



America's Seaplane City™

**TAVARES CITY COUNCIL  
MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 21, 2026 – 4:00 PM  
TAVARES CITY HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS  
201 EAST MAIN STREET, TAVARES**

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT**

**Lori Pfister, Mayor  
Bob Grenier, Vice Mayor  
Sandy Gamble, Council Member  
Doug Keown, Council Member  
Walter Price, 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  
Sarah Coursey, Police Chief  
James Dillon, Public Works Director  
Mark O'Keefe, Support Services Director  
Brian Dykes, Utilities Director**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Pfister called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. She 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. Deacon Jim Shelley, St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church**

Deacon Jim Shelley, St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church, provided the invocation and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

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

#### **MOTION**

**Walter Price moved to approve the Agenda, seconded by Doug Keown. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.**

### **IV. PROCLAMATIONS/PRESENTATIONS**

#### **Tab 2. Tavares Chamber of Commerce Update**

Mr. Drury noted that the Chamber President was unable to attend the meeting due to illness.

#### **Tab 3. Proclamation – Tavares’ 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Arbor Day Celebration**

Mayor Pfister read a Proclamation declaring January 17, 2026, as Arbor Day in the City of Tavares, in recognition of the City’s Tree City USA program requirements as established by the Arbor Day Foundation, the U.S. Forest Service, and the National Association of State Foresters.

#### **MOTION**

**Doug Keown moved to accept the Proclamation, seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.**

Mr. Dillon stated that the recent Arbor Day event was a great success, noting that more than 1,060 trees were distributed to the community. He shared that Parks Operations Manager Tracy Anderson and her team, along with all partnering organizations, did an excellent job coordinating the event. Mr. Dillon remarked that the upcoming year would mark the City’s 10th annual Arbor Day celebration and encouraged the Council and the public to stay tuned for future activities. He added that the Tavares Cemetery and Arboretum was a primary focus for the year and noted that the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences created a video recognizing the Tavares Cemetery as the first cemetery and arboretum of its kind in the State of Florida.

Mayor Pfister shared that she recently visited the cemetery, where she observed significant new plantings and noted that the area continued to improve. Mayor Pfister thanked the staff for their efforts and expressed appreciation to the entire team.

**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 2026-01**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, AMENDING THE 2026 FISCAL YEAR ADOPTED BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF TAVARES, REPRESENTING THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE ADOPTED BUDGET, AND PROVIDING FOR A REPEALER, SEVERABILITY AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

**RESOLUTION 2026-02**

**A RESOLUTION OF CITY OF TAVARES, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE STATE REVOLVING FUND LOAN PROGRAM; MAKING FINDINGS; AUTHORIZING THE LOAN APPLICATION; AUTHORIZING THE LOAN AGREEMENT; ESTABLISHING PLEDGED REVENUES; DESIGNATING AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVES; PROVIDING ASSURANCES; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTS, SEVERABILITY, AND EFFECTIVE DATE.**

**ORDINANCE 2026-02**

**AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF TAVARES, AMENDING CHAPTER 15, PENSIONS AND RETIREMENT, ARTICLE V, FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION TRUST FUND, OF THE CODE OF ORDINANCES OF THE CITY OF TAVARES; AMENDING SECTION 15-128, DEFERRED RETIREMENT OPTION PLAN; PROVIDING FOR AN EXTENSION OF DROP PARTICIPATION PERIOD; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY OF PROVISIONS; REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HERewith AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

**VII. CONSENT AGENDA**

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

**MOTION**

Walter Price moved to approve the Consent Agenda [Tab 4. Approval of the December 17, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes, and Tab 5. Approval of the 2026 City Council Meeting Dates], seconded by Doug Keown. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.

**Tab 4. Approval of the December 17, 2025, City Council Meeting Minutes**

*Approved on the Consent Agenda.*

**Tab 5. Approval fo the 2026 City Council Meeting Dates**

*Approved on the Consent Agenda.*

**VIII. RESOLUTIONS**

**Tab 6. Resolution 2026-01 – FY 2026 First Budget Amendment**

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

*Resolution 2026-01 represents increases and/or decreases to the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2026. Appropriation increases include capital projects and prior-year/project encumbrance rollovers. In addition, the Resolution also reflects transfers between individual accounts within adopted budgets for all departments. The resolution represents the First Amendment to the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2025-2026.*

Ms. Houghton said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2026-01, amending the Fiscal Year 2025-2026 City of Tavares Annual Operating Budget.

