TAVARES CITY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 3, 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
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 Scott Harmon, Tavares Community Church

Council Member Gamble provided the invocation and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance in the absence of Pastor Scott Harmon.

III. <u>APPROVAL OF AGENDA</u>

Mayor Price asked if there were any changes to the Agenda. There were none.

<u>MOTION</u>

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

IV. <u>PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS</u>

<u>Tab 2. Public Works Wins National APWA Management Innovation Award</u>

Mayor Price made the following presentation:

> *On August 18, 2025, the American Public Works Association (APWA) proudly honored the City of Tavares with the National APWA Management Innovation Award. This distinguished recognition is a testament to the city's exceptional vision and unwavering commitment to innovation. The creation of the Public Works Transportation Training and Innovation Center, the first facility of its kind in the nation, sets transformative benchmarks in the public works training and innovation arena.*
>
> *The award was presented to Mr. James Dillon, the Director of Public Works for Tavares, during the National APWA 2025 Public Works Expo held in Chicago, Illinois.*
>
> *The APWA National Management Innovation Award acknowledges initiatives that significantly elevate public works services through innovative and cost-effective approaches. These initiatives exemplify a profound impact on the agency, the public, and the community, transforming the delivery of public works services through inventive methods. This honor reflects advancements in materials, design, or equipment that drive efficiency, enhance information dissemination, and inspire education for both the public and personnel.*
>
> *The selection process is guided by the following criteria:*
>
> *1. Each nominated innovation is rigorously assessed based on its transformative impact on the delivery of goods and services to the public.*
>
> *2. The innovation must showcase proven success, demonstrating a substantial impact on improving quality or reducing costs in public works goods and services.*

3. The innovation must constitute a significant leap forward—far beyond a simple evolution of existing practices, common sense, or conventional wisdom. It should represent a bold step into the future of public service delivery.

4. The innovation must be thoroughly documented and easily presentable.

Mayor Price presented the APWA Project of the Year Award to Mr. Dillon and the Public Works Team.

Mr. Dillon said the award was made possible by the Council's support and the dedication of the City's Public Works team. Mr. Dillon introduced the following team members: Parks Operations Manager Traci Anderson, Senior Administrative Assistant Kellie Conway, Facilities Supervisor Nathan Douglas, Fleet Operations Supervisor Kyle Allman, Solid Waste Manager Jeff Henderson, and Operations Administrative Assistant Stacy Mewborne.

Council Member Gamble noted the City was featured in the APWA Reporter Magazine for establishing the country's first Public Works Transportation Training and Innovation Center.

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 2025-14

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF A FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF LAW ENFORCEMENT (FDLE) GRANT IN THE AMOUNT OF UP TO $25,000 FOR THE PURCHASE OF AN UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEM (UAS/DRONE) FOR THE TAVARES FIRE DEPARTMENT.

ORDINANCE 2025-08

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA AMENDING THE CITY OF TAVARES LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS CHAPTER 4 APPLICATION PROCEDURES AND PERMITTING, TABLE 4-B AND SECTION 4-22 PROCEDURE FOR CONSIDERATION OF A FINAL PLAT, AND CHAPTER 16 SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS, SECTION 16-31 FORMS AND REPLACING FORM 16-13 IN ITS ENTIRETY; SUBJECT TO THE RULES, REGULATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF TAVARES COUNCIL; PROVIDING SEVERABILITY AND CONFLICTS; AND PROVIDING FOR AN

EFFECTIVE DATE.

