CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Meeting
Thursday, September 25, 2025

The City Commission met in formal session on Thursday September 25, 2025, at 5:05 P.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
Barbara Blonder, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner
Cynthia Garris, City Commissioner
Jim Springfield, City Commissioner
Jon DePreter, City Commissioner

Also Present: David Birchim, City Manager
J.P. Steinmetz, City of St. Augustine Outside Council
Darlene Galambos, City Clerk
Meredith Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager
Reuben Franklin, Assistant City Manager
Stephen Slaughter, Director, Public Works & Utilities
Melissa Burns, Director, Finance
Jennifer Michaux, Police Chief, City of St Augustine
Elyse Wiemann, Senior Recording Secretary

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2. General Public Comments

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

- County Commissioner Ann Taylor
- Vicki Pepper

Commissioner Blonder asked about the informal meeting mentioned by County Commissioner Ann Taylor, and if the City would be able to participate.

J.P Steinmetz, Outside Council, replied that without a publicly noticed meeting and this being outside the jurisdiction of the City, a Resolution would be needed.

Commissioner Blonder commented that this was the same as previously stated by Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney.

Mr. Steinmetz said he did not recommend that the Commission participate; however, advise that City staff could attend and participate.

3. PUBLIC HEARING FOR RESOLUTIONS

3.A.Utilities Rate Adjustments for Fiscal Year 2026 Budget (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns Finance Director reviewed Resolution 2025-37.

Mayor Sikes-Kline confirmed that this resolution would reduce the outside City limits survharge rate to 12% and asked how long had the City been reducing the rate.

Ms. Burns replied that it had been at 25% and had been reduced over the past ten years.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said now that was rate was half as much as it was when it first began and she encouraged the Commission to continue that commitment. She said she hoped that in the future the rate would be at zero, even though that could be unrealistic, she was in support of reducing the surcharge.

Public hearing was open; however, there was no response.

MOTION

Mayor Sikes-Kline MOVED to PASS Resolution 2025-37.The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Blonder.

<u>VOTE ON MOTION:</u>
AYES: Sikes-Kline, Blonder, DePreter, Garris, Springfield
NAYES:NONE
MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

3.B. Stormwater Rate Adjustment for Fiscal Year 2026 Budget (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns Finance Director reviewed Resolution 2025- 38.

Public hearing was open; however, there was no response.

MOTION

Commissioner DePreter MOVED to PASS Resolution 2025-38.The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Springfield.

Commissioner Garris asked what the cost increase was.

Ms. Burns replied that the total increase was thirty-four cents.

<u>VOTE ON MOTION:</u>
AYES: DePreter, Springfield, Garris, Blonder, Sikes-Kline
NAYES:NONE
MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

3.C. Solid Waste Rate Adjustments for Fiscal Year 2026 Budget (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns Finance Director reviewed Resolution 2025-39.

Public hearing was open; however, there was no response.

Commissioner Blonder clarified that the solid waste fees were increasing by the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

MOTION

Commissioner Blonder MOVED to PASS Resolution 2025-39. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner DePreter.

<u>VOTE ON MOTION:</u>
AYES: Blonder, DePreter, Garris, Springfield,
NAYES:NONE
MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

3.D. Adopting the Final Millage Rate for Fiscal Year 2025-2026 (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns Finance Director reviewed Resolution 2025-33.

Public hearing was open; however, there was no response.

Commissioner Springfield said he was sympathetic and understood the concerns of the increase; however, the City provided the best public services and those professionals deserved to be paid a respectable amount. He felt the rate should remain at 7.5 mills in order to sustain the salaries for those important positions. He said the City had a difficult time hiring for the Solid Waste Department and felt jobs had to be attractive to people to keep good employees, because those were not easy jobs. He said once a millage rate was lowered it was almost impossible to raise and the commission had committed to use the extra funds for the environment and conservation, which was a good investment for the community. He was in support of keeping the millage at the rate it was.

Commissioner Blonder was in support of the millage and understood that would keep the taxes at a higher rate; however, she knew that the level of services provided were at a higher level and the FEMA rating had improved, which provided a major discount on their flood insurance rates. She said the City obtained a lot of grant funding because of the skills and hard work that staff provided She said the City tried to offset the cost by keeping the high level of service in the City and the budget was as conservative and reasonable as possible.

Commissioner Garris explained that she understood the residents' concerns, and she was sympathetic; however, public safety was the highest priority. She said there was a fine line when trying to make decisions.

Commissioner DePreter agreed public safety was a priority and the money used for conservation land would be beneficial long term. He said on average the increase was not as much as expected, and by keeping the millage rate the same, it made it easier for the City to plan, invest, and keep things steady. He said he supported the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and noted it was available for review online.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said the millage was not increasing; however, the taxes were increased. She said the last meeting was interesting as there were many residents who attended and provided input. She said if residents had questions regarding their taxes, property value, or in general, they should educate themselves by contacting the different departments and officials as most were very willing to help explain and discuss different strategies.

MOTION

Commissioner Springfield MOVED to PASS Resolution 2025-33. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner DePreter.

J.P. Steinmetz, Outside Council, read the Resolution.

RESOLUTION 2025-33

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA ADOPTING THE FINAL LEVY OF AD VALOREM TAXES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-2026.

