



**CITY OF TAVARES
PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD MEETING
TAVARES COUNCIL CHAMBERS
201 E. MAIN STREET, TAVARES
APRIL 17, 2025**

BOARD MEMBERS' PRESENT

Gary Santoro, Chairman
Deborah Murphy, Vice-Chairperson
Dian Joy, Board Member - *Absent*
Brooke Matthews, Board Member - *Absent*
Bruce Peterman, Board Member
James Sweeza, Board Member
Dara Treadwell, Board Member

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Antonio Fabre – Community Development Director
Anarquis Frias, City Planner
Amanda Boggus, City Attorney
Jillian Roberts, Deputy City Clerk
James Dillon, Public Works Director
Phillip Clark, Utility Director
Bob Tweedie, Economic Development Director

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Santoro called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m. and asked those present to silence their cell phones.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Santoro led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Tab 1. Approval of the March 20, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board Meeting Minutes

Chairman Santoro asked if there were any additions or corrections to the March 20, 2025, Planning & Zoning Board meeting minutes. There were none.

MOTION

Dara Treadwell moved to approve March 20, 2025, Planning and Zoning Meeting Minutes, seconded by James Sweeza. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

IV. SWEARING IN BY CITY ATTORNEY AND DISCLOSURE OF EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS

Attorney Holt asked those who wished to speak on Tab 2 [Resolution 2025-05; Variance – Reduced Side and Rear Yard Setback] to raise their right hands. She swore in those who wished to provide testimony.

Attorney Holt asked the Board to disclose any exparte communications. There were none.

Chairman Santoro asked if Board Members Joy or Mathews had advised of their absence. Mr. Fabre said both Board members sent emails indicating they could not attend the meeting.

Chairman Santoro said he would like to add an item under Other Business: Discussion on Board Attendance, Duties, and Responsibilities.

MOTION

James Sweeza moved to add Discussion on Board Attendance, Duties, and Responsibilities to the agenda under Other Business, seconded by Dara Treadwell. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

V. PUBLIC HEARING

Tab 2. Resolution 2025-05; Variance – Reduced Side and Rear Yard Setbacks – 122 East Main Street

Mr. Fabre made the following presentation:

This is a variance application from Tavares Heritage Square LLC for a reduction of the required minimum side yard setback of 7.5 feet and rear yard setback of 10 feet for property located at 122 East Main Street. Specifically, the property

owner desires to build to the historic zero (0') setbacks along Ruby Street and S. Rockingham Avenue. The owner of the property wishes to construct two (2) mixed-used (commercial on the first floor and residential on the top floors) multi-story building structures.

Furthermore, the property at 122 East Main Street is in the Commercial Downtown District (CD) and the Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District, both of which promote zero setbacks under certain conditions. Moreover, several existing buildings along Ruby Street (Puddle Jumpers Restaurant, Citrus Sky Bar/Key West Resort, Lakeview Inn West, Citrus on the Lake) and on Rockingham (O'Keefe's Irish Pub and City Hall) currently have historic zero (0') setbacks. Since the proposed zero (0') setbacks are consistent with the historical character of the area, staff is recommending approval of all presented variances.

Staff recommended Option 1, that the Planning & Zoning Board move to recommend approval of Resolution 2020-05.

Board Member Peterman asked why the variance was not brought to the Board sooner.

Ted Wicks, Wicks Engineering, said he represented the applicant and noted this was the first public hearing for the project. He said the property was zoned as Downtown Commercial, and the City staff recommended a variance due to the project design and densities. Mr. Wicks noted the first floor would include professional offices and possibly a coffee shop with no restaurants. He said the market was prime and would be a quality project for the City.

Board Member Treadwell said downtown Tavares did not have much retail and hoped shops would be on the first floor. Mr. Wicks said retail options were open, and the goal was not to move toward food service. Board Member Treadwell noted citizens expressed concern the view of the lake would be impeded when a performing arts center previously went before the voters by referendum.

Board Member Sweeza asked if the building height would impact airport flight patterns.

Attorney Holt swore in Mr. Tweedie, who wished to provide testimony.

Mr. Tweedie said there would be no effect on the airport. He said the area's current zoning allowed up to eighty (80) feet in height, which fell within the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) parameters for the types of approaches to the airport on the lake, which was a virtual runway.

