

MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA, HELD IN THE CITY HALL COMMISSION CHAMBERS, 100 NORTH U.S. #1, FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA, AT 9 A.M. ON MONDAY, JULY 14, 2025.

1. **Call to Order**

Mayor Hudson called the July 14, 2025, Day meeting to order at 9:00 A.M.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance**

3. **Roll Call**

Present: Commissioner Michael Broderick; Commissioner Arnold Gaines;  
Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.; Commissioner James Taylor; Mayor  
Linda Hudson

Staff Present: City Manager Richard Chess  
City Attorney Sara Hedges  
City Clerk Linda Cox

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

4. **Approval of Minutes**

A. Approval of the minutes of the June 09, 2025 Day Meeting.

Motion was made by Commissioner Michael Broderick, seconded by  
Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr. to approve the minutes of the June 09, 2025  
Day Meeting.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

5. **Additions or deletions to agenda and approval of the agenda.**

Motion was made by Commissioner Michael Broderick, seconded by  
Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr. to approve the agenda as set.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

6. **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Any person who wishes to comment on any subject may be heard at this time.  
Please limit your comments to three (3) minutes or less, as directed by the Mayor,  
as this section of the Agenda is limited to thirty minutes. The City Commission will  
not be able to take any official actions under Comments from the Public. Speakers  
will address the Mayor, Commissioners, and the Public with respect. Inappropriate  
language will not be tolerated.

No public comments

**7. Consent Agenda**

- A. Approval of the Arts and Culture Advisory Board's selection of eight Highwaymen paintings for use in creating image impressions of the artists' iconic style, including a seascape, royal poinciana, red sky, orange sky, yellow sky, backcountry, nocturne, and jacaranda, to be featured on four mosaic benches which will be installed at the Highwaymen Museum:
- B. Approval of travel for Mayor Hudson to attend the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida from August 13, 2025 to August 16, 2025 in the amount of \$1674.01.
- C. Approval of travel for Commissioner Broderick to attend the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida from August 13, 2025 to August 16, 2025 in the amount of \$1674.01.
- D. Approval of travel for Commissioner Taylor to attend the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida from August 13, 2025 to August 16, 2025 in the amount of \$1674.01.
- E. Approval of travel for Commissioner Gaines to attend the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida from August 13, 2025 to August 17, 2025 in the amount of \$1863.37.
- F. Approval of travel for Commissioner Johnson to attend the Florida League of Cities Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida from August 13, 2025 to August 17, 2025 in the amount of \$1863.37.
- G. Approval of the construction contract with R.K. Contractors, Inc. for Little Jim Camp Sanitary Improvements, Bid No. 2025-008, in the amount of \$390,648.22.

Commissioner Broderick pulled item 11G.

Motion was made by Commissioner Michael Broderick, seconded by Commissioner James Taylor to approve items 11A-11F of the Consent Agenda.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

As to item 11G

Commissioner Taylor recused himself from this item and filed form 8b as required.

Commissioner Broderick inquired as to why this item was appearing on the agenda again.

City Clerk Linda Cox clarified that the bid had previously been awarded, and this item pertains to the formal approval of the contract.

Motion was made by Commissioner Michael Broderick, to approve item 11G of the Consent Agenda.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson

Other: Commissioner James Taylor (ABSTAIN)

Passed

**8. City Commission - Resolutions**

- A. Resolution 25-R52 approving the Grant Agreement 25SRP28 between the City of Fort Pierce and Florida Department of Environmental Protection for the Wastewater Resilience and Adaptation - Phase II project in the amount of \$28,061,358.00 for the grant term of July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2027.

City Clerk, Linda Cox, introduced the Resolution, read by title only, into the record.

RESOLUTION NO. 25-R52

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA AUTHORIZING THE EXECUTION OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STANDARD GRANT AGREEMENT FOR THE WASTEWATER RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION – PHASE II PROJECT ; PROVIDING FOR A SEVERABILITY CLAUSE; REPEALING ALL RESOLUTIONS IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Motion was made by Commissioner Michael Broderick, seconded by Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr. to approve Resolution No. 25-R52.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

- B. Resolution 25-R53 approving the assignment of Grant Agreement 25SRP28 City of Fort Pierce for the Wastewater Resilience and Adaptation Phase II project to the Fort Pierce Utilities Authority.

City Clerk, Linda Cox, introduced the Resolution, read by title only, into the record.

