



**TAVARES CITY COUNCIL
MEETING MINUTES
OCTOBER 1, 2025 – 4:00 PM
TAVARES CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS
201 EAST MAIN STREET, TAVARES**

COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

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

STAFF PRESENT

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

II. INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Tab 1. Interim Pastor Josh Lane, Astatula Baptist Church

Pastor Josh Lane, Astatula Baptist Church, provided the invocation and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

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

MOTION

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

IV. PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS

Tab 2. Tavares Chamber of Commerce Update

Mr. Drury noted there was no one present to speak on behalf of the Tavares Chamber of Commerce.

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 2025-17

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, PURSUANT TO SECTION 196.1978(3)(o), FLORIDA STATUTES, ELECTING TO NOT EXEMPT PROPERTY UNDER SECTION 196.1978(3)(d)1.a., FLORIDA STATUTES, COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE "LIVE LOCAL ACT PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION"; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

RESOLUTION 2025-18

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, AUTHORIZING THE ACCEPTANCE OF A FIRE PREVENTION AND SAFETY GRANT FROM THE FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY TO PURCHASE A FIRE SAFETY TRAILER.

VII. CONSENT AGENDA

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

MOTION

Troy Singer moved to approve the Consent Agenda [Tab 3. Approval of the September 17, 2025, City Council Meeting and Budget Hearing Minutes, Tab 4. Cresswind at Lake Harris Phases 2 & 3 – Preliminary Subdivision Plat, and Tab 5. Request Council’s Approval of Equipment for Auction], seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 3. Approval of the March 5, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes

Approved on the Consent Agenda.

VIII. RESOLUTIONS

Tab 6. Resolution 2025-17 – Opt-Out Live Local Act Property Tax Exemption

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

In 2023, the Florida Legislature passed CS/SB 102 which amended Section 196.1978 of the Florida Statutes for purposes of addressing the affordable housing needs of residents across the State of Florida. The legislation created a 75 percent property tax exemption for multi-family developments if rental units were reserved for persons or families whose annual household income AMI is greater than 80 percent but not more than 120 percent of the median annual adjusted gross income for households within the respective metropolitan statistical area (MSA). This exemption is known as the “Live Local Act Property Tax Exemption Program”. (A copy of the Florida Senate 2023 Summary for CS/SB 102 by the Committee on Community Affairs is attached to provide additional background for the 2023 Amendment.)

In 2024, the Florida Legislature passed SB 328/HB7073 to again amend Florida Statutes Section 196.1978, the “Live Local Act”. The amendment (HB7073) was created to allow taxing authorities to opt-out of the exemption beginning with the 2025 tax roll if the Shimberg Center for Housing Studies Annual Report (Shimberg Annual Report) identifies that the number of affordable and available units in the respective MSA is greater than the number of renter households who meet the income criteria for the 80 to 120 AMI category. (A copy of the FL Senate Committee Summary for SB328+HB7073 is attached for additional background – see page 3 for HB 7073-New “Opt-Out” from the 80-120% AMI.)

Lake County and Lake County Municipalities are located within the Orlando-Kissimmee, FL MSA and the most recent Shimberg Annual Report, 2024 (see

page 32) confirms the number of affordable and available units is greater than the number of rental households in the identified category which provides eligibility for the City of Tavares to Opt-Out of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program. (A copy of the 2024 Shimberg report is attached.)

On September 18, 2024, the City of Tavares City Council adopted Resolution 2024-18 to Opt-Out of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program for Tax Year 2025. The Opt-Out provision requires the City Council to renew adoption annually for the Opt-Out of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program.

On February 11, 2025, the Lake County Board of County Commission adopted a Resolution to renew the “Opt-Out” of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program.

In order to renew the “Opt-Out” of the exemption for 2026, the City of Tavares must adopt Resolution 2025-17 by a two-thirds majority vote. The “Opt-Out” provision will be valid for the 2026 tax year and must be renewed by resolution each year thereafter, when the Shimberg Annual Report confirms that the number of affordable and available units is greater than the number of rental households in the identified category.