Mayor Pfister asked for questions from the Council. There were none.

**MOTION**

**Sandy Gamble moved to approve Resolution 2026-01, seconded by Bob Grenier. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.**

**Tab 7. Resolution 2026-02 – Authorize SRF Loan for SAHM Drinking Water Project DW3509A with Loan Forgiveness**

Ms. Houghton made the following presentation:

*The City of Tavares operates a public water system (PWS ID # 3351333) with over 134 miles of distribution lines, serving residents within the city limits and surrounding areas. Potable water is sourced from the Upper Floridan Aquifer through six groundwater wells, treated at four facilities, and stored in three tanks with a combined capacity of 2.5 million gallons.*

*The Project will include the following system improvements:*

- *Waterproofing and elevating electrical panels and control systems to prevent flood damage.*
- *Installing remote monitoring and control systems (SCADA) upgrades for real-time control and monitoring.*
- *Improving distribution system redundancy by looping key waterlines and adding pressure-boosting stations.*
- *Enhancing booster pump capacity for consistent water delivery.*
- *Increasing storage capacity or optimizing existing storage for better operational flexibility.*
- *Installing Drinking Water Wells to replace the 2 downtown wells.*

*The project aims to increase system redundancy, reliability, and resiliency, addressing issues identified during hurricane Milton and other disasters. By proactively strengthening the system's configuration, it will protect public health and safety, preserve environmental resources, and ensure regulatory compliance.*

*The Project cost for planning, design, and construction is estimated at \$21,450,000. The DEP SAHM funded listed amount is \$21,450,000 with a principal forgiveness amount of \$21,450,000.*

*Florida FDEP has included the project (SAHM 3590A) on the Florida DEP Funding List. The City will enter into a loan with loan forgiveness as indicated on the State DEP Division of Water Restoration Assistance Funding List provided in Notice ID# FA-SORF-202511.*

Ms. Houghton said staff recommended Option 1, for the Council to approve Resolution 2026-02, authorizing the Mayor to execute documents for application and acceptance for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection State Revolving Loan Program for SAHM Funding for the 3509A Drinking Water Project.

Council Member Gamble discussed long-standing concerns regarding water distribution and asked whether the proposed project would improve system pressure in the Royal Harbor area. Mr. Dykes stated that staff had previously reviewed potential improvements in that area and would continue to evaluate options. He explained that past efforts had been limited due to right-of-way and travel-path easement constraints.

Council Member Price asked when loan forgiveness would take effect and whether the City would be required to perform any debt service on the project, even temporarily. Ms. Houghton responded that while the project was large, the City would enter into a contract and begin disbursements immediately as contractor invoices were paid. She said reimbursement requests would be submitted with every payment request, ensuring the City was not advancing funds beyond its normal project cash-flow practices.

Scott Shannon, Consultant with Woodard & Curran, confirmed that once a contractor submitted an invoice, the City could pay it and then immediately request reimbursement. He stated that the only limitation was that reimbursement requests could be submitted approximately once every 30 days, which meant the City would not be out more than one to two months of cash flow at any given time. He noted that this was consistent with normal City operating constraints and did not require borrowing the full project amount.

Mr. Drury confirmed that the project would not add any additional debt to the City and stated that the City would cash-flow the project within its existing financial capacity.

## **MOTION**

**Doug Keown moved to approve Resolution 2026-02, seconded by Sandy Gamble. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.**

## **IX. ORDINANCES – PUBLIC HEARING**

### **First Reading**

#### **Tab 8. Ordinance 2026-02 – Extend Deferred Retirement Option from 60 months to 96 months for Tavares Firefighters’ Pension Plan**

*No discussion at First Reading.*

### **Second Reading**

## **X. GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

### **Tab 9. Community Grant Awards**

Ms. Novack made the following presentation:

*The Council budgeted \$2,000 in the current Fiscal Year 2025 for community grants. The City advertised at the beginning of the fiscal year an invitation to submit community grant applications for area not-for-profit organizations with a 502C3 designation for up to \$500 in funding for community and social service projects.*

*The City received five (5) grant applications (attached) as follows:*

*Angel Flight Southeast*

- Educational Foundation of Lake County*
- Lake Cares, Inc.*
- Tavares Theater, Inc.*
- Triangle Community Alliance, Inc.*

*A ranking committee consisting of the City Clerk, Finance Director, and*

*Community Services Director met on January 14, 2026, and reviewed the applications to determine if they met the criteria for the Community Grant Program. It was determined that each request met the award criteria. The grant opportunity was advertised in the Daily Commercial and on the City website.*

Ms. Novack said staff recommended Option 2, for the Council to award the grant requests in the amount of \$400 each to Angel Flight Southeast, Educational Foundation of Lake County, Lake Cares, Inc., Tavares Theater, Inc., and Triangle Community Alliance, Inc.