RESOLUTION NO. 25-R53

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA AUTHORIZING THE ASSIGNMENT OF THE STATE OF FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION STANDARD GRANT AGREEMENT FOR THE WASTEWATER RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION – PHASE II PROJECT TO THE FORT PIERCE UTILITIES AUTHORITY; PROVIDING FOR A SEVERABILITY CLAUSE; REPEALING ALL RESOLUTIONS IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Motion was made by Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr., seconded by Commissioner James Taylor to approve Resolution No. 25- R53.

AYE: Commissioner Michael Broderick, Commissioner Curtis Johnson, Jr.,  
Mayor Linda Hudson, Commissioner James Taylor

Passed

Commissioner Broderick commented on the outstanding work by the FPUA to secure the grant.

Commissioner Gaines arrived at 9:06 a.m.

9. **New Business - City Commission Discussion Items**

- A. Annual performance evaluation - Linda Cox, City Clerk

#### Mayor Hudson

I have observed the City Clerk's Office working diligently under challenging circumstances throughout the past year. Despite these challenges, the office continued to function seamlessly, largely due to the leadership of the City Clerk, particularly during her time as Acting City Manager. The position is incredibly important, especially when it comes to maintaining up-to-date public records, which helps safeguard the city from legal complications. Responsibilities such as ensuring the timely publication of agendas, advertising, and managing the commission's schedules are all handled with excellence. The City Clerk often reviews legal items in tandem with the City Attorney, further emphasizing the significance of this role. Historically, this Commission has emphasized the equal standing of all three Charter Officers, each of whom reports directly to us. It's easy to overlook excellence when operations are smooth, but I want to acknowledge that success. Based on the salary schedule presented for the budget workshop, I ask that we consider an increase in the City Clerk's compensation above the standard staff raise.

#### Commissioner Broderick

I wish the entire city government operated as efficiently as the City Clerk's Office. We've had zero issues come out of that department, and I credit the Clerk's leadership for ongoing operational efficiency. I reviewed the salary study and was surprised to find that Ms. Cox ranks near the bottom tenth or twelfth on the pay scale. As all Charter Officers report directly to this body, there is no intermediary; thus, their compensation should reflect that level of responsibility. It is concerning that she is currently paid less than several department heads and senior staff in other departments. I strongly believe her compensation package needs to be reevaluated and increased to a number of \$172,000.

#### Commissioner Taylor

I agree with Commissioner Broderick and the Mayor. The salary list made it glaringly obvious that Ms. Cox is paid less than many department heads, even though she leads a department and is a Charter Officer. I support bringing her salary in line with other department heads. I have no complaints or even constructive criticism—her performance has been exceptional. When I joined the Commission, she was Acting City Manager, and my onboarding was seamless. My calendar has been flawless, and issues brought to her by business owners were resolved efficiently. I appreciate her proactive efforts and her dedication.

#### Commissioner Gaines

I have no worries about the City Clerk's Office. Ms. Cox often goes above and beyond her duties, even handling complaints from other departments. She keeps me organized with appointments and board meetings, and she's always one step ahead. I reviewed the salary data and fully support an appropriate compensation adjustment.

#### Commissioner Johnson

Thank you, Ms. Cox, for the professional standards you and your team uphold. Your office is doing an outstanding job, particularly with appointments and public records requests. That said, I have two key considerations: First, a salary increase of this magnitude must be justified within the context of the budget. Second, I'd like to see comparative data from the Florida League of Cities to understand how our City Clerk's role and compensation align statewide. It's essential we protect and retain top talent, but we must ensure that the adjustment is appropriate, justified, and financially feasible.

City Clerk Linda Cox. I don't have the comparative data readily available. The reporting structure for City Clerks varies. Some report to City Managers, others are Charter Officers. Any salary comparison would need to account for these structural differences.

#### Commissioner Johnson

That's the type of context I'm seeking—to understand what standard we're setting. I'm not opposed to the increase, but I want clarity on where the funds will come from and how the adjustment compares across similar roles statewide. Given our budget constraints, we need thoughtful discussion.

Commissioner Taylor

At a minimum, Ms. Cox should be paid at a level consistent with other department heads. This is a budget workshop—we should be able to determine where to allocate those funds today. There's consensus that a raise is appropriate; we just need to determine the percentage.

Commissioner Gaines

The public and other department heads are watching these discussions. While Ms. Cox deserves the raise, we need to look at the Florida League of Cities data and make this correction as soon as possible.

Mayor Hudson

I believe I'm the only current commissioner who was here when Ms. Cox was hired. The role has evolved significantly since then. Originally, it was a much smaller scope. But today, due to state laws and the complexity of public records, scheduling, and compliance with Sunshine Laws, the role has grown in importance both locally and across municipalities. We'll continue to reflect on this throughout the day and determine a fair and financially responsible compensation adjustment.