ORDINANCE 2025-09

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, REZONING APPROXIMATELY 20.83 ± ACRES OF PROPERTY LOCATED ON THE NORTH SIDE OF US HWY 441, APPROXIMATELY 1.5 MILES WEST OF THE INTERSECTION OF US HWY 441 AND LAKE SHORE BLVD. AND 1.5 MILES EAST OF THE INTERSECTION OF US HWY 441 AND RADIO RD.; REZONING FROM PLANNED DEVELOPMENT (PD) TO MIXED USE (MU) DISTRICT; SUBJECT TO THE RULES, REGULATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF TAVARES COUNCIL; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Ms. Novack noted Resolutions 2025-15 and 2025-16 would be read in their entirety during the Budget Hearing at 5:05 p.m.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Price asked if anyone wished to pull an item from the Consent Agenda for discussion. He requested a clerical correction to page 3 of 16 under the Consent Agenda, as the minutes incorrectly referenced him as asking the Council if any wished to pull an item from the agenda. Mayor Price clarified for the record that he had not attended that meeting.

MOTION

Troy Singer moved to approve the Consent Agenda with said change [Tab 3. Approval of the August 20, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes], seconded by Bob Grenier. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 3. Approval of the August 20, 2025, City Council Regular Meeting and Budget Workshop Minutes

Approved on the Consent Agenda with a change.

VIII. RESOLUTIONS

Tab 4. Resolution 2025-14 – Authorizing the Acceptance of a Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) Grant for Drone Purchase for Fire Department

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

> *The Tavares Fire Department has been awarded an FDLE grant of up to $25,000 to purchase an unmanned aerial system (UAS), commonly referred to as a drone. This equipment will significantly enhance the department's operational capabilities and improve community safety.*

The drone will be utilized for a variety of critical functions, including:

- *Structure Fires: Providing aerial thermal imaging and real-time views to improve situational awareness and firefighter safety.*
- *Pre-Incident Planning: Capturing detailed imagery for accurate pre-plan documentation of commercial and industrial facilities.*
- *Search and Rescue: Assisting in locating missing people in urban, rural, or water environments using thermal imaging and wide-area scanning.*
- *Training: Supporting realistic scenario training, post-incident analysis, and performance reviews.*
- *Hazardous Materials Incidents: Monitoring hazardous material spills or releases from a safe distance to minimize risk to personnel.*
- *Disaster Response: Assessing damage and hazards following hurricanes, tornadoes, or large-scale emergencies without putting crews in danger.*
- *Wildland Fire Monitoring: Tracking fire spread and hotspots in brush or wooded areas to enhance suppression strategies.*
- *Traffic and Incident Management: Providing overhead views of large accidents or highway incidents for better resource deployment.*

Acceptance of this grant will allow the department to purchase a drone that meets all necessary specifications for fire service operations. There is no matching fund requirement associated with this grant.

Ms. Houghton said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2025-14 authorizing the acceptance of an FDLE grant for up to $25,000 to purchase a drone for the Fire Department.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the Council.

Council Member Singer stated that it always amazed him what the staff was able to accomplish in securing grants. He noted that the $25,000 grant for a drone would greatly benefit the City and would come at no cost. He commended all who had a role in pursuing the award, recognizing that grants were difficult to obtain.

Council Member Singer said he understood that drone pilots were required to have specific training and asked Chief Keith to address the training requirements and compliance.

Chief Keith credited Fire Division Chief Michael Willis with preparing the successful grant application. He emphasized that the drone was a technical piece of equipment requiring trained and licensed operators, noting that the City was fortunate to have staff with experience. Chief Keith explained that operators must obtain an FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate, followed by an additional license. He stated that the Fire Department anticipated training three operators at an estimated cost of $1,000 per person. The total training cost of approximately $3,000 was already included in the upcoming budget.

Council Member Singer asked if there would be a licensed operator available on each shift. Chief Keith responded that the drone belonged to the City as a whole and would be available to all departments. He explained that the City would not have a licensed operator assigned to every shift, rather it would maintain a cadre of licensed operators who could be called upon as needed.

Council Member Gamble asked whether the Police Department and other departments could utilize the drone. Chief Keith confirmed and provided the Council with a list of features included with the system. Council Member Gamble asked if those departments would be able to fund their own training. Mr. Drury responded that each department had a training budget available at the discretion of its director.