Mayor Pfister asked for comments from the Council.

Council Member Gamble stated that he was comfortable with the recommendations as presented. He indicated that, after reviewing the applications, all of the organizations appeared worthy. He expressed support for remaining within the approved budget and distributing the funds evenly.

Council Member Keown commented that the applicant organizations were all worthy of consideration.

Council Member Price stated that all of the organizations were worthwhile recipients of City support. He expressed interest in considering an increased funding amount in future fiscal years to make the grants more meaningful. He indicated support for Option 2, which included funding for all five organizations.

Vice Mayor Grenier stated that he did not support funding all five organizations. He said that he had concerns about whether the Triangle Community Alliance program aligned with the City's existing library services and the original intent of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library program. He noted that the City and surrounding communities already provided extensive library services and children's programming. Based on his review, he supported Option 1, which funded the first four organizations listed, and stated that he would not support funding the Triangle Community Alliance.

Mayor Pfister asked clarifying questions regarding current City support provided to several of the applicant organizations, including Angel Flight, the Educational Foundation, Lake Cares, and the Tavares Theatre. Mr. Drury confirmed that some organizations received City support such as the Educational Foundation for the Renaissance Fair.

Mayor Pfister expressed concern about allocating all available funds at the beginning of the year and stated a preference for retaining flexibility to address needs that might arise later in the fiscal year. Mr. Drury noted that the grant process was budgeted beginning October 1 and brought forward in January following advertising and committee review.

Council Member Gamble clarified that the Educational Foundation request was intended solely to support a Tavares High School scholarship program administered through the Foundation, rather than activities related to the Renaissance Festival. He discussed the history of the scholarship and noted that without City participation, the scholarship for Tavares students would not occur. Mayor Pfister noted that the City provided significant support to students through existing programs, including the Mayor’s Youth Council scholarships.

**MOTION**

**Bob Grenier moved to approve funding for the top four listed organizations [Angel Flight Southeast, Educational Foundation of Lake County, Lake Cares, Inc., and Tavares Theater, Inc.] at \$400 each, excluding the Triangle Community Alliance, and to reserve the remaining funds for potential future use. The motion died for a lack of a second.**

**MOTION**

**Sandy Gamble moved to approve Option 2, seconded by Doug Keown. The motion carried 3-2 as follows:**

<b>Lori Pfister:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Bob Grenier:</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Sandy Gamble:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Doug Keown:</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Walter Price:</b>	<b>Yes</b>

**Tab 10. Broad Budget Goals**

Mr. Drury made the following presentation:

*It is recommended Council members develop their three (3) to five (5) broad budget priorities over the ensuing weeks for the upcoming FY 2027 (October 1, 2026 -September 30, 2027) Annual Budget development and deliver those budget priorities individually to the City Administrator by the end of the month - January 31, 2026, so he can assemble them for the Council's collaborative consideration at the next City Council meeting on February 4th, 2026.*

**Tab 11. Property Acquisition for Future Parking Garage Construction**

Mr. Tweedie made the following presentation:

*The City has developed a long-term plan to construct two additional future parking garage structures to adequately address the parking needs of the community for the benefit of businesses, residents and visitors. These two parking garages, in addition to the existing Lake County garage, will be located*

*strategically in the downtown corridor, one block North of Main Street, behind City Hall and at the site of the former public works complex, providing easy vehicular access to the downtown core without crossing the Main Street corridor to access events, businesses and the waterfront area.*

*All the necessary property has been assembled and is under city ownership except for one parcel, located at the corner of Maud and New Hampshire, at the northwest corner of the existing City Hall property (attached photo). This parcel has recently been put on the market for sale and the owner has asked their real estate broker to provide the city with the first opportunity to purchase the property for its future garage needs. The lot is listed at a market price of \$255,500.*

*As this parcel did not become available until after the development and adoption of the current fiscal year budget, there were no funds allocated in this budget for the acquisition cost. Staff working together with the finance team have identified 3 options for funding in the current fiscal year:*

- 1. Building permit fee revenues.*
- 2. Current fiscal year reserves. The current reserves are sufficient to cover the cost of this expenditure while still exceeding GFOA recommended reserve funding levels.*
- 3. Reserves to be reimbursed with facilities impact fees to be collected in the future.*

Mr. Tweedie said staff recommended Option 2, for the Council to approve the expenditure of up to the full asking price of \$255,5000, subject to satisfactory appraisal of the property value, utilizing building permit fee revenues.

