



**CITY OF TAVARES
PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD MEETING
TAVARES CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
201 E. MAIN STREET, TAVARES, FLORIDA 32778
JULY 17, 2025**

BOARD MEMBERS' PRESENT

**Gary Santoro, Chairman
Jay Cunningham, Board Member
Deborah Murphy, Vice-Chairperson
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
Michelle Winegard, Deputy City Clerk
Michael Willis, Division Chief**

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.

Gary Santoro welcomed the newest Board Member, Jay Cunningham

III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Tab 1. Approval of May 15, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board Meeting Minutes

Chairman Santoro asked if there were any additions or corrections to the May 15, 2025 minutes of the Planning & Zoning Board meeting minutes.

Board Member Treadwell stated there was one grammatical error on page 4. She noted that where Chairman Santoro asked for comments, it should be "there were none, not there was none".

MOTION

James Sweeza moved to approve May 15, 2025, Planning and Zoning meeting minutes with the correction, seconded by Bruce Peterman. The motion passed unanimously 6-0.

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

Attorney Boggus said there were no quasi-judicial matters before the Board.

V. PUBLIC HEARING

Tab 2. Amending Chapter 3 Alcoholic Beverages, Section 3-3, and Chapter 14 Parks and Recreation, Sections 14-1 to 14-3 and adding Sections 14-4 – 14-5 & 14-56 – 14-62, including Article IV, Sections 14-63 – 14-65 "Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail Program" of the Code of Ordinances - Ordinance 2025-02 (Public Works)

Chairman Santoro asked Mr. Fabre to explain the proposed ordinance amendments. Mr. Fabre stated that the change was initiated by the Public Works Department Director, James Dillion, who was unable to attend. He further explained that Mr. Frias would present the staff report on Mr. Dillion's behalf. Mr. Fabre emphasized that the ordinance was a collaborative effort among multiple departments, and the proposed changes were intended to update and clarify appropriate conduct within city parks.

Mr. Frias made the following presentation:

Over the past thirty years, the city's park system has evolved into an invaluable community asset, experiencing a substantial increase in both usage and enjoyment that is congruent with the growth of our community. The proposed amendments to the Code of Ordinances, particularly the implementation of the Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail Program, aim to further enhance the public's experience by improving safety and enjoyment within these spaces. The proposed amendments to the City of Tavares Code of Ordinances, specifically concerning Chapter 3 (Alcoholic Beverages) and Chapter 14 (Parks

and Recreation), along with the introduction of the Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail Program, are intended to clarify regulations, enhance the usability of the affected areas, align with established local best practices, and ensure compliance with state and federal laws.

Furthermore, several Lake County Parks, including Lake Gem and Lake Idamere, are located within the City's Interlocal Service Boundary Agreement (ISBA) area. City staff conducted a comprehensive review of the Lake County Code of Ordinances, initiating a comparison with the City's documentation to ensure consistency and uniformity for all parks within the City's ISBA area.

All stakeholders affected by the proposed amendments—including the Tavares Police Department, Community Services, Economic Development, Community Development, Public Works, and the City Attorney—collaborated to review, update, and provide feedback on the proposed ordinance amendments based on their areas of expertise. A strong consensus has been reached that the proposed amendments will significantly contribute to the greater public good. Therefore, staff recommends the approval of all the presented ordinance amendments as depicted in Ordinance 2025-02.

Chairman Santoro opened the floor for questions from the Board.

Board Member Peterman referenced Section 14-54 and inquired whether e-cigarettes should be included in the ordinance. Mr. Fabre stated that e-cigarettes were different from tobacco products and not specifically addressed in the draft. Mr. Fabre then stated that he would consult with legal counsel regarding their inclusion. Board Member Sweeza concurred that the ordinance should address e-cigarettes.

Chairman Santoro asked Attorney Boggus for her input. She offered to conduct research, if requested. Mr. Fabre stated he would follow up with Mr. Dillon and the City Attorney.

There was a consensus from the Board to include language regarding e-cigarettes and vaping.

Board Member Peterman referred to Sec. 14-55, Line 251. He inquired whether e-bikes were included under the term "bicycles." Mr. Fabre agreed to research the matter further. Chairman Santoro noted that e-bikes have varying engine classifications and recommended that those differences be considered in any revisions. A discussion was held, and Mr. Fabre confirmed the Board preferred e-bikes not be allowed in parks, but they may be permitted on designated trails.

Board Member Cunningham inquired about the fee structure outlined in Section 14-60 and asked whether fees differed between recreational and passive parks. Attorney Boggus explained the distinction between recreational parks, which typically included active-use amenities, and passive parks, which were more natural and quiet in use. She

stated that she would provide revised language clearly defining both park classifications and would incorporate recommendations from the Planning and Zoning Board for City Council review.

Board Member Cunningham also addressed Section 14-62 concerning park advertising. He requested clarification on the program's intent. Mr. Fabre explained that the idea originated with Mr. Dillon and was modeled after similar initiatives in other municipalities. Attorney Boggus provided examples such as advertising banners at ball fields and noted that type of advertising would not be appropriate in nature parks. She stated that the City Administrator would be responsible for final decisions regarding advertising approvals. The Board agreed that keeping the decision-making authority with the City Administrator would allow for flexibility and reduce the need for recurring board involvement.