Council Member Gamble stated that duplication of services was sometimes necessary, and he emphasized the importance of having equipment available locally for the safety of citizens.

Council Member Grenier asked whether there was an opportunity to pursue an additional grant to secure a drone for the Police Department. Chief Coursey stated that staff would review available grant opportunities to determine if additional funding was available.

Mayor Price commended staff and stated the drone project was an excellent idea.

MOTION

Troy Singer moved to approve [Resolution 2025-14], seconded by Sandy Gamble.

Council Member Singer emphasized that the grant was non-matched.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

IX. ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING

First Reading

Tab 5. Ordinance 2025-08 – Amendments to the City's Land Development Regulations, Chapter 4 – "Application Procedures and Permitting," Table 4-B and Sections 4-22 – Procedure for Consideration of a Final Plat, and Chapter 16 – "Subdivision Regulations," Section 16-31 – Forms; and replacement of Form 16-13

No discussion at First Reading.

Tab 6. Ordinance 2025-09 – Palm Gardens Property – Rezoning of Approximately 20.83 Acres Located on the Northwest Intersection of US Hwy 441 and Dead River from City of Tavares Planned Development (PD) Zoning to Mixed Use (MU) Zoning District

No discussion at First Reading.

Second Reading

X. GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Tab 7. West Main Street Gateway Sign Design Phase 1

Mr. Dillon made the following presentation:

> *In the City Capital Improvement Plan for the current fiscal year, Council previously identified the West Main Street Gateway Feature as a top priority, allocating the necessary funds for its implementation. Subsequent to the approval of the City budget, City staff conducted an extensive survey along West Main Street, commencing at the intersection of Pulsifer Avenue and extending westward to the intersection of State Road No. 19 (N. Duncan Drive).*
>
> *The objective of this survey was to determine the most advantageous location for the gateway feature while ensuring that the installation occurs outside the right-of-way of the Florida Department of Transportation. Moreover, the survey considered existing underground utilities and potential future developments within the corridor. As of February 2025, City staff have successfully analyzed the survey results and identified an optimal location that fulfills all project objectives, addresses the City's needs, and eliminates additional capital expenditures associated with land acquisition and utility relocation. This outcome yields substantial cost-saving measures for the project.*
>
> *Afterwards, city staff organized a project meeting with Don Bell Signs, which has a continuing service agreement as the City's authorized contractor responsible for all of Tavares' municipal Gateway and Wayfinding signage. The objective of this meeting was to explore the project details in greater depth and to present three meticulously crafted conceptual drawings to present to Council. City staff collectively agreed that the proposed concepts not only conform to the city's established framework for Gateway and Wayfinding signage but also cultivate a strong sense of civic pride. The innovative concepts are intended to signal to visitors that they are entering "America's Seaplane City," thereby reinforcing the city's branding and honoring its significant seaplane heritage.*

Mr. Dillon said staff recommended Option 3, for the City Council to authorize the City Administrator to enter into a purchase agreement with Don Bell totaling $217,240 for the engineering, fabrication, and installation of the West Main Street Gateway Feature in accordance with the specifications outlined in the Option 3 rendering.

Mr. Dillon invited Sales Manager Valerie Grub and Installation Manager Andrew Simso of Don Bell Signs to the podium.

Ms. Grub thanked the Council for its many years of partnership with Don Bell Signs, noting that she had worked with the City since 2010. She provided a PowerPoint presentation of the three design options.

Council Member Singer asked if the front and back of the signs would be identical. Ms. Grub confirmed that they would. Council Member Singer asked about the lighting, and Ms. Grub stated that the lighting could be configured in white, blue, or any color desired.

Mayor Price asked which option provided the greatest nighttime illumination. Mr. Dillon responded that Option 3 stood out more than the others. Mayor Price stated his preference for the arch design in Option 3, noting that it complemented the cemetery gateway.

