

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Meeting
Thursday, August 22, 2024

The City Commission met in formal session Thursday, August 22, 2024 at 9:00 A.M. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline, and the following were present:

1. Roll Call: Nancy Sikes-Kline, Mayor/City Commissioner
Roxanne Horvath, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner
Barbara Blonder, City Commissioner
Cynthia Garris, City Commissioner
Jim Springfield, City Commissioner

Also Present: David Birchim, City Manager
Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney
Darlene Galambos, City Clerk
Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager
Reuben Franklin, Assistant City Manager
Stephen Slaughter, Director, Public Works & Utilities
Amy Skinner, Director, Planning and Building
Melissa Wissel, Director, Communications
Jennifer Michaux, Police Chief
Carlos Aviles, Fire Chief
Elyse Wiemann, Recording Secretary

2. General Public Comments

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

Dovana Bell expressed concerns about the amount of the property taxes that she and others paid, she asked the commission to consider rolling back the millage rate and work toward keeping the taxes as low as possible.

Denise Thomas asked that the tennis courts be resurfaced.

3. FY 2025 Budget Review & Discussion (M. Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager)

Ms. Breidenstein introduced Melissa Burns, the new Director of Finance, to the Commission.

♦ 2025 Proposed Budget

Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager, reviewed, in detail, the Fiscal Year 2025 budget.

Commissioner Springfield said the comparison of the salaries for St. Johns County and the City showed that this was where employees left to pursue higher rates of pay at the County level. He also felt that the City needed to be competitive to retain employees and not continue to spend dollars on the recruitment and training of new employees.

Commissioner Blonder pointed to inflation year after year and the effect it had on employees that struggle to make ends meet and said that while others not in the city received increases that were below the

CPI, the city was attempting to keep pace to benefit employees positively.

Commissioner Blonder thought that the illegal parking fees were too low and could be increased to provide additional revenue as well as discouraging illegal parking. The current fees were \$35 for illegal parking and \$25 for expired meter parking. She clarified that only the fees for illegal parking should be increased.

Mayor Sikes-Kline thought that comparing St. Augustine with other cities of similar size would help to determine if the fees should be increased.

Commissioner Springfield agreed with the increase and said it should be advertised with proper signage.

Commissioner Garris felt that reducing the millage rate would help residents within the city. She said that having no increases since 2010 was a good thing; however, she thought that a reduction should be considered.

Ms. Breidenstein advised that a reduction from 7.5 to 7.4 would reduce revenue by \$328,000, which would not significantly reduce property taxes for residents.

Commissioner Springfield said the total value of property had increased; however, using the rollback rate of 6.7%, the city would receive the same amount of money as the prior year and city would lose \$300,000 of new money. He also said that increasing the millage rate was very difficult and over ten years, the savings to the residents and businesses were relatively small. He advised the commission that they needed to be mindful of the services that were provided and the increasing cost of those services for residents and visitors alike.

Commissioner Horvath asked for an explanation of the \$42 million difference in the proposed budget and the revised budget for 2024.

Ms. Breidenstein explained that certain projects that were encumbered and committed from the previous budget were moved to the new budget, thus causing the increase.

Commissioner Blonder was concerned that the county share of the impact of the visitors was too low, she wanted to enforce management agreements with them for the costs that the city was taking on. She was complimentary of the people writing grants, saying that their work was very important to the city.

Ms. Breidenstein showed examples of the importance of the grant monies by highlighting the budget for stormwater. She advised that because of the increased numbers from the Tourist Development Council (TDC), there would be assistance to offset some of cost for events that took place in the city.

Commissioner Blonder was not in favor of a revised budget as it was not a significant cost benefit for the residents when factoring in the cost of providing services.

Commissioner Springfield was mindful of the timing with the budget and sending the tax bill to residents, any changes would have to be considered immediately.

