

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTIN

City Commission Special Meeting
Thursday, August 28, 2025

The City Commission met in special session on Thursday, August 28, 2025, immediately following the Community Redevelopment Agency Meeting (CRA), 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
Barbara Blonder, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner
Cynthia Garris, City Commissioner
Jim Springfield, City Commissioner
Jon DePreter, 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
Melissa Burns, Director, Finance
Jessica Beach,
Donna Hayes, Director, Human Resources
Jaime D. Perkins, Director, Community Service
Jennifer Michaux, Police Chief
Carlos Aviles, Fire Chief
Elyse Wiemann, Senior Recording Secretary

Mayor Sikes-Kline advised the meeting started at 9:49 a.m.

Mayor Sikes-Kline requested to add item 3.B for public comment after the presentation.

MOTION

Mayor Sikes-Kline MOVED to add item 3.B. public comment after the presentation. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Blonder and APPROVED BY UNANIMOUS VOICE VOTE.

2. General Public Comments

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

- Gina Burrell

3. FY 2026 BUDGET REVIEW & DISCUSSION

3.A. FY 2026 Proposed Budget. (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns, Finance Director, reviewed the Proposed budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026. She highlighted the following items:

- Total Proposed Revenue Budget FY2026
- Total Expenditure Budget for FY 2026
- Personnel Summary 2026
- Proposed General Fund FY 2026
- Proposed Utility Fund FY 2026
- Proposed Stormwater Fund FY 2026
- Solid Waste Fund FY 2026
- Municipal Marina FY 2026
- Visitors Information Center Fund FY 2026
- Proposed Historic Area Community Redevelopment Area (HACRA) FY 2026
- Proposed Lincolnville Community Redevelopment Area (LCRA) FY 2026
- Proposed West City Community Redevelopment Area (WCCRA) FY 2026

Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager, advised that the current City budget was ninety-nine million dollars without transfers.

Commissioner Blonder asked what could be included in miscellaneous revenues.

Ms. Burns replied that it could be revenue without a specific location, interest from investments, reimbursements, or a one-time revenue source.

Ms. Breidenstein added that the Rents and Royalites went to that category as there was no other place for them. She said the interest was the largest for the General fund.

Commissioner Springfield reminded everyone that annually the ad valorem taxes were approximately 50% business and 50% residents.

Ms. Breidenstein commented that the residents' percentage was slightly higher and could be provided if requested.

Commissioner Blonder asked if Public Safety was paid by property taxes.

Ms. Breidenstein replied in the affirmative. She said it was except for the Fire Assessment fee and that it would be reevaluated professionally. She said the Police Department and Code Enforcement were paid by property taxes.

Commissioner Blonder praised the City Fire Department for having a high-class rating.

Commissioner Garris asked if the expenditures for the Fire and Police Department included raises.

Ms. Breidenstein said the increases were for all City employees, which was 2.5% general wage increase plus \$.50 an hour, and a merit increase up to 2%, resulting in an increase of up to 6%.

Commissioner Garris said she wanted the City to be comparable with the County to help the City keep valuable employees.

Ms. Breidenstein advised the County had proposed pay increases at 7%, and the City was at 6%; however, there were other things the City contributed to employees that increased the benefits. She said they felt the City was comparable with St. Johns County Sheriff's Department as well as the Fire Department.

Commissioner Springfield commented that as a Florida Retirement System retiree and a former City Firefighter's Pension Fund Board member, he felt the City had a better retirement plan than the County.

Commissioner Garris said the County allowed their police officers to take vehicles home. She asked if the City charged officers for taking their vehicles home, as she had been informed the County did not.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that there was a charge if the officers lived outside City limits, for repairs, maintenance, and fuel biweekly. Commissioner Blonder expressed concern that Public Safety could be affected if property taxes were eliminated.

Ms. Breidenstein reviewed the proposed FY 2026 General Fund expenditures as there were several columns notating the budget. She said the revised budget column included any grants, enumerate, or any funds rolled over from the previous year but was not yet completed, and that was the reason for the difference in original and revised budget.

Ms. Burns advised there was an increase in the Commission budget for Compassionate Village, a new contribution to Port in the Storm, Home Again St. Johns, and others. She noted the decrease to the City Managers budget, which was moved to the City Commissions Budget as a contribution.