Council Member Gamble stated that Options 2 and 3 incorporated a design element resembling the wing of an airplane, which supported the City's branding as America's Seaplane City.

Council Member Singer expressed support for Option 3 and asked how long the City had been discussing a gateway sign. Mr. Dillon replied that the project dated back to 2006 and had been under consideration for nearly twenty years. Council Member Singer said he was pleased the project was finally coming to fruition.

Council Member Grenier shared his experience touring the Don Bell Signs facility and described it as magnificent. He stated his preference for Option 3, noting that the blue would stand out.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve and accept Option 3, seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Singer asked for the time frame for project completion.

Ms. Grub stated that the project would take approximately 20–25 weeks once permitted. Mr. Simso added that the work would be completed in phases, beginning with the footers. Mr. Dillon stated the project was expected to be complete by spring 2026 and confirmed the budget would roll forward into the next fiscal year.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 8. State and Federal Governmental Relations Firm Selection

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

> *The city is requesting many Federal and State grants to shift the cost of initiatives and projects from the General Fund to grants. In order to compete for these grants and have them awarded to the City it is very helpful to have and engage*

the services of a State and Federal Governmental Relations Firm that can advocate for and represent the City of Tavares at the State and Federal grant agency levels.

The city re-issued a request for qualifications for State and Federal Governmental Relations Firm due to the timing of State and Federal Legislative sessions leading to a lower response than anticipated. The city received four responses (see attached). A ranking team made up of the Utilities Director, Public Works Director and City Administrator reviewed and ranked the firms as follows (also see minutes attached):

#1 Continental Strategy
#2 TFG/SCG
#3 Becker Law
#4 Pittman Law Group

Mr. Drury said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to authorize staff to negotiate a contract with the number one-ranked firm, Continental Strategy, and bring that contract back to Council for approval.

Mayor Price invited the firm representative to address the Council. Ashley Ellis Spicola, Managing Partner of Continental Strategy, introduced herself. She stated that she grew up in Lake County and was a graduate of Lake County Schools. She said the firm also represented the City of Eustis and understood the needs of the City of Tavares and its citizens, as well as the surrounding community. She expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to represent Tavares.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve Option 1, seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Singer asked for clarification regarding funding and whether reserves would be used. Mr. Drury stated the contract would not draw from reserves. He said staff would bring back the fiscal impact at the next meeting and confirmed the item was budgeted for the upcoming fiscal year.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Mayor Price stated that the budget hearing could not begin until 5:05 p.m. as required by state law and moved the remaining items of the Regular Meeting up on the Agenda.

XII. NEW BUSINESS

XIII. OLD BUSINESS

XIV. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

Debbie Weinert, 724 Lake Dora Drive, Tavares, reported that she had closed August 2025 with 1,225 children enrolled in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library literacy program, which serves children from birth to age five. Of that number, 467 children were from Tavares, with the remainder from Leesburg and Mount Dora. She explained that the program prepared children for kindergarten and positively impacted families, siblings, and teachers throughout the community. Ms. Weinert shared a new bilingual pamphlet and encouraged the Council to consider funding support for the program in the future.

Mayor Price thanked Ms. Weinert for her report.

Vance Jochim, 12619 Milwaukee Avenue, Lake County, stated he had recently walked the Tavares Nature Preserve and reported one tree was down but not blocking a pathway. He suggested the City prepare a map of the park with trail markers to assist visitors and emergency responders. Mr. Jochim commented on the Far Reach Ranch proposal and expressed concern that high-density homes would direct traffic onto Shirley Shores Road. He recommended that municipalities reform the process for selecting vendors who conduct studies, such as traffic analyses, rather than allowing developers to choose the firms. He recommended that the City join the legal challenge against Senate Bill 180. Mr. Jochim also suggested that the City explore the use of artificial intelligence to reduce administrative costs and improve efficiency.

