's study at the intersection. Mr. Drury said two previous studies were conducted, and he would acquire their latest study.

Vice Mayor Pfister asked for an update on turning the old Public Works complex into downtown parking. Mr. Drury said bids would go out in two weeks to remove the buildings and graveling. Mr. Dillon noted Phase I would include fifty (50) parking spaces, and Phase II would consist of forty (40) parking spaces. He said a mix of asphalt and gravel would go down first, and the entire parking area would eventually be paved.

Council Member Grenier asked how far into Sorrento the trail would go. Mr. Dillon said the trail would go all the way to Redtail.

Council Member Gamble asked if water and sewer were available to the sixteen (16) homes on the Peninsula. Mr. Clark said it was only to the entrance of the subdivision. He said Phase II or III of the Crestwind project would bring services to the front of the homes toward the end of the year.

Mayor Price inquired about work in the Tavares Nature Park. Mr. Drury said a meeting with Florida Wildlife Commission biologists was held following Hurricane Milton and resulted in an agreement on developing a system of trails that would coincide with the biological habitats in the park and provide improved park accessibility year-round. He said the initiative would support responsible land management and open areas for wildflowers and bird watching that were difficult to access and navigate. Mr. Drury said a new GIS layer had been created, and Public Works was working with several land management companies to develop a scope of work that would best fit the City's budget. The Parks Division was updating the management plan for the park to be submitted with a timeline for the proposed trail improvements. Upon review and approval, work could be scheduled once funding was available and a schedule to reopen the hurricane-damaged paths was forthcoming. Until that time, the park remained closed.

Tab 8. Waterfront Park Designations Map

Mr. Tweedie made the following presentation:

The City's public-use waterfront property spans almost a mile from end to end and includes several different features, facilities and amenities to include, among others: Pavilion on the Lake event center, a playground, splash pad, special event pad/venue, passive park space, gazebos and pavilions, seaplane base, sand volleyball courts, a boat slip marina, boat ramp, parking etc. The waterfront has become a hub of entertainment, arts and culture, events and lots of activity for the community and visitors. And it serves a unique and vital function as the "Economic Engine" for our downtown business sector.

The waterfront has generally been designated and referred to as Wooton Park and Wooton Park West, with Pontoon Promenade being adopted by the Council previously, but with no further designation or depiction of the specific areas, functions and identifying features of each area. In order to clearly identify, depict and display these various functions, features and uses for City residents and visitors alike, it would be useful to have designations, signage, maps and online graphics clearly and simply designating these areas, which would also help to make the area more attractive and marketable. With input from the resident "keeper of History", Council member Bobby Grenier, the City Administrator and Economic Development Director, the attached graphic depiction has been developed for City Council discussion and consideration, designating and color coding the following 4 distinct areas of the Waterfont Park:

- 1. Wooton Park*
- 2. Pontoon Promenade East*
- 3. Seaplane Base*
- 4. Pontoon Promenade West*

If adopted, this plan would officially designate each of these four sections and include each of their specific features, amenities and facilities within each section. Staff could then put together a plan to include appropriate color code maps/signage to be physically placed on the property depicting and identifying each section as well as online graphics etc. including estimated cost to implement, which would be included in the upcoming FY 26 budget for Council consideration.

Staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve the waterfront park designations map.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the Council.

Vice Mayor Pfister thanked Mr. Tweedie. She said area designations were needed to assist those with mobility issues to park areas. She said the designated areas provided ease of use for anyone who visits the City's waterfront.

Council Member Grenier stated that the Tavares Ecological Park was the fifth element of the entertainment historic district. He said the signage makes Tavares a tourist

destination and noted his support. Mr. Drury said the Tavares Ecological Park would be added to the map.

Council Member Singer asked if a budget would be developed for FY 2026 to develop a plan and for the costs of signage and maps. Mr. Tweedie confirmed.