Board Member Treadwell inquired about the administration of the Adopt-A-Trail Program. Mr. Fabre responded that the City Administrator would have authority over appointments. Attorney Boggus added that the program could not officially begin until the ordinance was adopted.

Chairman Santoro then called on Vice-Chairperson Murphy, who stated she was comfortable with the information provided but supported the inclusion of the earlier-mentioned updates regarding e-cigarettes and e-bikes.

Chairman Santoro brought attention to Section 14-50 regarding animals and pets. He noted that the ordinance referenced guide dogs but made no mention of "service animals." Mr. Fabre acknowledged that a service animal exemption would need to be added. Board Member Treadwell remarked on the ease with which individuals could claim a pet as a service animal. Chairman Santoro clarified that, according to federal guidelines, only dogs and miniature ponies were recognized as service animals. Attorney Boggus stated she would research what questions the City is permitted to ask under federal law concerning service animals.

Chairman Santoro requested that Attorney Boggus complete the research and that all Planning and Zoning Board suggestions be incorporated into a revised draft. He directed Mr. Fabre to present the final ordinance to the City Council after legal review was completed.

The Board accepted the proposed ordinance as amended, pending legal review and final City Council approval.

MOTION

Deborah Murphy moved to approve Chapter 3 Alcoholic Beverages, Section 3-3, and Chapter 14 Parks and Recreation, Sections 14-1 to 14-3 and adding Sections 14-4 – 14-5 & 14-56 – 14-62, including Article IV, Sections 14-63 – 14-65 "Adopt-A-Park/Adopt-A-Trail Program" of the Code of Ordinances - Ordinance 2025-02

(Public Works) as amended with Planning and Zoning Board suggestions regarding e-cigarettes, vaping, e-bikes, advertising fee structures for different type parks and services animals, pending legal updates/corrections. The motion was seconded by Dara Treadwell. The motion passed unanimously 6-0.

Tab 3. Amending Chapter 8, Table 8-1 "Future Land Use/Zoning Matrix" and Table 8-3 "Development Standards" of the Land Development Regulations - Ordinance 2025-05 (Community Development)

Chairman Santoro asked for comments from the Board.

Mr. Fabre proceeded to read the following section of the staff report into the record:

On September 21, 2022, City Council approved a master revision to the Land Development Regulations in order to be consistent with the adopted 2040 "Taking Flight" Comprehensive Plan. Thereafter, city staff discovered errors in Chapter 8, Table 8-1 "Future Land Use/Zoning Matrix" of the Land Development Regulations. Attached is the revised Table 8-1 which allows for PD (Planned Development) in RE (Residential Estate) zoning district consistent with the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan.

On April 17, 2025, the P&Z Advisory Board recommended City Council to consider 0' setbacks without any conditions in the Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District. On May 7, 2025, the City Council directed staff to implement the recommended text amendment changes into the Land Development Regulations. Attached is the revised Chapter 8, Table 8-3 CD (Commercial Downtown), which permits 0' setbacks without any height conditions in the Downtown Waterfront Entertainment District.

He also emphasized that one of the key changes included the elimination of specific setback requirements in the downtown area. He noted that this modification would simplify the development process.

Attorney Boggus added that removing the downtown area setback requirements would allow builders to better utilize available lot space without the need to apply for variances on a case-by-case basis. She stated that the change was expected to streamline the building process while maintaining appropriate design standards.

Division Chief Willis confirmed that the proposed changes would not impact emergency vehicle access or fire department operations related to the properties.

Chairman Santoro concluded the discussion by reiterating that the Planning and Zoning Board supported the changes as submitted by City Staff. The Board expressed agreement with the proposed amendments.

MOTION

Bruce Peterman moved for the Planning and Zoning Board to recommend to the City Council Ordinance 2025-05 as amended by City Staff, seconded by Dara Treadwell. The motion passed unanimously 6-0.

Tab 4. Amending Chapter 16, Section 16-24 Fire Protection of the Land Development Regulations - Ordinance 2025-06 (Fire Department)

Division Chief Willis made the following presentation:

City staff is recommending incorporating the "Click-2-Enter" (C2E) system into the City's Land Development Regulations (LDRs) to replace the outdated Siren-Operated Sensor (SOS) system. The C2E system is designed to enhance emergency response by providing seamless access to automatic gates in residential communities. Unlike the SOS system, which relies on audible sirens, and a receiving microphone that is known to fail, the C2E system uses secure radio frequency through dispatch, offering a more reliable, quiet, and efficient method for first responders to gain entry during emergencies.

Adopting this standard will align the city with surrounding jurisdictions, promoting regional consistency and interoperability among public safety agencies. It will also reduce confusion, improve response times, and ensure all new gated developments are built with modern, effective emergency access in mind.