Vice Chairman Murphy and Board Member Sweeza asked why the City did not make a broader change for the entire area rather than requiring each property to come before the City Boards for individual variance requests. Mr. Fabre noted a provision in the City code for zero setbacks in the entertainment district. However, there was a height limit of thirty (30) feet. Attorney Holt said any legislative change in code must go before the City

Council. She understood that the Board was asking why height should not be codified and that staff would communicate their questions to the City Administrator and City Council.

Chairman Santoro said it was not the building footprint that needed a variance; it was the height of the building. Mr. Fabre confirmed.

Board Member Treadwell asked why the rendering of the front building depicted two (2) stories of apartments and the building facing the lake depicted four (4) stories. Mr. Wicks said the building on Main Street included the retail commercial component with residential above. Building two (2) facing Ruby Street was strictly four (4) residential floors.

Board Member Sweeza said the businesses facing Ruby Street were thriving and mostly food service. He asked if the buildings needed to be reversed. Mr. Wicks said that would not work from a marketing standpoint. He said Main Street was the main component coming through the City, where Ruby Street was a side street and mainly food service.

MOTION

Bruce Peterman moved to approve Option 1, to recommend approval of Resolution 2025-05, seconded by Dara Treadwell. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

Tab 3. Alfred Street/Old 441 Horizon Team Presentation

Mr. Fabre explained that Horizon Teams typically included one Council Member, the City Administrator, and a Department Director. An Alfred Street/Old 441 Horizon Team kick-off meeting was held on March 12, 2025. It was decided to include the Planning and Zoning Board, Public Works Department, and Utility Department to ensure comprehensive representation and coordination.

Mr. Fabre delivered a PowerPoint presentation covering the following topics:

- Images of buildings, businesses, and landscaping along Alfred Street/Old 441.
- Overview of the 2007 Lake County PD&E Study of Alfred Street from the beginning to Bay Street
- Discussion of lighting improvements at the intersection of David Walker Road and Old 441, including trail connections.
- Review of existing signage and active projects along Alfred Street/Old 441.
- Coordinated plans with:
 - FDOT on the approved Rails-to-Trails PD&E
 - Lake County Public Works

- FDOT
- Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), which sets priorities for future projects
- Plans to develop:
 - Gateway entrance signage
 - A Complete Street Pre-Engineering Master Plan
 - A pre-engineering utility extension plan to Bay Road (ISBA boundary)

Vice Chairman Murphy inquired about the extent of landscaping and sidewalks along Alfred Street/Old 441. Mr. Fabre replied that those details would be addressed in the Master Plan, and once completed, the City could pursue grant funding.

Chairman Santoro asked if the railroad would relinquish the right-of-way. Mr. Dillon confirmed the City had a letter of intent from CSX to sell, which was part of a grant application. Trust for Public Lands (TPL) was assisting with land acquisition.

Chairman Santoro asked if the City would be responsible for removing the rail cars. Mr. Dillon said the rail car operator would be responsible for removal.

Board Member Peterman discussed a sign obstructing the view of oncoming traffic along Alfred Street/Old 441. Mr. Fabre agreed to review the sign and report to the Board.

Board Member Peterman asked what constituted a safety crossing. Mr. Fabre said there are different types of safety crossings:

- High-emphasis safety crossings have lights and visible markings on the ground.
- Low-emphasis crossing paths on minor streets with single lines.

Board Member Peterson asked about crossings along the trail. Mr. Fabre said the crossings would be major emphasis areas with blinking lights. Mr. Dillon provided updates on current trail crossing locations, noting most of the trail was away from heavy traffic.

Board Member Sweeza asked about trail safety cameras. Mr. Dillon responded that camera installation could be discussed with Lake County's design team.

Board Member Sweeza asked about golf cart access. Mr. Dillon clarified that only non-motorized bicycles and pedestrians would be permitted on the trail. He noted that golf carts were allowed on most City streets with speed limits of 35 mph or lower, and other designated areas may be established.

Chairman Santoro inquired about reclaimed water availability along Old 441. Mr. Clark said it was currently unavailable and would require crossing a canal and extensive excavation on Main Street and Alfred Street. The Caroline Plant may eventually be able to supply reclaimed water, depending on future wastewater treatment expansion.

Chairman Santoro expressed support for converting Main Street to one-way traffic.