Council Member Singer asked if the designation would affect Police and Fire response times. Chief Coursey and Chief Keith said the designated areas would be helpful and would not significantly impact response time.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve Option 2 with the addition of the Tavares Ecological Park, seconded by Bob Grenier. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

XII. NEW BUSINESS

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

Council Member Singer said he received a letter from David D'Agostino regarding a contact he has in Natchez, Mississippi, who may be able to assist with a Sister City program. Mr. Drury asked Council Member Singer to forward the contact information for the Horizon team to review. He thanked Mr. D'Acostino.

XIV. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

Gary Santoro, Royal Harbor, Tavares, thanked the Council for supporting the Police Department pension request. Mr. Santoro thanked Mr. Drury and Mr. Fabre for inviting staff members to speak at the Planning and Zoning meetings. He said Division Chief Mike Willis made a phenomenal presentation and noted his support for showcasing City employees.

XV. REPORTS

Tab 9. City Administrator Report

Mr. Drury said he would like to echo Mr. Santoro's comments as it was nice working with Mr. Fabre to add a new component to the Planning and Zoning Board meetings. He said each month, a Department Director would either speak to the Board or assign a staff member to provide updates on how their process works to assist in completing a building permit or planning initiative. Mr. Drury thanked Mr. Fabre and Mr. Santoro.

Mr. Drury noted that the Mayor's Youth Council Mock Meeting would be held on April 16 at 3:00 p.m., immediately preceding the Council meeting. Mr. O'Keefe said the Mayor's Youth Council program was highlighted in a recent City newsletter.

Mr. Dillon said Publix contacted the City regarding a public service community program encouraging their associates to volunteer for environmental initiatives. Tavares was selected for an environmental and beautification project on Wednesday, April 9, where one hundred (100) volunteers gathered at the Public Works operations center and planted trees along the western stormwater basin. He said the collaboration promotes environmental awareness and education and contributes to the America in Bloom program.

Chief Keith stated the Fire Department would be participating in a multi-agency aerial truck training exercise the following week throughout the City. He said ladder trucks would be in the downtown area during the training.

Mr. Fabre thanked Mayor Price and Council Member Singer for attending the recent Horizon Team corridor meetings. He said future presentations would be made to the Council after receiving a review from the Planning and Zoning Board.

Attorney Boggus asked when the dog park would reopen. Mr. Dillon said the contractor anticipated completing work on the dog park by the end of the month. He said there would be a second phase of the project, which would include installing bee mats at a later date. Attorney Boggus noted that the Planning and Zoning Board presentation by Fire Department Division Chief Willis was excellent.

Tab 10. City Council Member Reports

Vice Mayor Pfister commended those staff members and departments who assisted with the Sunnyland Antique Boat Show. She asked if the City could look for a way not to charge entry fees to City residents. Mr. Tweedie said the staff would continue encouraging the organization to provide fee relief to the residents.

Vice Mayor Pfister commended Mr. Aldrich and said her grandson enjoyed a recent STEAM program visit to the Utility Department lab.

Council Member Grenier thanked the staff for their thorough summaries and presentations to the Council. He hoped those present enjoyed having Good Friday off and that everyone would reflect on what Good Friday and Easter represent.

Council Member Singer said he appreciated the Tavares Chamber of Commerce for returning the Taste of Tavares event and thanked Board Chairman David D'Agostino for his efforts.

Council Member Gamble thanked Chief Coursey and the Tavares Police Department for their efforts on the recent Xavier Williams candlelight vigil at Wooton Park. He said Pastor Michael Watkins also extended his appreciation and thanks to the department.

Council Member Gamble noted Tavares High School would be replacing sidewalks as soon as their baseball and softball seasons concluded.

Mayor Price commended the Police Department and their charity for an unbelievable turnout for the Xavier Williams vigil at Wooton Park. He was proud of the community and to be a part of it.

Mayor Price discussed his recent legislative trip to Tallahassee on behalf of the City. He said most bills identified by the Florida League of Cities would harm municipalities. He discussed home rule issues and thanked Mr. Dillon and Tracy Anderson for their efforts on behalf of the Trails project.

XVI. ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business, and Mayor Price adjourned the meeting at 5:22 p.m.

Respectfully,

Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM
City Clerk