B. Annual performance evaluation Sara Hedges, City Attorney

Commissioner Broderick

I had both the duty and the privilege of participating in the hiring process for our new City Attorney. Candidly, it was clear from the outset that whoever was selected would be inheriting a department in significant disarray—marked by severe understaffing, disengaged personnel, and a general state of turmoil, to put it mildly. It was evident that the role would require not only a sharp legal mind, but also a strong and capable manager to begin the work of rebuilding and stabilizing the department.

When Sara was interviewed, I admit I had initial concerns—not about her legal aptitude, which was exceptional—but about her experience in managing such a challenging environment. As someone with many more years behind me professionally, I recognized that our generational difference might shape our perspectives and approaches. I recall discussing my concerns with her directly, specifically regarding her readiness to assume a management role of this magnitude.

However, from the outset, her tenacity stood out to me. It was, in fact, one of the key attributes that convinced me she was the right fit for the position. Her commitment to representing the city's best interests is not only commendable—it's refreshing. She works diligently to keep matters on track, even when that means helping to keep me within the appropriate guardrails, which I know can be no easy task.

Over time, I've had the opportunity to observe the reconstitution of the department under her leadership, and I've been thoroughly impressed. She's tackled what was arguably the most significant challenge of her role head-on—with professionalism, focus, and a results-driven mindset. Her ability to manage complex and often thorny issues, frame sound legal opinions, and seek outside expertise when needed speaks volumes—not just about her legal talent, which was never in question—but about her capabilities as a leader and manager.

Where I once had concerns, I now have full confidence. I find working with Sara to be an absolute pleasure, even in the face of difficult issues that often carry substantial consequences for the city. Her growth in the position has been remarkable. She has demonstrated maturity beyond her years, and I sincerely hope she continues to serve as our City Attorney for many years to come. Her continued professional and managerial development is evident—and it's a joy to witness. Sara, you have a very bright future ahead of you. I just hope that future remains here, in the City of Fort Pierce. Losing you would be a significant loss. You've done a truly outstanding job.

Commissioner Johnson

Ms. Hedges, thank you once again for the professional standard you have established within your department. It is truly a pleasure to work with you during

our weekly meetings, which provide valuable insight into the city's litigation landscape and help ensure we remain informed and aligned.

I recall being present when you were first hired as the Assistant City Attorney, and later when you made the decision to pursue the role of City Attorney. Since then, I have had the opportunity to witness the steady progression and positive transformation of your office firsthand.

I would echo Commissioner Broderick's sentiments—there are, indeed, many complex and challenging issues currently before us, and undoubtedly more to come. I deeply appreciate the professionalism and diligence you bring to navigating these matters, and I look forward to seeing your continued leadership as we work through them together.

Your recent efforts to strengthen your team, including the thoughtful addition of a new attorney to address specific areas of need, reflect your commitment to both strategic growth and operational excellence. Thank you for being the dedicated and effective leader that you are, and for the vision and integrity you continue to bring to the City Attorney's Office.

#### Commissioner Gaines

Ms. Hedges, I want to sincerely thank you for the professional standards you've brought to the City Attorney's Office. I'm pretty sure I'm the one who gives you the most gray hair up here on the dais—and what the public doesn't always see are the looks I get when I approach the mic. But it is what it is. You've done an excellent job keeping me in line—believe it or not—and I appreciate your guidance.

Behind closed doors, we've had our share of intense discussions, but even when we've disagreed, you've maintained a high level of professionalism, and we've always moved forward with mutual respect. That speaks volumes about your character and your commitment to your role.

I'm well aware of the challenges you inherited in your department and the continued pressures you face. I remember asking early on if everyone fully understood what was going on internally, and I commend you for stepping into that situation with strength and resolve. You've continued to fight for what's best for this city—whether or not everyone agrees with your methods—and I respect that. Your job is to protect the City of Fort Pierce, and that includes its employees, and you've done that with dedication.

I'm also pleased that additional support has been brought into your office.

We have a lot of legal challenges facing the city—some right at our doorstep. I look forward to our ongoing meetings and our open, unfiltered dialogue. As attorneys, we have a duty to stand on principle. Unfortunately, in today's world, I see fewer and fewer doing so. But the oath we took still matters to me.

It may not always be obvious, but the decisions we make here—or fail to make—can land us before regulatory bodies in Tallahassee or Orlando. And if you get called to Tallahassee, let's just say, that's when you know it's serious. So let's continue to stay sharp, stay principled, and continue protecting the City of Fort Pierce and its staff.