Resolution 2025-17 mirrors the prior year Resolution that was prepared by the City Attorney. Staff have confirmed that the 2024 Shimberg Annual Report (the most recent report) confirms the number of affordable and available units is greater than the number of renter households in the identified category which provides eligibility for the exemption.

Ms. Houghton said the staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to adopt Resolution 2025-17 for the City of Tavares to “Opt-Out” of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program for Tax Year 2026.

Mayor Price asked for comments from the Council.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve Option 1 [For the Council to adopt Resolution 2025-17 for the City of Tavares to “Opt-Out” of the Live Local Property Tax Exemption Program for Tax Year 2026], seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Singer stated that he supported the motion and asked for clarification that the Resolution was the same opt-out action adopted the previous year. Mr. Drury confirmed that it was. Council Member Singer further asked whether one developer had taken advantage of the Live Local Act program prior to the City’s opt-out. Mr. Drury confirmed. Council Member Singer then asked if the City of Tavares had done everything possible to prevent the application of the exemption. Council Member Gamble clarified that the Resolution addressed only the property tax exemption portion

of the law. Mr. Drury explained that the ad valorem tax exemption did not apply to applicable multifamily projects in the previous year due to the Council's action and, if adopted again, would not apply in the coming year, ensuring the City would continue to receive the full taxable value of any development.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Tab 7. Resolution 2025-18 – Acceptance of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Grant for Fire Safety Trailer

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has awarded the City a \$270,000 Fire Prevention and Safety grant to purchase a fire safety trailer. FEMA will cover 95% of the trailer's cost (\$257,142.85), and the City must pay the remaining 5% (\$12,857.15). The fire safety trailer will be used to offer interactive, scenario-based learning in a controlled environment.

Details of the grant from FEMA include the following:

- *Agreement Number: EMW-2024-FP-00441*
- *Pass-through Entity: N/A.*
- *Awarding Entity: Federal Emergency Management Agency.*
- *Recipient: City of Tavares.*
- *Grant Award: \$257,142.85.*
- *City Match: \$12,857.15.*
- *Award Period: 9/27/2025 – 9/26/2026.*

Ms. Houghton said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2025-18, authorizing the City Administrator to accept and execute all necessary grant agreements with FEMA for the fire safety trailer grant, and to authorize staff to utilize Infrastructure Sales Tax reserves for the city match portion of the grant in the amount of \$12,851.15.

Division Chief Michael Willis introduced Fire Inspector Lee Cheney and presented two videos, one featuring a Fire Safety Simulator Trailer and the other featuring a Fire Extinguisher Training Simulator.

Division Chief Willis explained that the trailer could be customized to reflect the City of Tavares, including the City logo and local images. He stated that it would be used for outreach at schools, retirement communities, and public events.

Council Member Gamble remarked that the system looked excellent. Council Member Singer noted that the trailer was ADA-compliant and asked to be contacted when it arrived so he could experience it. He further commented that the City's share of the cost would be \$12,851.15, which City Administrator Drury confirmed would be funded through infrastructure sales tax reserves.

Council Member Grenier asked how the City would publicize the program and who would provide demonstrations. Division Chief Willis responded that the Fire Department would coordinate with the Support Services Department and integrate the trailer into existing public education programs, which already included visits to schools and facilities. He noted that there would also be a dedicated training component.

Council Member Gamble asked if this would be the first such unit in Lake County. Division Chief Willis confirmed it would be, noting that Lake County had a trailer but it was not as advanced. Inspector Cheney added that the nearest comparable simulator trailer was located in Jacksonville, Florida.

MOTION

Sandy Gamble moved to approve [Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2025-18, authorizing the City Administrator to accept and execute all necessary grant agreements with FEMA for the fire safety trailer grant, and to authorize staff to utilize Infrastructure Sales Tax reserves for the city match portion of the grant in the amount of \$12,851.15.], seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Grenier asked where the trailer would be housed. Division Chief Willis stated it would be stored in a secure facility at the Downtown Public Safety Complex. He explained that the vendor was selected because the system represented the newest and most advanced technology in fire safety training.