Gary Santoro, of Royal Harbor, commended staff for their performance, attributing their success to Mr. Drury's leadership, which he described as motivating and providing the direction needed for excellence. He expressed appreciation to the Council and to Mr. Drury for their service to the City.

XV. REPORTS

Tab 11. City Administrator Report

Mr. Drury stated the Council would recess and reconvene at 5:05 p.m. for the budget public hearing.

Mr. Dillon reported that Lake County had provided notice it would be installing delineators on Dead River Road between State Road 19 and Circle K, with work expected to begin soon.

Mayor Price asked about the status of the traffic signal at State Road 561 and State Road 19. Mr. Dillon responded that the underground infrastructure was already in place and survey markers had been set to designate the location of utility poles. He said staff was hopeful the project would break ground in October.

Mr. Aldrich reported that the library Story Walk had been installed the previous week. He thanked Council Member Grenier for his support and stated the project was made possible through a $10,000 gift to the Library. He said a soft welcoming ceremony was scheduled for Wednesday, September 10, following Story Time at 10:00 a.m., with the outdoor exhibit to begin at 10:30 a.m.

Mr. Aldrich further reported that registration for Babe Ruth baseball and softball had closed with record numbers, resulting in 14 teams and 169 participants. He stated that soccer registration had also closed with 13 teams and 125 participants. He congratulated the Recreation Department and Library staff for their accomplishments.

Tab 12. City Council Member Reports

Council Member Grenier announced that the 9/11 Patriot Day Remembrance Ceremony would be held on Thursday, September 11, at the Lake County Historic Courthouse and Museum. He stated the ceremony would begin at 9:00 a.m., starting outdoors and then moving inside. He noted the City's Division Chief would again serve as master of ceremonies. Council Member Grenier invited the public to attend and stated that the Tavares Fire Department was leading and participating in the event.

Council Member Singer reported that he had recently visited the library and was given a preview of the Story Walk installation, which he enjoyed. He commended Library Director Rebecca Campbell on her leadership.

Council Member Singer observed that several park benches at the library appeared to be in disrepair and had outlived their useful life. Mr. Dillon confirmed that staff were working with Mr. Aldrich and Ms. Campbell to plan for replacements in the upcoming fiscal year. Council Member Singer asked Mr. Aldrich to pass along his commendation to Ms. Campbell for her work and dedication.

Council Member Gamble stated that each Council Member had likely received an email from a citizen regarding a homeless individual in the area of Banning Beach Road. He said Mr. Drury had provided a response confirming that Chief Coursey and Captain Hall were able to place the individual in a residential program. He commended Chief Coursey and Captain Hall, stating it was clear the Police Department cared for the community, both in policing and through their year-round programs that provided donations and assistance to children and individuals in need.

Council Member Gamble further stated that the day marked the last day of service for Special Events and Operations Manager Cheri Moan, who had managed City events for many years. He described a farewell held by staff the previous day that included a "brick road" display with highlights of the many events Ms. Moan had orchestrated throughout her career. He recognized her significant contributions to the City's events program and congratulated her on her new position with the City of Eustis.

Mayor Price reported he had attended the Florida League of Mayors and the Florida League of Cities annual conferences in Orlando. He stated that major topics of discussion included property taxes, artificial intelligence, legislative preemptions in Tallahassee, and Senate Bill 180. He said the City was paying close attention to these issues as they developed.

Mayor Price recessed the Regular Meeting at 4:54 p.m.

Mayor Price called the Public Hearing to order at 5:05 p.m.

XI. BUDGET HEARING – FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026 TENTATIVE MILLAGE & BUDGET – READING OF TENTATIVE MILLAGE AND BUDGET RESOLUTIONS – 5:05 P.M.