#### Commissioner Taylor

When I first began serving on the Commission, my initial introduction to city governance came through regular meetings with Ms. Hedges. From the start, she has been an invaluable resource and sounding board. I've leaned on her insight frequently—through phone calls, meetings, and questions—and I appreciate her willingness to guide me, even when that guidance is often reminding me of what I *can't* do. Her cautious, principled approach is exactly what the City of Fort Pierce needs.

Sara's legal counsel is thoughtful and measured. She doesn't claim to have all the answers and is never afraid to say, "Let me check." That humility, paired with competence, is rare and commendable. She's fiercely protective of the city, operates with integrity, and prioritizes the organization's long-term interests over convenience or popularity.

The role of City Attorney is not an easy one. It's largely behind the scenes, and the public may not always understand the boundaries of the position. Yet Sara has remained accessible and focused, ensuring the City is represented with professionalism and clarity. Compared to previous models where outside counsel lacked consistent presence and accountability, the move to a fully staffed, in-house legal team has significantly improved responsiveness and effectiveness—and Sara has played a major role in shaping that.

I also appreciate her ability to communicate with the Commission—even when correcting us—gracefully and directly. That kind of diplomacy, especially when navigating the inherent tensions among charter officers, is crucial. Tension between the City Attorney and the City Manager is normal and healthy—it helps ensure that decisions are well considered, legally sound, and in the city's best interest. The same goes for the dynamic with the City Clerk.

Ms. Hedges, thank you for your leadership, your steady hand, and for always placing the city first. Now that your office is fully staffed, I'm confident we're well-positioned to move forward. I consider you a trusted advisor and a friend, and I hope to see you continue in this role for many years to come.

#### Mayor Hudson

When I think of Ms. Hedges, the word that comes to mind is "fierce"—particularly in her unwavering protection of the City. She has consistently demonstrated dedication to her role and a strong commitment to serving both the Commission and the broader interests of Fort Pierce. I'm especially pleased to see that her office is now fully staffed. That's a significant accomplishment and a reflection of the progress being made.

This Commission views our charter officers as equal partners in governance, each bringing a vital perspective to the table. While we may occasionally have differing views, that dynamic serves as a necessary system of checks and balances. Ms. Hedges navigates those complexities with professionalism and balance, ensuring the legal interests of the City are always front and center.

The nature of her position is not always visible to the public. It's not a public-facing role in the traditional sense, and at times, that can lead to misunderstandings. Some may not realize that a lack of returned phone calls doesn't reflect a lack of concern—it reflects a clear understanding of her priorities, responsibilities, and the scope of her duties. And for that clarity and focus, I am grateful.

I also want to recognize the importance of having transitioned from outside counsel to an in-house City Attorney. That move was driven by the need for accessibility, accountability, and responsiveness. In the past, legal matters sometimes disappeared into what we jokingly referred to as "the Bermuda Triangle." Under Ms. Hedges' leadership, we've seen a welcome shift toward efficiency, transparency, and timely legal guidance.

I also appreciate her judgment in recognizing when outside counsel is necessary. She doesn't hesitate to seek the right expertise when needed, which speaks volumes about her dedication to doing what's best for the City—not just what's convenient.

One of Ms. Hedges' greatest strengths is her ability to tactfully guide commissioners, even when our ideas might be a bit outside the lines. She has a remarkable way of telling someone they're off track—without making it confrontational—and that's not an easy skill to master.

Finally, I want to acknowledge a reality that all staff and commissioners must understand: there is naturally some tension between the roles of City Attorney, City Manager, and City Clerk. That tension is healthy. It reflects the balance of authority, the push and pull that leads to better decision-making. Each of these charter officers has a distinct duty, and it's through respectful collaboration—and sometimes disagreement—that we achieve the best results for our City.

Ms. Hedges, thank you for your continued dedication, your steady leadership, and your commitment to protecting Fort Pierce. Now that your office is fully staffed, we're truly back in business.

#### Commissioner Broaderick

The City Charter is crystal clear regarding the responsibilities of our charter officers, including to whom they report and how they are to manage and administer their independent offices. I share the sentiment that some level of pushback among the charter officers is inevitable. That dynamic is part of the balance of governance. However, it also reinforces my belief that the City Clerk should be compensated commensurate not only with the operational duties of the office but also with the Clerk's active role in providing senior-level decision-making support to the City Commission. That advisory function is a vital part of the Clerk's responsibilities as a charter officer.