Tab 4. SR 19 Horizon Team Presentation

Mr. Fabre provided an update on the SR 19 Horizon Team with the following highlights:

- Working from the approved 2015 PD&E study.
- The objective is to construct a second bridge to alleviate traffic bottlenecks when the road is expanded to four lanes.
- A signal warrant study at the second entrance of Royal Harbor began in March 2025 and is expected to conclude by June 2025.
- A signalized intersection is planned at SR 19 and CR 561, with construction scheduled to begin in October 2025 and finish by January 2026.
- Planning includes:
 - Coordination with the MPO's 2050 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) priorities
 - Collaboration with FDOT (District 5), which has jurisdiction over the roadway.
 - Consider future land use rezoning, including encouraging commercial development along the frontage with compatible multifamily or residential use behind.
 - Future improvements to Woodlea Road as part of the Cresswind development.
 - Intergovernmental coordination with Lake County Public Works.
 - Budgeting for a Pre-Engineering Master Plan.
 - Development of utility infrastructure plans within FDOT right-of-way.

Mr. Clark noted that a new development behind Royal Harbor would require the installation of its own infrastructure. He mentioned conflicts with existing reuse, sewer, and lift stations. Mr. Clark said SR 19 improvements would loop from Howey Bridge toward CR 448.

Chairman Santoro asked Mr. Clark if he was referring to a development by Eichelberger Road. Mr. Clark confirmed.

Chairman Santoro expressed concerns about traffic congestion during the Renaissance Fair and the future Lake County fairgrounds. He noted a lack of parking and insufficient road capacity to accommodate such events.

Mr. Fabre acknowledged that a parking demand study would be required, and a parking structure may be necessary. He said he had not received site plans for the fairgrounds from Lake County. Mr. Dillon confirmed the fairground was a county project and

emphasized the City's involvement in ongoing discussions due to its impact. He said the City would provide utilities for the area. The Board discussed future traffic from a proposed Publix shopping center and a nearby apartment complex along SR 19.

Chairman Santoro asked about relocating a lift station. Mr. Clark stated that the lift station on SR 19 would likely need to be moved.

Tab 5. Discussion on Board Attendance, Duties, and Responsibilities

Chairman Santoro reminded Board members of their duty and responsibility to attend each meeting. He emphasized that the City Council appointed the Board members to fulfill specific obligations outlined in the City's regulations, including attendance and conduct guidelines. Chairman Santoro said he would like to address an ongoing issue with absenteeism. He noted that one Board member had missed three consecutive meetings and said the Board had the authority to declare the absentee seat vacant, should they choose to do so. He also noted a concern regarding Board members attending meetings for brief periods and then leaving.

Chairman Santoro asked the Board members to notify him if they could not attend a meeting.

MOTION

Bruce Peterman moved to remove members from the Board for lack of attendance, seconded by Dara Treadwell.

Attorney Holt confirmed that Chairman Santoro was correct in his interpretation of the Land Development Regulations. Under Section 2.9, a Board member may be removed from office for failing to attend two out of three meetings.

Attorney Holt noted that Ms. Joy had not been present for the past three meetings. Although Ms. Joy submitted a notice regarding her absence, Attorney Holt clarified that the notice was not approved and did not constitute permission or consent under the regulations. Therefore, the Board was within its rights to make a motion and vote to declare the seat vacant. If the motion passed, the vacancy would be referred to the City Council to appoint a replacement for the remainder of the term.

Chairman Santoro reiterated that active participation was essential for the Planning and Zoning Board to function as an effective team, and regular attendance is expected from all members.

Attorney Holt also advised that any motion to remove a member must specifically include the name of the individual to be removed.

Bruce Peterman moved to remove Dian Joy from the Planning and Zoning Board, seconded by Dara Treadwell.

Chairman Santoro said a motion had been made to remove Ms. Joy, and for her position on the Board to be considered vacant.

Board Member Peterman inquired whether any medical issues had been communicated to the Board. Attorney Holt responded that Ms. Joy's absence in February was noted as due to illness.

Board Member Sweeza suggested adding a stipulation that Board members must be present for the full duration of each meeting.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Mr. Fabre and Attorney Holt stated that City Staff would notify the City Administrator of the vacancy and initiate the process by informing the City Clerk. The City Clerk would then proceed with advertising the open position.

Chairman Santoro requested that Mr. Fabre send a notification email to Ms. Joy regarding the vacancy and to copy both himself and the City Administrator on the correspondence.

Board Member Peterman commented that it was nice that City employees would have Good Friday off.

Each Board member extended their best wishes to Deputy City Clerk Jillian Roberts in her future endeavors and expressed that she would be missed.

VII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION

James Sweeza moved to adjourn the meeting at 4:33 p.m., seconded by Deborah Murphy. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM
City Clerk