Tab 9. Approve Resolution 2025-15 for Tentative Millage Rate for FY 2026 – First Reading

Ms. Novack read Resolution 2025-15 in its entirety as follows:

RESOLUTION 2025 - 15

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING A FINAL MILLAGE RATE OF 6.6850 FOR THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, FOR AD VALOREM TAXES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026; SETTING FORTH THE PERCENT BY WHICH THE MILLAGE RATE IS GREATER THAN THE "ROLLED-BACK" RATE.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA:

WHEREAS, the City of Tavares of Lake County, Florida on September 3, 2025, adopted the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year Tentative Millage Rate following a public hearing as required by Florida Statute 200.065.

WHEREAS, the City of Tavares of Lake County, Florida, following due public notice as required by law, held a second public hearing on September 17, 2025, as required by Florida Statute 200.065 on the 2024-2025 Millage Rate; and

WHEREAS, the gross taxable value for operating purposes not exempt from taxation within Lake County has been certified by the County Property Appraiser to the City of Tavares as $1,896,245,451.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City of Tavares of Lake County, Florida, that:

1. **The City of Tavares Fiscal Year 2025-2026 operating millage rate to be levied is hereby set at 6.6850 mills, which millage rate is greater than the rolled back rate of 6.3538 mills by 5.21%.**

2. **The voted debt service millage rate is set at .1467 mills for Fiscal Year 2025-2026.**

3. **This Resolution will take effect immediately upon its adoption.**

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

The City Administrator and staff have developed a budget for Fiscal Year 2026 for Council's consideration totaling $69,201,385 that is fully balanced. The proposed budget for FY 2026 includes, among many other items, the following:

1. *A Similar Level of Service is achieved.*
2. *General Fund millage rate decreases from 6.7756 mills to 6.6850 mills, which is 5.21% above the rollbacked rate.*
3. *Debt Service millage rate decreases from .1601 to .1467.*
4. *Estimated reserve balances that meet GFOA recommendations.*
5. *Fire Assessment level funded with no rate increase.*
6. *Employee raises of 5.0%.*
7. *Six new Public Safety positions are proposed: three for Police, and three for Fire.*
8. *Six new General Fund positions are proposed with a hire date of 7/1/2026: two for Finance (one part-time, and one full-time), one for Fleet Management, one for Facilities Management, and three for Community Services (two part-time, and one full-time).*
9. *Street paving - $400,000.*
10. *Expanded programs are cut.*

Previously, the City Council discussed the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget at the following public meetings:

- *7/16/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (General Fund Budget)*
- *7/16/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Set Maximum Tentative Millage rate)*
- *8/06/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (General, Utility, and Special Revenue Fund Budgets)*
- *8/20/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Capital Improvement Plan Presentation)*
- *8/20/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Discussion on FY 2026 Proposed Budget)*

A Tentative Budget (all funds) has been prepared for the City Council. Exhibit A lists all the changes made to the Proposed Budget since it was presented at the July 16th City Council meeting. The changes made have resulted in $108,970 in unappropriated revenue in the General Fund that remains available for appropriation. Options include: 1) Appropriate it as a "contingency" for unforeseen initiatives or projects that the Council may want to initiate during the next fiscal year 2) Fund a cut item 3) Place it into reserves or 4) lower the millage rate.

The Final Public Hearing to adopt the FY 2026 Millage Rate and the FY 2026 Budget will be held at 5:05 p.m. on September 17, 2025, at which time the final millage rates will be adopted.

Mr. Drury said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to take public input and approve the Tentative Millage for Fiscal Year 2026 as reflected in Resolution 2025-15. And, address the $108,970 appropriations during the next agenda item during the adoption of the budget.

Public Comment

Vance Jochim, 12619 Milwaukee Avenue, Lake County, addressed the Council. He stated that in the current economy there was significant uncertainty, including stock market volatility and layoffs, many tied to artificial intelligence. He noted there was a shift in expectations in the private sector, with corporations requiring departments to use AI to reduce costs before adding new staff. He encouraged the City to consider the role of AI in government operations.