Putting compensation aside—since I know that topic will be addressed separately—I do have concerns about the potential for overreach among the charter officers. It will be incumbent upon the City Attorney, City Clerk, and City

Manager to work collaboratively and remain within their clearly defined areas of authority. The Charter outlines these responsibilities in no uncertain terms. Any efforts to cross those lines or influence another charter officer's department could lead to serious complications.

Let me be direct: any violations of the Charter related to authority or oversight will not end well if brought before the City Commission. I would strongly urge all parties to thoroughly review the Charter, respect its boundaries, and remain focused on their own departmental responsibilities. The Charter serves as the final word on these matters and must be adhered to without exception.

## 10. City Commission Budget Workshop

### A. Presentation of Proposed FY 2025-2026 General Fund Budget

City Manager, Richard Chess, introduced Finance Director, Johnna Morris to present the FY 2026 Operating Budget along with, for the first time, the FY 2026–2030 Capital Improvement Plan. This plan outlines all major projects and will be essential as we pursue additional grant funding.

Ms. Morris presented the proposed FY 2025-2026 General Fund Budget. The City of Fort Pierce has proposed a balanced FY 2025–2026 General Fund budget totaling \$67,537,211, representing a 4.4% increase (\$2.87 million) from the current fiscal year. This increase is primarily driven by a 10.46% rise in taxable property values, generating an additional \$2.78 million in ad valorem revenue, while maintaining the current millage rate of 6.9.

Despite growth in property values, Ms. Morris emphasized a cautious and conservative fiscal approach due to ongoing economic uncertainties. These include potential changes in ad valorem tax policies, inflationary pressures, global trade volatility, a projected 35% chance of recession, and state-level discussions that could reduce municipal revenue streams (e.g., fuel taxes and CRA sunset efforts).

Key budget highlights include:

Eight new positions, including a city engineer and roles in IT, police, and city management.

5% COLA for non-bargaining and sworn personnel; commissioner raises also included (pending approval).

\$600,000 reserved for capital projects in FY 2026.

Police Department budget is \$20.75 million (30.7% of General Fund), showing a slight decrease in personnel costs due to vacancy budgeting at midpoint salaries rather than top-scale. However, total investment, including \$767K in capital, results in a net decrease from the prior year.

Operating expenditures increased by \$1.47 million, largely driven by inflation and increased technology needs.

Capital outlay rose by \$726K to \$1.9 million.

Debt service decreased by \$288K with total general fund debt now at \$13.6 million, positioning the city to be debt-free by 2032.

Healthcare premium increases are minimal (1.5% for health; no increase for dental), with continued strong performance from the city's insurance provider (PRM).

The Commission expressed concerns over state proposals to cap or eliminate ad valorem revenue sources and sunset CRA programs like FPRA, emphasized the need to plan for potential downturns in real estate valuations and to support economic development efforts, and expressed a commitment to long-term sustainability, responsible growth, and fiscal resilience while supporting key City services and strategic capital investments.

### B. Five (5) Year Financial Projection

Ms. Morris presented the long-range financial projections, noting a modest 1.4% revenue increase in FY 2027 alongside rising expenditures, especially from capital needs and inflation. Personnel projections include no cost-of-living adjustments through FY 2030, maintaining flexibility during economic downturns. Commissioners discussed contingency plans like vacancy eliminations and capital deferrals to avoid layoffs.

**Key Discussion Points:**

**Utility Tax Revenue:** Concerns were raised about stagnant utility tax growth despite development. Legislative risks include potential loss of utility fund transfers—currently 13% of the operating budget.

**Solid Waste:** A rate increase (residential from \$29.04 to \$34) is proposed to support service improvements, fleet renewal, and new staff.

The Commission urged transparency since rate changes were budgeted before approval.

**FPRA Budget:** Increased to \$6.65M, with funding for community policing and support for 10 grant-funded officers.

FPRA's \$1.9M debt to the General Fund by FY 2027 was broadly supported, pending fiscal caution.

**Enterprise Funds:**

Marina: \$429K increase.

Golf Course: \$162K increase.

Animal Shelter: \$406K decrease.

Sunrise Theatre: \$4.6M budgeted, contingent on the outcome of an active RFP. If privatized, the City's operational burden would cease.

**Police Funding:**

Declining grants and an unreimbursed \$500K federal expense raised concerns.

The Commission emphasized the need for better police compensation, suggesting increases beyond the proposed 5%, potentially up to 15–17%, funded via millage or budget reallocation.

Ms. Morris warned of unsustainable use of one-time revenues for recurring costs.

**CDBG and Grant Administration:**

\$2.3M increase for housing rehab and park infrastructure projects.

Concerns over underutilized funds and outdated allocations are prompting refocused strategies.