Mayor Pfister asked for comments from the Council.

Council Member Gamble asked whether sufficient funds were available within building permit fee revenues for the proposed project. Ms. Houghton noted that the funds were restricted and could not be transferred to the General Fund, requiring their use for capital projects that served the Building Department. She stated that staff had reviewed the percentage of use attributable to the Building Department and confirmed that the proposed parking garage met the required nexus and could be funded in a fair and equitable manner.

Mr. Drury explained that the proposed garage would replace the existing building permit parking lot and confirmed that the City had adequate funding available for building-permit-related capital projects.

Council Member Gamble stated that he believed the proposal was a good idea and noted that the location was better situated for downtown activities than the previously discussed site near the former Public Works facility. He added that the location was

positioned behind the event areas, allowing vehicles to enter and exit without being caught in event traffic.

Council Member Keown commented that neighboring cities often struggled with limited parking during large events and stated that providing a structured parking option within a short walking distance downtown would be valuable. He noted that such a facility would give residents and visitors confidence that parking was available when attending major events.

Council Member Price asked whether the project could be funded entirely through building permit fee revenues, and staff confirmed that it could. He stated that he preferred the proposed downtown location over the former Public Works site. He noted that he could not offer a formal opinion on property value and stated that the asking price appeared consistent with comparable downtown property sales.

Vice Mayor Grenier stated that prior discussions about a parking garage near the lake at the former Public Works site had been intended to support pavilion-related activities and that he viewed that parking as serving a different function. He indicated support for the proposed garage, provided that the design complemented downtown's historic character and was not visually disruptive. Mr. Drury stated that, if the project moved forward, staff would return to the Council with architectural renderings for review and approval.

Mayor Pfister stated that she believed the proposal was proactive and timely. She expressed concern about preserving trees and emphasized the importance of thoughtful design. Mayor Pfister stated that the project would support downtown economic development and help address parking challenges during events. She added that she did not want the City to become known for parking shortages and expressed hope that the facility would remain free to the public.

Council Member Price noted that future retail development at the Cagan development site would increase parking demand.

Mr. Drury stated that following the acquisition of the property, staff would coordinate design development and return to the Council with renderings for further discussion.

Vice Mayor Grenier requested that the design include a designated Purple Heart parking space. Mayor Pfister emphasized the importance of improved accessible parking and stated that accessibility should be carefully considered as part of the garage design.

## **MOTION**

**Sandy Gamble moved to approve Option 2, seconded by Walter Price. The motion carried unanimously 5-0.**

## **XI. NEW BUSINESS**

## **XII. OLD BUSINESS**

Vice Mayor Grenier stated that he continued to support keeping the decorative lighting installed behind the Tavares gateway. He commented that the blue and silver lights on the palm trees provided an appealing backdrop for the sign and expressed interest in continuing that approach moving forward.

Council Member Gamble referenced the palm trees along Ruby Street near the Sheriff's Department and asked whether the colored lights installed in the tree limbs were City-installed or associated with another entity. Mr. Tweedie responded that the lights had been installed by the Sheriff's Department and stated that their removal was being coordinated. Council Member Gamble remarked that the lighting created a nice visual effect.

## **XIII. AUDIENCE TO BE HEARD**

Mayor Pfister stated that she had received a Request to Speak form from Robert Revira and noted that Mr. Revira was not present in the audience.

Bruce Peterman, a resident of Royal Harbor, addressed the Council and expressed appreciation for a recent two-hour presentation provided to the Royal Harbor community by Fire Division Chief Willis and Fire Inspector Cheney. He said that the presentation covered what to expect after calling 911, cardiac emergencies, proper use of a defibrillator, and the application of tourniquets. Mr. Peterman stated that the presentation was informative and beneficial and commended the City and its staff for the quality of the training and the services they provided to the community.

## **XIV. REPORTS**

### **Tab 12. City Administrator Report**

Mr. Drury reported that the City's Arbor Day event had been successful and well attended. He stated that staff provided educational seminars to the public and distributed 1,060 trees. He emphasized that the trees were substantial in size, contributing to the planting of thousands of new trees throughout the City.