Mr. Jochim said he did not support wage increases and urged the Council to review Senate Bill 180 and its potential impacts on future planning.

There being no further public comment, Mayor Price closed comments from the public.

Council Discussion

Council Member Singer said he did not support placing excess funds into contingencies or reserves and said the City worked hard to establish reserves at a healthy level. He suggested the $108,970 in available funds could instead be applied to projects on the City's cut list, such as road paving. He expressed his preference to keep the millage rate as proposed and to continue the budget discussion.

Vice Mayor Pfister agreed with Council Member Singer in maintaining the current millage rate. She suggested the Council could revisit options between the tentative and final budget hearings to determine the best use of the available funds.

Council Member Singer inquired whether applying the $108,000 to reduce the millage would be feasible. Ms. Houghton confirmed this would lower the millage rate to 6.6275, resulting in a 4.31% increase above the rollback rate.

Council Member Singer asked what this adjustment would mean for the average homeowner. Mr. Drury said the savings for a home valued at $300,000 would be approximately $1.20 per month, or about $14 per year.

Mr. Drury further stated that applying the available funds toward road improvements would be positively received, as residents often requested additional paving projects.

Council Member Gamble recommended dividing the funds between roads and sidewalks. He emphasized the need for sidewalk repair and new sidewalks to ensure the safety of children walking to school, particularly in areas where the City did not mow the right-of-way.

Mr. Drury responded that the budget discussion would provide the appropriate time to determine how best to allocate these funds.

MOTION

Troy Singer moved to approve the Tentative Millage Rate at 6.6850 and Debt Service Millage Rate at .1467, and to adopt Resolution 2025-15. Bob Grenier seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously 5-0, at 5:22 p.m.

Tab 10. Approve Resolution 2025-16 for Tentative Budget for FY 2026 – First Reading

Ms. Novack read Resolution 2025-16 in its entirety as follows:

RESOLUTION 2025-16

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE FINAL BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, FOR THE FISCAL YEAR 2025 - 2026.

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA:

WHEREAS, a public hearing on the tentative 2025-2026 budget was held at the Tavares City Hall Council Chambers in the City of Tavares, Florida, Lake County, Florida on Wednesday, September 3, 2025 at 5:05 p.m., as required by Florida Statutes 200.065; and

WHEREAS, the general public was given an opportunity to express its views pertaining to the tentative budget, and

WHEREAS, the City Council approved the tentative budget for 2025-2026, and

WHEREAS, a second public hearing on the proposed 2025-2026 budget was held in the Council Chambers at the Tavares City Hall, 201 East Main Street in the City of Tavares, Florida, on Wednesday, September 17, 2025, at 5:05 p.m.,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Budget for 2025-2026 fiscal year for the City of Tavares, Florida is hereby adopted by the Tavares City Council in the amount of $69,201,385 at public hearing this 17th day of September 2025.

This resolution will take effect immediately upon its adoption.

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

The City Administrator and staff have developed a budget for Fiscal Year 2026 for Council's consideration totaling $69,201,385 that is fully balanced. The proposed budget for FY 2026 includes, among many other items, the following:

11. *A Similar Level of Service is achieved.*
12. *General Fund millage rate decreases from 6.7756 mills to 6.6850 mills, which is 5.21% above the rollbacked rate.*
13. *Debt Service millage rate decreases from .1601 to .1467.*
14. *Estimated reserve balances that meet GFOA recommendations.*
15. *Fire Assessment level funded with no rate increase.*
16. *Employee raises of 5.0%.*
17. *Six new Public Safety positions are proposed: three for Police, and three for Fire.*
18. *Six new General Fund positions are proposed with a hire date of 7/1/2026: two for Finance (one part-time, and one full-time), one for Fleet Management, one for Facilities Management, and three for Community Services (two part-time, and one full-time).*
19. *Street paving - $400,000.*
20. *Expanded programs are cut.*