Grants management is returning to Finance for tighter integration and strategic alignment with capital planning.

**Public Works:** Notable capital investment aimed at addressing long-standing equipment and maintenance backlogs. Commissioners stressed parity with police raises to avoid a mass exodus due to perceived inequities.

**Risk Management:** Currently housed with the City Attorney but budgeted in HR; discussions continue regarding appropriate departmental alignment. Departments submitted proposals based on historical trends and projected needs. Staff adjusted line items to optimize available funding.

The Commission prioritized public safety, public works, and code enforcement as high-need areas, suggested increased revenue streams (impact fees, millage rate adjustment) and reallocating internal service costs, and emphasized aligning budget allocations with the City's strategic goals, particularly beautification and safety.

C. Five (5) Year Capital Improvement Projects FY 2026 to FY 2030

Ms. Morris presented The total appropriations for this fiscal year amount to \$1,915,918. The funding is allocated as follows:

Facility Maintenance: \$428,408

Streets and Drainage: \$147,000

Fleet Maintenance Projects: \$56,600

Parks and Grounds: \$237,000

Leisure Services: \$30,000

IT Projects: \$199,018

Police Projects: \$767,892

Engineering Projects: \$50,000

Jason Atkinson, Public Works Director, commented that the majority of this year's requests are for equipment rather than traditional projects. The focus is on improving operational efficiency, cleanliness, and overall aesthetics—particularly along the shoreline and in high-traffic areas like downtown, parks, and beaches, working closely with Keep Fort Pierce Beautiful to achieve a pristine beach and public spaces. Initiatives include enhanced pressure washing, landscape maintenance, and deploying service teams across city hotspots such as the Jetty, Causeway Park, and Jaycee Park.

Key equipment items like a grapple truck and productivity-enhancing machinery—will allow crews to clean thoroughly and efficiently. We're exploring solutions to streamline workflow, such as acquiring a self-driving maintenance machine and implementing dispatch technology with two-way radios to reduce overlapping work and improve response times.

This approach blends public service with private-sector efficiency. We emphasize professionalism, visibility, and pride among our Public Works staff, recognizing they represent the city in every interaction. Additional efforts include partnering with FPRA and grants, leveraging the Tree Fund to purchase a water truck for new plantings, and addressing irrigation challenges. We're also exploring long-term environmental solutions, such as installing baffling systems to redirect seaweed buildup caused by seasonal tides—potentially mitigating beach maintenance issues. This budget request supports a clean, responsive, and visibly professional Public Works operation aligned with community expectations and long-term sustainability.

Mayor Hudson thanked Public Works for their continued efforts. Regarding the seaweed issue, it's unclear whether anyone is currently responsible for cleanup. While some residents express concerns about the odor and appearance, it's important to note that seaweed is a natural occurrence and plays a role in preventing beach erosion. Historically, Fort Pierce may have engaged in limited seaweed removal, but it's uncertain if the County currently manages it. Additionally, inquired if the equipment referenced is primarily intended for clearing branches and debris—not for seaweed removal.

DeVoshay Johnson, Deputy City Manager, presented the planned upgrades for Administrative Services.

Chambers Technology Upgrade:

This includes essential hardware improvements—such as cameras, microphones, and ADA-compliant equipment—for this room, which supports our broadcast channel. The upgrade, typically done every five years (now overdue at seven), ensures accessibility for the hearing and visually impaired.

Leisure Services Enhancements:

Critical updates are planned for the River Walk venue, including a new HVAC system and upgraded technology such as sound and lighting. These improvements will support a proposed rate increase for special event rentals by enhancing the overall value of the space.

#### ERP Platform Expansion:

Five new time-entry kiosks will be installed at locations including the Marina, Public Works, and Police Department to support the Tyler system rollout. Public-use kiosks will also be added at City Clerk, Planning, and Building departments to improve customer service and streamline operations. The Police Department is particularly focused on gaining access to advanced scheduling functions.

#### Citywide IT Equipment Refresh:

Due to procurement delays during COVID and prior administrative limitations, the city has fallen behind on its standard three-year equipment refresh cycle. This funding will allow all departments to return to regular IT upgrade schedules, ensuring consistent performance and efficiency. These targeted investments aim to modernize operations, improve public service delivery, and restore citywide equipment standards.