Commissioner Blonder felt that lowering the millage rate would not change the cost benefit ratio. She said that the city had not changed the millage rate since 2010 and while she understood the effects that increased taxes had on residents, rising inflation also influenced the costs the city incurred as well.

Commissioner Springfield suggested for the next budget discussion in March, there should be examples of budgets showing reduced millage rates using reductions of .5 per budget and what services would have to be discontinued if those smaller budgets were selected.

Mayor Sikes-Kline wanted to show the long-term impact on the budget to include residential, commercial, and new construction.

Mr. Birchim advised that the connection fees and mobility charges from the city bring costs close to what the county was charging for impact fees.

Ms. Breidenstein expanded on the general operating funds by department, highlighting increases and additions to each budget as necessary. She stated the grounds budget included an additional \$30,000 for the city-wide tree canopy, removal of invasive species, funds for improved irrigation, electrical and top seeding for Francis Field. She advised that the fencing had been purchased in 2024 and the cost had been divided between the city and the amphitheater.

Commissioner Blonder felt that the city should reach out to the county and have the county pay for the resurfacing of the tennis courts as the city could not absorb those costs at this time.

Mr. Franklin advised that the Sevilla Street project included rebricking.

Mr. Slaughter provided an update for St. George Street, he said that the project was taking a lesser priority than others; however, work was being done to resolve the issue of the missing bricks.

Ms. Breidenstein continued with her review of the budget.

Commissioner Blonder asked if more composting bins would be provided.

Ms. Breidenstein advised that those funds were included in the solid waste budget. She continued and spoke about reserve funds and transfers and the options that were available with those funds.

Mr. Birchim questioned how the Historic Preservation funds were used.

Ms. Breidenstein explained that the funds help offset the cost of archeology staffing, operations, building improvements to the historic properties, Historic Preservation Master Plan implementation, annual contributions to University of Florida Preservation Institute, University of South Florida for La Florida, and the Historical Society.

Mr. Birchim asked if the \$504,000 could be used to create an expanded HP fund or new HP fund.

Ms. Breidenstein advised that could be a possibility; however, she cautioned making it a reoccurring plan.

Commissioner Horvath asked where the monies for repairs of the VIC come from, and the commission was advised that those monies mostly came from grants.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said she would like to see the \$504,000 spent or set aside for Historic Preservation for purchase, relocation, or stabilization.

Commissioner Springfield asked what was being done to prepare for the added expenses when the circulator would no longer be funded by the state.

Ms. Breidenstein said they were preparing for more expenders with the Broudy garage. She said they wanted to use excess revenue from the Visitor Information Center to help all garages meet their expenses to avoid having to use monies from the General fund.

There was consensus to setup an account similar to the land acquisition account for historic preservation that would apply to work outside the CRA.

Commissioner Blonder confirmed that the Tolomato Lot and Sevilla Street projects would both be done in this budget cycle.

Mayor Sikes-Kline shared that Davis Shores was turning 100 years old in 2025

and the neighborhood had approached the city for funding to assist with the celebration.

Mr. Birchim provided some things that the city could do such as: commemorative plaques for ten original homes, street signs designating the Davis Shores area, landscaping beautification to the neighborhood. He also said that the city could apply for a grant to list the neighborhood in the National Register of Places.

Commissioner Blonder asked the City Manager to speak about the recent changes proposed by the state to Anastasia State Park.

Mr. Birchim detailed the plan brought forward by the state of Florida. He explained that the city had regulatory authority over the state park because it fell within city limits; therefore, if the development required any local action, for example tree removal, Future Land Use or rezoning of the property, it would have to be reviewed by the planning board or the city commission. He stated that city should not prejudge the application before it came before them because it could taint the legal process.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked Mr. Birchim to prepare a position in writing.

♦ **FY 2024- FY 2028 PW & Utilities Capital Improvement Plan**

4. Items by Mayor and Commissioners

(None)

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:53 A.M.¹



Nancy Sikes-Kline, MAYOR



Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK



¹ Transcribed by Elyse Wiemann