Mayor Sikes-Kline pointed out that the City had a contract with the St. Johns County Sheriff's Office for the past three years for dispatch service and the cost was \$985,000, which was a substantial amount.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that was correct. She said yearly, the Sheriff's department provided the previous year's actual expenditure for the communication and dispatch department; they provide the call volume percentage for the City compared to calls received in total and that percentage against their actual expenditure was how the cost was determined.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said she was not questioning the service as it was very valuable. She said after reviewing some other percentages, mobility had increased but that was due to the South Dixie Sidewalk project being incorporated into this fiscal year. She said many residents would be very pleased.

Commissioner DePreter asked for clarification on the Police Department budget.

Ms. Breidenstein replied the budget was strictly for the City Police Department, not including salaries, for the contract with the Sheriff's Department for dispatch service and their operation budget.

Commissioner Blonder said regarding the transit lane on San Marco Avenue, how much did each parking meter in the City make in terms of revenue. She said there was free parking on San Marco Avenue, as she felt that could be metered parking and was a missed opportunity.

Reuben Franklin, Assistant City Manager, replied that every metered parking space was different depending on location and turnover. He said this stretch of San Marco Avenue was designed for two-hour parking and it was not paid to park. He said enforcing a time limit in this area was difficult.

Commissioner Springfield commented that all City residents paid County tax including the Sheriff. He said the City residents were already paying for dispatch services. He asked if that had been considered.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that it had been discussed.

Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney, agreed that it was discussed, but it had not been discussed any further.

Commissioner Springfield said the City and County had a great relationship but did not agree that the City residents should have to pay twice.

Commissioner Garris questioned why dispatch was eliminated.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that the reason it was eliminated was it became very difficult to fill the position, and the County helped supplement the City to make sure the City was fully staffed. She said many upgrades were needed to the dispatch center; however, the main reason was staffing.

Ms. Lopez commented there was a change in legislation due to a tragic event that took place in Florida, which resulted in a unified dispatch.

Commissioner Springfield recommended touring the dispatch facility. He said this type of job was extremely difficult and the Sheriff's department was working with St. Augustine High School on an Academy offering high paying salaries to high school graduates if able to complete the program. He said about one in ten that began training successfully complete it.

Mayor Sikes-Kline agreed that it would take a unique individual to be in that type of career, as it was a challenging job.

Ms. Breidenstein said the feedback received was that it worked well for the officers and it was beneficial for staff responding. She said if that changed, they could review other options.

Commissioner Blonder said in relation to the Nights of Lights (NOL) and the Board of County Commissioners workshop that took place yesterday, a detailed lined item from the City was requested for them to approve the funds as recommended by the Tourist Development Council (TDC). She asked if that request was being responded to, and if it was, could it be provided to the Commission, as well as the taxpayers, for them to know exactly where the funds were being spent and what the City contributed yearly, who shouldered much of the financial burden.

Mr. Birchim replied in the affirmative that they were planning to provide as many details as possible including all the contracts for lighting, shuttles, restrooms, including overtime details, and other items will be provided in time for the regular County meeting on Tuesday.

Commissioner Blonder confirmed that the expenses that came directly from the City's budget would be included.

Ms. Breidenstein said the budget included the previous year's commitment for NOL and the additional \$125,000 for the Sheriff's office resources. She said it included what the City had paid for shuttling in the past but

it did not incorporate the additional service request made to the TDC, which included the additional shuttling service, restrooms, barricades; however, there was a line item to purchase the barricades instead of renting them as the purchase of those would be used for more events other than NOL.

Commissioner Blonder questioned what would be missing from the City's budget if those funds were not provided to the City from the County.

Mr. Birchim said a report would be provided to the Commission if the funds from the County were not provided. He said they would identify the amount of funds available and the logical use for the funds.

Commissioner Springfield felt it was well noted that these funds were not from the County but funding from taxes charged to tourist that stayed in St. Augustine, and the City received \$200,000 yearly for NOL but contributed millions of dollars into the TDC funds. He said the request was reasonable. He said the St. Augustine Amphitheatre saw around 225,000 guest a year and received nearly three million dollars from the TDC, compared to the City who had close to 20,000 people daily.

Commissioner Blonder reiterated that the revenue from the municipal parking garage was allocated and no profit was made.