Council Member Grenier asked about future technology needs, specifically software upgrades. Inspector Cheney confirmed that warranties and system updates would be provided at no additional cost, ensuring the trailer remained current.

Mayor Price asked if the trailer would be available for events at Wooton Park. Division Chief Willis confirmed that the goal was to have it on site at Rocktoberfest and other community events to showcase fire safety operations. Division Chief Willis confirmed that it was unlikely the trailer would be ready by the Christmas event due to customization requirements.

The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

Council Member Singer thanked the staff responsible for securing grants

IX. ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING

First Reading

Second Reading

X. GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Tab 8. Award and Authorize Contract to Continental Strategy for State and Federal Governmental Relations

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

On September 3, 2025, the City Council awarded RFQ 2025-0009 for State and Federal Governmental Relations services to Continental Strategy and authorized staff to negotiate a contract for Council consideration.

Staff has successfully negotiated a contract with Continental Strategy in the amount of \$9,000 per month (\$108,000 annually) for both State and Federal Governmental Relations services, plus travel expenses as incurred. The proposed agreement is for an initial term of one (1) year, with the option for up to three (3) additional one-year renewals upon mutual agreement of both parties.

The contract also includes a 30-day cancellation clause, allowing either party to terminate the agreement with written notice.

The negotiated amount reflects the current market rate for similar services provided to municipalities of comparable size within the State of Florida that engage firms to provide both State and Federal governmental relations services.

The City Council appropriated \$75,000 from reserves in FY 2025 for Governmental Relations Services. These funds have not been used and will roll forward into FY 2026. In addition, the City Council appropriated \$60,000 during the budget process for FY 2026. This provides a total of \$135,000 in available funding, which is sufficient to cover the annual contract plus travel expenses.

Mr. Drury said the staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve the contract with Continental Strategy in the amount of \$9,000 per month for FY 2025-2026.

Mayor Price asked for Council comments.

Council Member Singer asked whether the City could hire the firm solely for federal representation without the state component. Mr. Drury confirmed this was possible and noted that throughout prior discussions, the Council had expressed the need for both federal and state advocacy. Council Member Singer stated that his concern lay with the fiscal impact and reviewed the history of Council actions over the past year. He explained that while he supported the firm, he had remained concerned about using reserves throughout Council discussions and had dissented on earlier votes. He stated that \$60,000 had been appropriated in the FY 2026 budget, in addition to the previous reserve allocation of \$75,000, totaling \$135,000 in available funding. He stated that he was comfortable with the firm and believed they would do an excellent job, but not with the method of financing. He asked Mr. Drury to explain further.

Mr. Drury stated that his understanding was that federal representation typically costs about \$6,000 per month and state representation about \$5,000 per month, and the Council had expressed interest in both. He said that the \$75,000 appropriated in FY 2025 was already restricted for this purpose, and the \$60,000 in the FY 2026 budget was added to ensure adequate funding. He acknowledged that his earlier comments may have caused some misunderstanding and stated that, from his perspective, the \$75,000 could not be simply returned to reserves without Council action. He also noted that staff had proceeded with the intention of securing both federal and state services.

Vice Mayor Pfister stated that she supported Option 1, noting that \$75,000 had been appropriated in the previous fiscal year and was restricted for this purpose. She said that she supported the contract as a strategic investment in economic development, especially with respect to trail funding, and that even one successful grant would make the effort worthwhile. She characterized the expenditure as a safe risk with strong potential benefits.

MOTION

Lori Pfister moved to approve Option 1 [For the Council to approve the contract with Continental Strategy in the amount of \$9,000 per month for FY 2025-2026.], seconded by Bob Grenier.

Council Member Gamble asked whether the firm worked year-round. Mr. Drury confirmed that they did, explaining that much of their work occurred outside of legislative sessions in preparation for advocacy. He added that the firm engaged at both the local level during delegation visits and directly in Tallahassee and Washington during session. Council Member Gamble stated that he did not favor contracting for only federal services, as the City had benefited greatly from state advocacy in the past. He said that securing both federal and state representation at a combined rate of \$9,000 per month was a favorable arrangement.

