



**CITY OF TAVARES  
PLANNING AND ZONING BOARD MEETING  
TAVARES CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
201 E. MAIN STREET, TAVARES, FLORIDA 32778  
OCTOBER 16, 2025**

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

**STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Antonio Fabre, Director, Community Development  
Amanda Boggus, City Attorney  
Michelle Winegard, Deputy City Clerk  
James Dillion, Director, Public Works  
Traci Anderson, Parks Operations Manager**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Santoro called the meeting to order at 3:13 p.m., after a brief delay due to technical difficulties.

**II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Chairman Santoro led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance and then asked everyone to silence their cell phones.

**III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Tab 1. Approval of August 14, 2025, Planning and Zoning Board Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Santoro asked if there were any additions or corrections to the August 14, 2025, Planning & Zoning Board meeting minutes. There were none.

**MOTION**

**Bruce Peterman moved to accept the August 14, 2025, Planning and Zoning Meeting Minutes. Dara Treadwell seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously 6-0.**

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

Attorney Amanda Boggus stated there were no quasi-judicial matters on the agenda.

**V. PUBLIC HEARING**

Mr. Antonio Fabre stated there were no public hearings scheduled for this meeting.

**VI. OTHER BUSINESS**

**Tab 2. Integrating America in Bloom with Planning & Zoning Initiatives (Public Works)**

Chairman Santoro introduced James Dillion, Director of Public Works, and Traci Anderson, Parks Operations Manager.

Mr. Dillion stated that the goal of the presentation was to explain how the America In Bloom (AIB) program aligns with the goals of the Planning and Zoning Board.

Ms. Anderson explained the purpose of the America In Bloom program, as outlined below:

*America in Bloom is a national awards program for cities, towns, colleges and business districts that “strives to empower communities to beautify and improve the overall quality of life through their programs, grant opportunities, resources library and more.” The program focuses on seven areas of impact within the municipal, business, and residential sectors; identified as: Overall Impression, Floral Impact, Urban Forestry, Environmental Initiatives, Landscaped Areas, Celebrating Heritage, and Community Vitality.*

*These areas of impact closely mirror those that we try to achieve when planning and anticipating the growth of a city. Community Vitality is the beneficial result of excellent master planning, strong ordinances and*

*communication of those efforts. Endeavors become sustainable when the heartbeat of the municipality is one of Community Vitality, demonstrating civic pride and volunteerism.*

*Policies, programs, activities and facilities that lead to a vibrant community and promote a sense of health and well-being sustain that vitality. The AIB program focuses on elements that align with comprehensive planning goals, often included in master plans or community development strategies:*

- *Beautification – landscaping, floral displays and urban forestry*
- *Environmental Efforts – sustainability and green infrastructure*
- *Heritage Preservation – historical, cultural, natural, agricultural and industrial resources*

*The AIB program provides various tools to support municipal leaders and planners in identifying community strengths and weaknesses with metrics that define the program goals to aid in self-assessment, suggestions from professional advisors, and recognition programs that incentivize best practices. Through participation and implementation of the program, planners can prioritize investments, engage the public, and align beautification, environmental efforts, and heritage preservation with land use policies. Through program tools and participation, AIB can act as the catalyst for planning and zoning success by:*

*Enhancing community engagement:*

- *Supporting sustainable land use*
- *Promoting alignment between beautification and regulatory frameworks*

*Allowing AIB initiatives to support zoning goals through:*

- *Increasing walkability in neighborhoods through the encouragement of mixed-use developments*
- *Reducing sprawl and expenses through the revitalization of underused spaces with the promotion of infill development*
- *Embracing rising trends such as form-based codes that focus on the physical form of the built environment and encouraging small-scale, often more attainable development*

*Tavares has enjoyed substantial success through our participation in the America in Bloom program. We enrolled in the program in 2017 as a Level 3 participant and have been celebrated numerous times, including:*

- *Coolest Place for Kids 2017*
- *Overall Impression 2017*
- *Environmental Efforts 2018*
- *Overall Impression 2019*

- *Best Innovative Project or Program 2019*
- *Champion Community 2019, Population 18,000 – 23,000*
- *Tavares did not participate during 2020 & 2021, when the program was administered virtually, due to Covid 19.*
- *Overall Impression nominee in 2022*
- *Coollest Downtown 2023*
- *Champion Community 2023, Population 20,000 – 25,000*
- *Overall Impression 2023*
- *Coollest Place for Kids 2024*
- *Overall Impression 2024*
- *Community Involvement 2025*
- *Innovation in Action – Most Impressive New Project or Program recognizing the Tavares Public Works Transportation Training and Operations Center partnership with Lake Technical College*
- *Champion Community 2025, Population 20,000 – 25,000*

*Tavares was instrumental in establishing the first America in Bloom chapter in the country with the Lake County Chapter, facilitated through Keep Lake Beautiful and now successfully being adopted and replicated nationwide. This year, three local cities participated in the Level 3 program: Eustis, Leesburg, and Tavares, with Eustis and Tavares attending the National Symposium in Orion Township and Rochester, Michigan during September.*

Ms. Anderson further explained that the program sends advisors to each city to evaluate progress and provide feedback. The cost of each visit was approximately \$1,100. She added that the City's program rating had increased from 7 to 8 since 2024.