Ms. Breidenstein agreed and said that the income from the parking garage was used for salaries, operations, repair and maintenance, a sinking fund for repair and maintenance, and transfers for historic preservation and mobility. She said mobility was where the money came from for shuttles. She said the garage was now able to make enough revenue to where it was able to pay for those items mentioned and able to pay for the items identified by the Commission that visitors came to the City to see. She said that was more detailed in the Visitors Information Center (VIC) budget.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said there had been questions from residents regarding excess funds from the VIC and the parking garage. She said she explained, as a policy, the City businesses, taxpayers, and residents all carried a cost for tourism. She said there was no way to have a direct benefit from tourists other than the money from the garage and those revenues were being used for what was important to the residents or what had been the "core values", which was historic preservation, archeology, and mobility.

Commissioner Blonder felt those resources were not only important to residents, but also important to the tourists and part of their reason for visiting.

Commissioner DePreter thanked Ms. Breidenstein and Ms. Burns for their hard work. He said resiliency was one of his major priorities. He noted under the "Resiliency Objective" where ditch and culvert maintenance and improvement were identified, he suggested adding and identifying where many natural ditches and culverts were located.

At the request of Mayor Sikes-Kline, Ms. Breidenstein said the Middleton House would be added under the arts, education and community objective. She said that project was ongoing and under design. She said the proceeds from the sale of the property on Dolphin Drive were being used as much as possible. She stated they hoped to align the timing for construction with the new Fire Department in order to borrow all funds needed at one time.

Commissioner Blonder questioned the I&I elimination program

Stephen Slaughter, Utilities & Public Works Director, explained that this was the Infiltration and Inflow (I&I) Elimination Program. He said this was a term used in Gravity Sanitary Sewer Collection. He said the Wastewater Treatment Plant, lift stations, gravity mains, and force mains

were designed to carry a specific amount of flow and if that were increased through wet weather events, infiltration, or direct connections with down spouts connected to the gravity sewer caused sanitary sewer overflow. He said a certain amount of funds were being set aside yearly to help eliminate this and there have been improvements in this area.

Commissioner Springfield questioned the ridership on the STAR Circulator as he noticed it was small. He said he did not want the public to think the City would keep funding it after the end of the five years. He said he wanted to know what was being done to improve the service and what could be done if the City were to take over after five years for it to be more effective.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said she wanted to add on to what Commissioner DePreter had said regarding the ditches and culverts. She said the beautification should be included as it was not just about clearing. She added she was pleased with the amount of funds allocated for paving. She said she did not feel that the paving plan had ever been funded to this amount, and it impacted the residents' daily lives, just like solid waste workers were working with the residents two or three times a week minimum. She said they were the face of the City the same as our streets. She noted the Commission added a historic preservation fund as a policy and it was identified as a sinking fund. She asked for the policy to be developed and advised she was committed to working on it in the coming year, as she wanted it developed for future generations.

Commissioner Springfield asked if funds were added for the United States 250th year Anniversary Celebration.

Melissa Wissel, Communications Director, informed the Commission that some funding had been embedded in the budget for the celebration, and they were collaborating during the History Festival, which was held in May and the Summer

Concert series in the Plaza would be more Americana type celebratory music. She said they were also working with other organizations in the community.

Commissioner DePreter said he wanted to maximize drainage with an emphasis dedicated to staying as natural as possible. He said there was not a lot of lighting at Plantation Island Drive and Mizell Road, which caused confusion; however, he understood Florida Power and Light were moving ahead with that project. He wanted to review the landscaping at the coquina life station in South Davis Shores, as he felt it needed to be addressed. He supported the Red Cox Park playground improvement.

Ms. Breidenstein confirmed that the Red Cox Park improvement was on the list for safety and renewal. She added that the lift station was in the grounds budget.

Commissioner Blonder asked for the crosswalk signs to be updated as many had been rubbed off and could be confusing for visitors. She said the Florida League of Cities had an option to add the property tax education tool kit that could be included on the website, which could be a very helpful tool for residents.

Mr. Birchim commented that it was being added.

Mayor Sikes-Kline stated when she attended the conference, they were offering data personalized for the City that could be added to the tool kit and that it would be built for the City, although that would take time.