Acting Police Chief, Deputy Chief Robert Ridle, explained that the \$767,000 figure represents the first-year cost of a new contract with Axon, the provider of the Police Department's technology, including Tasers, body-worn cameras, in-car cameras, and evidence management software. The current contract ends soon, with a new five- or ten-year agreement set to begin in October 2026. Axon's technology also includes advanced features such as automated alerts when an officer's Taser is drawn, allowing supervisors to immediately access live footage from body-worn cameras. The contract will also cover upgrades to outdated equipment in the Criminal Investigations Division and includes an improved drone platform already in use by the department. This technology is a national standard in law enforcement, and renewing the contract is vital to maintaining operational efficiency and accountability.

The Commission inquired whether the \$767,000 was a first-year cost and clarified that this is a lease agreement for the equipment, not a direct purchase.

Chief Ridle commented that the contract begins at \$767,000 and increases annually to \$797,000, \$829,000, \$862,000, and \$897,000. While not inexpensive, signing in the first year locks in these rates for the full term. The agreement operates as a lease—equipment is returned at the end, and updated technology is provided as it becomes available. Axon has consistently supported the city and maintained strong service standards.

Mr. Chess noted that the current contract expires next year, and we still need to address the RFP process. Discussions are ongoing with the City Attorney's Office to determine the proper path forward, as issuing a five-year contract may not align with our current procurement code. We must evaluate whether this qualifies as a sole-source procurement or if a formal RFP is required. This item is included in the FY26 capital plan as part of the \$1.9 million allocation.

Mark Zrallack, City Engineer, explained that many of our visible infrastructure improvements are funded through the surtax, a critical revenue source. Since 2020, we've resurfaced 14 miles of roadway, with plans to complete another 8 miles by FY28/29. A map was presented to highlight the tangible impact of this work.

A major upcoming project is the FDOT-funded Sun Trail/Highwaymen Trail Gap—a 1.3-mile, 10–14-foot-wide non-motorized path from Indian Hills to Georgia Avenue, backed by over \$2 million in funding.

To improve how we prioritize roadwork, we're proposing a Pavement Condition Survey, which uses high-definition cameras and a DOT-supported system to assess road quality and assign a Pavement Condition Index (PCI). This data-driven approach will help us preserve roads before major reconstruction is needed, ultimately stretching funds more effectively.

The survey is a project-based initiative, not an equipment or software purchase. It aims to improve long-term planning and maintenance.

Lastly, as the surtax is set to expire around 2026, we must prepare to engage the public on its importance. Without renewal, we risk losing a key funding source that directly supports essential infrastructure improvements. Early polling is positive, but a proactive outreach campaign will be necessary.

The Commission inquired whether the road assessment initiative was equipment or IT-related and if the digital dashboard generated from this data would provide a comprehensive, statistical overview of Fort Pierce road conditions, including failed roads—crucial information for justifying the continuation of the surtax. This data-driven approach will also help distinguish city-maintained roads from county or state roads, enabling faster, more accurate responses to constituent concerns. The shift from photo-based records to quantifiable analytics will enhance transparency and decision-making.

Shyanne Harnage, Community and Economic Development Director, noted that the full project-based budget and Capital Improvement Plan will be reviewed in detail at the upcoming meeting. One highlighted project is the Depot Drive enhancement, initially proposed in 2023 and tied to the potential Brightline station. The FPRA is reviving this concept to improve parking, pedestrian connectivity, and integration with the county garage and Sunrise Theatre. The project also aims to activate the area beneath the Citrus Avenue bridge. While there were past discussions about a 50/50 funding partnership for permanent parking and walkways at Depot Drive, no formal agreement has been confirmed. Staff will revisit those conversations, especially regarding ownership and responsibilities among city, county, and private stakeholders. Additional major initiatives include:

Indian River Drive: A \$2.7M Florida Job Growth Grant, with bidding nearly complete. The FPRA increased its contribution from \$2M to \$3M.

Avenue D Reconstruction: A long-discussed project, with \$1.5M committed by FPRA and ongoing coordination with engineering to improve U.S. 1 to 29th Street.

Harbour Pointe: Under an interlocal agreement with St. Lucie County, the FPRA committed \$2M to waterfront improvements. \$1M has already been allocated, with the potential for \$500K annually over four years, contingent on design timelines.

Overall, the FPRA is taking a strategic, phased approach to multi-year projects, ensuring community input, detailed planning, and minimized change orders. Additional project updates will follow.

The Commission requested clarification on the scope of stormwater projects, particularly how they relate to street and gutter cleanliness. Referencing prior discussions with Mr. Andrews, they emphasized the importance of maintaining clean curbs to prevent debris from entering the stormwater system. They asked for an overview of the specific stormwater projects currently being considered.