Previously, the City Council discussed the proposed Fiscal Year 2026 Budget at the following public meetings:

- *7/16/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (General Fund Budget)*
- *7/16/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Set Maximum Tentative Millage rate)*
- *8/06/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (General, Utility, and Special Revenue Fund Budgets)*

- *8/20/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Capital Improvement Plan Presentation)*
- *8/20/2025 – City Council Budget Workshop – (Discussion on FY 2026 Proposed Budget)*

A Tentative Budget (all funds) has been prepared for the City Council. Exhibit A lists all the changes made to the Proposed Budget since it was presented at the July 16th City Council meeting. The changes made have resulted in $108,970 in unappropriated revenue in the General Fund that remains available for appropriation. Options include: 1) Appropriate it as a "contingency" for unforeseen initiatives or projects that the Council may want to initiate during the next fiscal year 2) Fund a cut item 3) Place it into reserves or 4) lower the millage rate.

The Final Public Hearing to adopt the FY 2026 Millage Rate and the FY 2026 Budget will be held at 5:05 p.m. on September 17, 2025, at which time the final millage rates will be adopted.

Public Comment

Mayor Price opened the floor for public comment. There was none.

Council Discussion

Mayor Price asked Mr. Dillon if the City had developed a need assessment and cost estimate for sidewalks. Mr. Dillon stated that several areas were identified that lacked sidewalks. He said the available $108,970 could fund the construction of at least two blocks of sidewalks. In response to questions about road resurfacing, Mr. Dillon said the funds would cover about one mile using the new micro-resurfacing technique. He added the City faced a 20-year backlog in road maintenance, and a 2015 road assessment recommended approximately $750,000 annually to maintain the infrastructure.

Mayor Price commented that it appeared more beneficial to allocate the funds to road improvements rather than sidewalks and noted that developers were installing sidewalks in front of their developments. Mr. Dillon stated the City was requesting sidewalks and street lights from developers.

Council Member Gamble supported the consideration of sidewalks and noted that both needs were significant.

Council Member Singer reviewed several cut list items. He asked whether $14,000 had been intended to provide microphones in the Council Chambers for the Department Director tables. Mr. Drury confirmed. Council Member Singer then asked about two cell phones budgeted for fleet employees. Budget Analyst Brett Jones explained the expense could be absorbed and would not begin until July when the new employees were scheduled to be hired.

Council Member Singer referred to the $2,500 reduction in the fireworks budget. Mr. Jones stated the fireworks funding was level with the prior year. Council Member Singer said he wanted the City's fireworks display to remain strong and recommended restoring the $2,500.

Council Member Singer also noted $1,300 was listed for lighting at the U.S. 441 gateway sign. He suggested keeping the lights year-round. Mayor Price agreed that the lights improved the appearance of the gateway. Council Member Singer further suggested exploring seasonal Christmas lights at the gateway sign. Mr. Drury advised that a full Council discussion would be appropriate regarding color changes. Council Member Grenier recalled that the lights had originally been installed for Christmas and were attractive year-round. Mr. Drury said he would provide cost options for Christmas colors at the next meeting.

Mr. Drury stated the Council could adopt the budget as presented and decide final allocation of the $108,970 at the next meeting, allowing Vice Mayor Pfister an opportunity to provide input. He added that the discussion would be reflected in the minutes for Council reference at the final hearing.

Council Member Singer suggested placing the $108,970 into a holding account until the next meeting to allow the Council to consider various allocations, including roads, sidewalks, and other projects.

MOTION

Council Member Gamble moved to approve the Budget as presented, with final allocation of the $108,970 to be decided at the next meeting [on September 17, 2025]. Council Member Singer seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously, 5-0.

XVI. ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business, and Mayor Price adjourned the meeting at 5:34 p.m.

Respectfully,

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Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM
City Clerk