Commissioner Springfield said three years ago when he was running for office, the common concern was the homeless, and now it was much less with the collaboration of the Police Department by modifying some positions and supporting some of the organization as outlined in the budget, and it had made a difference. He said Compassionate St. Augustine, had been a contributor to the Commission meetings

and he felt that it was beautiful. He said the new organization that they were trying to help fund was related to the elderly. He asked for development of a City Government 101 to be added to the website to help citizens who had questions as the City was different from the County. He said the training program was very successful and it taught people a lot about the government, but he felt a brochure could be a great addition.

Commissioner Garris said the homeless population was very important. She said she wanted the Dignity Bus to be considered as it could be used if the homeless population increased. She said the bus would have twenty beds, and since there as a decrease in the number of beds at St. Francis house, she suggested moving forward with this bus in the spring if there seemed to be a rise in numbers. She said this may help put the City in a better position for the homeless population.

Ms. Breidenstein clarified if she wanted to have this added to FY 2027 budget.

Commissioner Garris replied in the affirmative.

Ms. Breidenstein informed the Commission that the Public Works Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was included but was for information only unless there were questions.

Commissioner DePreter said it was very informative and a great reference.

Ms. Breidenstein added the CIP was part of the budget and it would be approved at the time of the budget hearings.

Commissioner Blonder advised that these documents were available online if any members of the public wanted to access them.

3.A Public Comment

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

- BJ Kalaidi
- Gina Burrell

Public comment was closed.

4.ITEMS BY MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Blonder replied to a comment made by Gina Burrell, and said a study was completed by the University of Florida in the Lighthouse Park area and Flagler College had several professors working with students to assess the water quality in parts of the City, particularly looking for septic tank leakage into the waterways.

At the request of Commissioner Blonder, Ms. Beach said City had grant funding for an Adaptation Plan, which was the second part to the Vulnerability Assessment that was completed last year. She said with this plan, they went through a rigorous exercise reviewing the critical assets and infrastructure and those were prioritized by flooding risk. She said a Preliminary Adaptation Plan in the Vulnerability Assessment were more of the CIP type projects that could be funded by the State for implantation. She said now the Adaptation Plan was the more robust version of the Preliminary Plan that they would be looking at to meet the requirements of the state. She said funding was available in the next year.

Commissioner Blonder asked how that was incorporated with the Army Corp of Engineers Back Bay Study.

Ms. Beach replied that there were many studies taking place and the Back Bay study was running parallel to many of the projects. She said the Adaptation Plan had projects that the City was able to implement and then

the Army Corp of Engineers was City wide and more comprehensive. She said a lot of the data from the Vulnerability Study was being used by the Army Corp of Engineers.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked if the area around Fort Mose had been looked at. She said residents have conveyed they were experiencing red water and issues with drainage.

Ms. Beach said it was in the Vulnerability Assessment but City wide, it was at a lower risk of flooding than other parts of the City; however, it did not mean it was not at risk from flooding from rainwater. She said that area was included in the CIP.

Mayor Sikes-Kline thanked the staff for their hard work and appreciated the comments from the Commissioners. She said when she was campaigning for Mayor, resiliency was in the forefront, and she thanked Vice-Mayor Blonder for being an advocate and leading the way as it was a very important issue and it affected the daily lives of everyone. She thanked each Commissioner for supporting their cause and moving them forward.

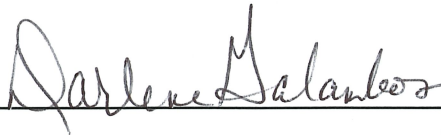
Mayor Sikes-Kline thanked BJ Kalaidi for attending the County Nights of Lights Workshop. She said she had not heard any opposition from the community about spending money for NOL. She appreciated the efforts of staff, and they were continuing to work as hard as they could to move this forward.

5. Adjournment

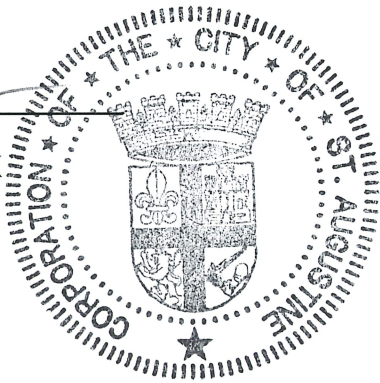
There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:27 A.M.¹



Nancy Sikes-Kline, MAYOR



Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK



¹ Transcribed by Elyse Wiemann