Ms. Novack provided an update on the Mayor's Youth Council. She stated that updated information had been included in the Council dais folders, including the dates when students would be shadowing each Council member. She noted that the Mayor's Youth Council members were scheduled to shadow City departments on February 11 and that the Mayor's Youth Council Mock Meeting was scheduled for April 15.

Mayor Pfister stated that she wished to relinquish her Mayor's Youth Council report to Vice Mayor Grenier.

Chief Coursey congratulated Sergeant Melissa Robinson on completing the SPIES Command Officer Development Course. She said the program was a ten-week intensive course focused on professionalism and leadership and was highly regarded within the law enforcement community.

Mr. Tweedie reminded the Council and the public of the upcoming Rhythm on Ruby event scheduled to take place on Ruby Street and invited the community to attend.

Mr. O'Keefe reported that the garage sale permitting process had gone live on the City's website and stated that the process was functioning smoothly. He noted that the Code Enforcement and Community Development teams had reported positive results and that staff were available to answer any questions.

Mr. Dillon provided an update on the West Main Street gateway project. He stated that the project was ahead of schedule and anticipated that installation would be completed by spring.

Chief Keith announced that the Golden Triangle Rotary Club would be hosting a food drive on Saturday, January 31, and stated that the City's Public Safety Building would serve as one of the drop-off locations. He noted that donations would be accepted from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. and that all collected food would be donated to Lake Cares. He clarified that the event was organized by the Rotary Club and not by City staff. He further noted that this was expected to be the final year the City would participate in the event.

Council Member Gamble asked whether the food drive would also take place at local schools. Chief Keith responded that the Rotary Club food drive involved only three fire stations in Eustis, Mount Dora, and Tavares. He stated that schools and Lake Technical College conducted their own food drives independently and on separate schedules.

### **Tab 13. City Council Member Reports**

Council Member Gamble asked about the anticipated impact to nearby restaurants once construction began on the West Main Street gateway sign. Mr. Dillon responded that construction activities would occur either before business hours or in the evening, with the goal of avoiding disruption to local businesses. Mr. Drury added that the completed gateway was expected to benefit nearby businesses by drawing additional visitors to the area.

Council Member Keown announced that he would begin holding office hours the following day in the first-floor conference room at City Hall between 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. He invited residents to attend and share concerns or topics for discussion. He also stated that he was looking forward to his upcoming Fire Department orientation and commended Mr. James and staff for their work.

Council Member Price stated that he attended the Arbor Day event and noted strong public participation. He suggested that in future years the City consider including blue plumbago, the City's official flower, as part of the giveaway.

Council Member Gamble stated that three Council Members would be traveling to Tallahassee to meet with legislative representatives regarding support for City-related projects and grant efforts.

Vice Mayor Grenier requested that the meeting record clearly reflect that although he voted against one community grant recipient, he supported the remaining grant recipients and the overall grant applications. He thanked City fire officials and staff for a recent presentation to members of the Masonic Lodge, noting that it had been well received. He also commented positively on improvements at the cemetery and noted that a new museum staff member had joined the team. Vice Mayor Grenier stated that a Historic Preservation meeting was scheduled for Friday and would include a discussion of a new cemetery tour to complement the downtown walking tour.

Vice Mayor Grenier further commended Mr. Dillon on the completion of the train station roof replacement, and Mr. Dillon confirmed that the roof was a lifetime installation. Council Member Grenier stated that the roof preserved the historic appearance of the structure. He also shared a personal observation regarding the growth cycle of a pecan tree received at a prior Arbor Day event and encouraged patience with newly planted trees.

Vice Mayor Grenier thanked Mayor Pfister for hosting a holiday gathering prior to Christmas and expressed appreciation for Council and staff support of local history initiatives. He noted that the City would be participating in numerous events during the upcoming year in recognition of the nation's 250th anniversary and highlighted planned activities, including historical presentations, nursery rhyme readings, and a Liberty Tree planting.

Mayor Pfister stated that she was pleased with the improvements at the cemetery and expressed appreciation for the ongoing work. She noted that she had gained a new perspective on the importance of cemetery enhancements and stated that the site was both beautiful and meaningful to the community.

## **XV. ADJOURNMENT**

There was no further business, and Mayor Pfister adjourned the meeting at 5:02 p.m.

Respectfully,

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Susie Novack, MMC, FCRM  
City Clerk