Mr. Zrallack explained that this is the second phase of the four-phase Surfside drainage project, covering Clover, Eucalyptus, Cypress, and Sunset Isles, and noted coordination with Public Works to ensure baffle boxes—critical for protecting waterways—are maintained, with current repairs underway.

Mr. Atkinson shared that the City operates two street sweepers—one smaller, more maneuverable unit used for downtown, now scheduled for early morning cleaning four times a week (Monday–Thursday). Staff efforts have been reorganized for better efficiency, separating tasks between general crews and vacuum truck operations. They're also using paper maps to track completed areas, ensuring nothing is missed. He emphasized a more proactive approach to maintaining catch basins and encouraged staff to report issues as they see them in the field.

Dean Kubitschek, Marina Manager, emphasized the urgent need to dredge Moores Creek, as silt buildup has rendered about one-third of the recently funded boat ramp unusable. This dredging effort is essential to maintain navigability and support the marina's operation. He is coordinating with engineering to issue an RFP and hire a consultant—an investment exceeding \$500,000. The consultant will assess both dredging and the marina expansion, as the two projects are interrelated. The city plans to pursue grants to offset costs, including resiliency grants for the internal basin, which often floods during storms, and Wildlife Commission grants for the external basin expansion. Additionally, there are plans to install a pump-out station on the marina's north side, supported by a 75/25 state grant, confirmed efforts are underway to enforce upcoming anchoring limitations. The city now operates a patrol boat and

has applied for federal funding to acquire a second. Two staff members are currently certified as code enforcement officers, and future hiring is budgeted once the ordinance is finalized. The approach aims to strengthen waterway management while minimizing costs through strategic funding and planning.

Paul Thomas, Building Official, commented that the \$630,000 budget primarily funds a new backup generator for the Sunrise Center, which currently has none. Although the building was wired for a portable generator last year, the associated contract costs proved unreasonable. With FPUA support, \$300,000 is now allocated toward a permanent gas-powered generator connection. An additional \$150,000 will go toward computer upgrades due to aging equipment and staffing needs. Other expenses include new vehicles, improved department security (e.g., ballistic drywall, updated card readers), and interior modifications to better support staff use in areas originally designed for public access.

Danny Visconti, Manager, Indian Hills Golf Course, commented on Commissioner Johnson's inquiry of the pickleball courts and clubhouse facility. The pickleball courts have been well-received, with around 40 users last weekend, 17 memberships sold, and strong daily guest participation. Interior windscreens will soon complete the courts. A \$50,000 project fee is allocated for upgrades to the 23-year-old golf course irrigation pump house. This year focuses on replacing outdated internal components—such as relays, surge protection, and the control panel—which no longer interface properly with the newer system. The pumps themselves, still in decent condition, are slated for replacement next year at a cost of \$20,000 and will be kept on site as backups. The next phase of development includes a new clubhouse, cart barn, and paved parking for the southern area. These improvements are part of the five-year plan and will be coordinated to align with nearby changes, including T.D. Bank selling adjacent property, which affects shared parking. The clubhouse project is seen as a future revenue opportunity, addressing both aging infrastructure and community facility needs.

Commissioner Johnson commented on the need to exercise caution and investigate who purchased the property, as the previous owner had a significant presence there. Given its impact on the area and our future plans, it's important to stay informed about developments at that location.

Mr. Visconti commented that the new pickleball courts added approximately 35 parking spaces on the north side. Reconfiguring and repaving the south lot could add about 70 more, which would provide adequate parking overall.

The Commission emphasized the need for realism and teamwork, stressing that all parties—union members, city employees, and taxpayers—must cooperate to find sustainable solutions within the city's limited \$65 million budget. There was consensus that everyone would have to make sacrifices, as Fort Pierce does not have the financial capacity of larger entities like St. Lucie County. Directors were urged to reexamine budgets and reduce expenses, keeping in mind that the previous 10.5% increase was temporary and won't continue beyond 2027. Future planning may require cost-cutting measures such as department optimization and outsourcing. Commissioners also discussed enhancing revenue through user fees and ensuring all city-owned assets, such as leased properties, generate market-rate returns. The City plans to assess its leases and explore hiring a real estate professional to improve asset management and reduce the need for tax increases. A Special Meeting is scheduled for July 21st at 9 a.m.

## 11. **Adjournment**

Immediately following adjournment, please move toward the doors and exit the chambers. This allows for the safe and courteous exit of all persons, and those on the dais. Conversations after the meeting should be held outside of chambers, in the foyer or elsewhere, but not in the commission chambers where lights will be out as soon as the chambers are empty.

Mayor Hudson adjourned the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

ATTEST:

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR COMMISSIONER