Council Member Grenier commended Council Member Singer for his detailed review, and stated that he believed the services were vital to the City's future economic development and would ultimately pay for themselves. He noted that with the City was preparing for major projects and the timing was critical.

Mayor Price noted that the proposed agreement was for a one-year term at \$108,000 plus travel expenses, which would enable the Council to reassess its value after the first year. He stated that he supported moving forward with the contract as presented.

Council Member Singer stated for the record that he had complete confidence in the firm. He explained that he was not comfortable with the process that led to the contract's funding arrangement, and that concern with the fiscal impact was the only reason for his dissenting vote.

The motion carried 4-1 as follows:

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

XI. NEW BUSINESS

XII. OLD BUSINESS

Vice Mayor Pfister stated that she had received an inquiry regarding the City's brick program and inquired about the proper way to handle such requests. Mr. Drury responded that inquiries about the brick program should be directed to the City Clerk.

XIII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD

April Cook, 625 Virginia Avenue, Tavares, addressed the Council regarding the new development on Carolina Court. She stated that a fence had been installed in the wrong location and was not placed on the developer's property. She explained that the misplacement had created problems, including homeless individuals and golf carts cutting through private property, increased traffic, and vehicles parking on her side of the neighborhood. She added that the gate in the fence was so wide that vehicles could drive through, and the development was contributing to drainage issues since there was no ditch to carry water to the lake, resulting in flooding on both sides of the street. She requested that the City consider installing a barricade.

Mr. Drury asked Ms. Cook to provide her email and phone number so staff could follow up on the concerns. He stated that staff would look into the matter and coordinate to determine appropriate action. Ms. Cook said she would return to the next Council meeting with her engineer and additional supporting information.

XIV. REPORTS

Tab 9. City Administrator Report

Mr. Drury reported on his attendance at the America in Bloom Conference in Michigan. He commended Mr. Dillon and Parks Operations Manager Anderson for doing an excellent job representing the City and stated that he looked forward to providing a full report and presentation at the next Council meeting. He thanked the Council for encouraging him to attend.

Public Works Director James Dillon announced that the City of Tavares, in partnership with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, would host the second annual Fish & Fly Event on Saturday, October 11, from 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. at the Public Works Operations Center. He explained that the pond had been stocked and the

Commission would provide fishing poles and bait. He also noted that the Larks RC Club would offer free demonstrations of radio-controlled aircraft during the event.

Chief Keith congratulated Fire Division Chief Michael Willis and Inspector Lee Cheney for securing the FEMA grant, noting that it followed closely on the heels of their successful FDLE grant award.

Tab 10. City Council Member Reports

Council Member Grenier stated that he had attended the America in Bloom Conference and that the program was well-aligned with the City of Tavares, both in terms of size and character. He said the City's participation continued to improve each year and highlighted the Blue Plumbago as an outstanding feature. He thanked Mr. Dillon for sharing photos throughout the event.

Council Member Singer said he attended the America in Bloom Conference and congratulated Mr. Dillon, Ms. Anderson, and the City team for an impressive showing. He said he looked forward to the full presentation at the next Council meeting, and reminded everyone that October was Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Council Member Gamble congratulated Mr. Dillon and his team for their America in Bloom accomplishments and thanked them for their efforts on behalf of the City. He shared a personal reflection from the prior week when he saw firefighters at breakfast who had spent the previous four hours fighting a fire. He said many people do not understand the hard work of City employees behind the scenes and expressed gratitude for their service.

Mayor Price stated that he was proud to represent the City at the America in Bloom Conference and looked forward to sharing the awards at the next Council meeting. He thanked Mr. Dillon and Ms. Anderson for their leadership and announced that Mr. Dillon had been asked to serve as a national advisor, which he said was a significant honor for both Mr. Dillon and the City of Tavares.

XV. ADJOURNMENT

There was no further business, and Mayor Price adjourned the meeting at 4:53 p.m.

Respectfully,

Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM
City Clerk