Board Member Peterman asked whether the proposed amendment applied only to new construction. Division Chief Willis confirmed that it did; however, he added that if an existing fire protection system was outdated, out of service, or beyond repair, the Fire Department could require it to be upgraded to meet the new standards.

Chairman Santoro stated that he supported the Fire Department's and City's proposed changes, but he offered suggested revisions to improve clarity. He distributed a hard copy of his revised version to attendees and read the proposed language aloud:

B. Gated Community Access. *Every electronic roadway entrance gate shall be equipped with an approved public safety access gate opening system ("Public Safety Access System"). The Public Safety Access System shall be permitted, inspected, and approved by the City of Tavares prior to installation and operation. In the event an existing Public Safety Access System is found to be malfunctioning or inoperative, The City of Tavares or any authorized responding municipal emergency service, may order that the entrance gate remain in the locked-open position until such time as the system is repaired; replaced and inspected. Any electronic gate opening system being installed, that is either new or replacing the existing Public Safety Gate Opening System, shall be permitted and approved utilizing a specific and exclusive radio frequency channel for all public safety agencies utilizing the "Click-2-Enter®" public safety access technology.*

Chairman Santoro pointed out that the proposed amended language did not address older communities. He also mentioned that he wanted to exclude “private” emergency services by adding the word “municipal”. Attorney Boggus noted that the term “municipal” might unintentionally exclude some valid government partners, such as county or interagency responders. She suggested using the term “government emergency services” instead to ensure inclusivity of all appropriate public agencies while still excluding private entities.

Division Chief Willis agreed with this recommendation and confirmed that “government” accurately encompassed the intended agencies, including City Police, EMS partners, County and interlocal responders.

Board Member Sweezea expressed support for the inclusion of “government” in the revised language, and the rest of the Board agreed.

Attorney Boggus then asked for clarification on the language related to repair, replacement, and inspection requirements. Division Chief Willis confirmed that both repaired and replaced systems would require reinspection through the City’s permit process.

Board Member Peterman asked whether the Fire Department had encountered situations where property owners repaired their systems without securing the required permits. Division Chief Willis confirmed that such violations had been found during annual inspections and noted that this issue was one of the reasons the department was transitioning to the “Click-2-Enter®” system.

Chairman Santoro continued reviewing his proposed edits. Vice-Chairperson Murphy and Board Member Sweezea voiced support for the revised language. The Board further discussed the requirements for system repair versus replacement and concluded that either option would be acceptable, provided an inspection was conducted afterward.

Chairman Cunningham suggested that the ordinance specify that the system must receive an “approved” inspection, not just any inspection. Division Chief Willis responded that the word “approved” was unnecessary, as the inspection process inherently would require the system to be repaired or replaced until they received an approved inspection.

Chairman Treadwell asked about the origin of the “Click-2-Enter®” technology name and whether it had a scientific basis. Division Chief Willis explained that the system operates through secure radio frequencies triggered by emergency responders’ handheld devices, and that it was currently the most secure and reliable method for ensuring timely access to gated communities.

Board Member Peterman inquired about how often the Fire Department needed to physically breach gates. Division Chief Willis clarified that the Click-2-Enter® system keeps the gate open for five minutes, allowing enough time for all responding vehicles to enter without the gate opening and closing repeatedly.

After the discussion, Chairman Santoro confirmed with Division Chief Willis and Fire Chief Richard Keith that they were satisfied with his suggested edits, including the two key revisions: (1) replacing “municipal” with “government” emergency services, and (2) clarifying the permit and inspection requirements for both repairs and replacements.

MOTION

Deborah Murphy moved to approve Amending Chapter 16, Section 16-24 Fire Protection of the Land Development Regulations - Ordinance 2025-06 (Fire Department) with the suggested changes and the plan to forward the recommendations to City Council for adoption. The motion was seconded by James Sweeza. The motion passed unanimously 6-0.

VI. OTHER BUSINESS

Tab 5. Community Development Director Report

Mr. Fabre provided the following updates to the Board.

- He reported that, to improve customer service, building officials and building inspectors had begun using iPads to expedite their work and provide faster responses.
- Regarding the Tavares Heritage Square development, Mr. Fabre stated that the site plan had been approved. He explained that the next step required the contractor to submit horizontal and vertical building elevations. When asked by Board Member Peterman about the project timeline, Mr. Fabre indicated that construction was expected to begin within one year. Mr. Frias added that, similar to the Starbucks development, builders often start enthusiastically but may face external delays. In such cases, developers can request extensions from the City.
- Chairman Santoro inquired about the timeframe for the signaled intersection at 561 and SR 19. Mr. Fabre explained that the State of Florida is overseeing the project, which is still in process and is expected to be completed by early 2026.
- Vice-Chairperson Murphy and Mr. Fabre discussed the distinction between the roles of Code Enforcement Officer and Building Inspectors.

To conclude the meeting, Chairman Santoro requested that all Planning & Zoning Board Members refrain from discussing upcoming projects with anyone before their formal presentation to the Board.

VII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION

Gary Santoro moved to adjourn the meeting at 3:59 p.m., seconded by James Sweeza.

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle Winegard
Deputy City Clerk