Board Member Murphy asked about the process followed during the advisors' visit. Ms. Anderson stated that an itinerary was prepared, and the advisors were given a guided tour that included both walking and driving throughout the community. She noted that advisors may visit anytime between April and June. Mr. Dillon added that the tour included both the downtown area and residential neighborhoods. In response to a question about whether residents were informed of the visit, Ms. Anderson confirmed that they were.

Board Member Murphy asked how the Planning and Zoning Board could assist. Ms. Anderson said she would welcome a meeting with board members to share ideas and collaborate.

Board Member Treadwell asked where the advisors were from. Ms. Anderson stated that there were local advisors from Florida and others from Ohio, Wisconsin, and possibly Kentucky, noting that their tours typically began in Florida and moved northward.

Mr. Dillon provided background on the formation of the Lake County Chapter.

Chairman Santoro asked whether accessibility was considered in the evaluations. Ms. Anderson confirmed that it was and stated that Tavares was ahead of the curve in that area.

Chairman Santoro expressed the Board's willingness to assist with the program in any way possible.

Board Member Treadwell asked if Ms. Anderson would be willing to speak publicly to raise awareness about the program. Ms. Anderson stated that she would.

Board Member Peterman thanked staff for their efforts and asked if information about the program had been included in the City newsletter. Ms. Anderson said that it had been considered, adding that the biggest challenge had been bridging communication with local homeowners' associations.

Mr. Dillon commended City staff for leading by example and building community passion through action.

Board Member Treadwell asked if Mr. Dillon was involved in the YMCA Regional Park project. Mr. Dillon stated that the project was under the direction of Mr. Scott Aldrich. Board Member Treadwell discussed the importance of separate bike and walking trails. Ms. Anderson mentioned that other cities had used "Walk Your Wheels" signage and suggested similar signs could help.

Board Member Peterman expressed concern about e-bike speeds. Ms. Anderson asked whether any ordinances had been adopted on that issue. Mr. Dillon stated that future trail projects, such as the Wekiva Trail, would follow standards outlined in the City's Land Development Regulations.

Board Member Cunningham asked how the program aligns with ordinances requiring native plants. Ms. Anderson stated that the City had been commended for embracing Florida-friendly principles and native plantings.

Chairman Santoro reiterated the Board's support and asked Mr. Dillon to coordinate a future meeting with staff and board members. He noted that if more than three board members attended, the meeting would need to be advertised as a public meeting.

### **Tab 3. Community Development Director Report**

Mr. Antonio Fabre provided the following updates:

1. Mr. Anarquis Frias earned his CNU accreditation and was promoted to Planning Manager, leaving the City Planner position vacant.
2. Advent Health Center received a certification of completion for its exterior construction; there was no estimated date for the internal opening.

3. The Far Reach Ranch application was routed to all City departments, including the City Attorney, City Engineer, Lake County, and other review agencies for feedback. Staff comments were compiled and sent to the developer on October 9th, 2025. These comments are public record and available through the City Clerk's office.
4. The November Planning and Zoning agenda would include two advertised public hearings for Land Development Regulations amendments requested by the City Council.

## **VII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD**

Mr. Don Kehr introduced himself and spoke regarding the Far Reach Ranch project. He stated that he resides in the Shirley Shores area and expressed a desire to discuss ways for residents to collaborate with the City on the project. He explained that he had participated in the 2040 Comprehensive Plan process and felt the current application differed significantly from that plan. He expressed concerns about the density of housing proposed by D.R. Horton.

Chairman Santoro explained that because the project was still under staff review, the Planning and Zoning Board had not yet received or reviewed any materials regarding the project.

Attorney Boggus advised that the Board should not review any information before staff completes its review. Chairman Santoro concurred.

Mr. Kehr asked about the next step in the zoning process and why zoning codes were not established before the application submission. Attorney Boggus explained that the process occurs concurrently with the application review and that the project was not yet final.

Mr. Kehr reiterated his opposition to the project as proposed and asked whether staff comments were available. Mr. Fabre confirmed they were public record and could be obtained from the City Clerk's office. Mr. Kehr stated he would submit a request.

Mr. Darold Diamond, of 11605 Lane Park Road, addressed the Board, stating that he had served on a planning commission for 14 years and urged Tavares to manage growth carefully. He recommended a compromise for lower-density development and referenced the Cresswind project as an example.

Chairman Santoro then invited Fire Division Chief Willis to speak about a recent grant the Fire Department had received. Division Chief Willis reported that the \$270,000 grant would fund a mobile training trailer allowing on-site fire training sessions at schools and community events. He stated he planned to bring the trailer to a future Planning and Zoning meeting for members to experience the training firsthand.

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

**MOTION**

**Deborah Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting. Dara Treadwell seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 4:25 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,



Michelle Winegard  
Deputy City Clerk