WHEREAS, the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine, Florida has conducted a public hearing on its final millage rate of 7.5000 mills and has determined its rolled back rate is 7.3513 mills as required by Florida Statute 200.065;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine, Florida that:

The Fiscal Year 2025-2026 final millage rate of the City of St. Augustine, Florida is 7.5000 mills which represents an increase in the rolled-back rate of 7.3513 mills of 2.02 percent.

ADOPTED at a special meeting of the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine, Florida commenced at 5:05 p.m. this 25th day of September 2025.

<u>VOTE ON MOTION:</u>
AYES: Springfield, DePreter, Garris, Blonder, Sikes-Kline
NAYES:NONE
MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

4. PUBLIC HEARING-SECOND READING

4.A. Adopting Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year Beginning October 1, 2025, and Ending September 30, 2026, and five-year Capital Improvement Plan (M. Burns, Finance Director)

Melissa Burns, Finance Director, reviewed Ordinance 2025-29.

Public hearing was opened; however, there was no response.

Commissioner DePreter stated the budget was laid out well and he was in support of the budget and the CIP.

Commissioner Springfield complemented the City Manager, David Birchim, for taking a stance on no additional staff as that was where most of the funds were spent along with the CIP. He said that was a good move and encouraged the commission to support that decision and the budget.

Commissioner Garris said the budget had been discussed multiple times, and a lot of the concerns that were important to the commission had been addressed. She said the budget contained many ways to help the homeless population in the City and the Drop-in Day Center was completed, which would be a huge benefit to the community. She thanked the commission for being supportive of West Augustine and she was excited for the changes coming to that side of US1. She noted that County Commissioner Ann Taylor was present and asked staff to attend the meeting she proposed and requested there to be a discussion after the special agenda was completed.
Mayor Sikes-Kline agreed and said it could be discussed after the fiscal business was concluded.

Commissioner Blonder thanked staff for the budget presented. She said when it came to unsheltered individuals, historic preservation, and conservation, the City had developed many programs that made her proud. She reminded everyone that half a million dollars were being used to fund Nights of Lights (NOL) which was 37% of the budget and there was still a $58,000 short fall that would come from the general funds. She was in favor of the budget and appreciated the hard work that had been put into it.

Mayor Sikes-Kline explained that the budget and CIP expressed the values of the City and what the residents care most about. She said she was very proud of the work being done to keep the roll back rate. She said with what was happening in Tallahassee, it was important to show the public why property taxes were important and how ad valorum taxes were vital to the operation of the City. She thanked Ms. Burns for her hard work and providing a balanced budget.

MOTION

Mayor Sikes-Kline MOVED to PASS Ordinance 2025-29. The motion was SECONDED by Commissioner Springfield.

J.P. Steinmetz, Outside Council for the City of St. Augustine, read the Ordinance.

ORDINANCE NO. 2025-29

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA, RATIFYING, APPROVING AND ADOPTING THE ANNUAL BUDGET OR BUDGET ESTIMATES OF REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES FOR THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA, FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025, AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2026; PROVIDING FOR REPEAL OF ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; PROVIDING FOR SEVERANCE OF INVALID PROVISIONS; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The annual budget estimates of revenues and expenditures of the City of St. Augustine, Florida for the Fiscal Year 2025-2026, as prepared, amended and submitted to the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine, Florida by the City Manager, as considered and acted upon by said City Commission, under and by authority of the Charter of said City and the Laws of Florida, are hereby ratified, approved and adopted by the City Commission of said City, and the amounts of money set forth therein are hereby appropriated.

Section 2. The said budget of revenues and expenditures adopted for the ensuing Fiscal Year 2025-2026 shall be spread in full upon the minutes of the City Commission.

Section 3. The appropriations within an activity or sub-activity for Fiscal Year 2024-2025 and Fiscal Year 2025-2026 may be transferred within by the City Manager for the purpose of equalization, when necessary.

Section 4. All funds for the current Fiscal Year 2024-2025 and budgeted Fiscal Year 2025-2026 may over-expend adopted budgets to the extent that actual revenues exceed the adopted budget.

Section 5. All unencumbered appropriations, except for special projects or commitments, be and are canceled as of September 30, 2025, and the City Director of Finance is directed to transfer all appropriation credit balances to unappropriated surplus and place to the credit of all appropriation accounts which show a debit balance for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025 an amount from unappropriated surplus to balance same and to close all such accounts for the Fiscal Year 2024-2025.

Section 6. If any provisions of this Ordinance, or the application thereof to any person or circumstances, are held invalid, such invalidity shall not affect other provisions or applications of the Ordinances which can be given effect without this invalid provision or application, and to this end the provisions of this Ordinance are declared to be severable.

Section 7. All ordinances or parts of ordinances in conflict herewith are hereby repealed.

Section 8. This ordinance shall become effective upon passage.

PASSED by the City Commission of the City of St. Augustine, Florida, in special session, at 5:05 p.m., this 25th day of September 2025.

<u>VOTE ON MOTION:</u>
AYES: Sikes-Kline, Springfield, DePreter, Garris, Blonder
NAYES:NONE
MOTION APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY

Mayor Sikes-Kline said there was a request for special consideration to discuss the creation of a committee by a County Commissioner. She said she was not completely clear on that and asked Mr. Birchim for more information.

Mr. Birchim replied that he had not spoken to the County Commissioner about the meeting but the City could send subject matter experts from different departments to the meeting to help answer any questions that may arise regarding Nights of Lights (NOL).

Mayor Sikes-Kline reiterated that she was unclear the purpose of the meeting and if it was a Sunshine meeting and advertised. She said she did not know the goal or the intended outcome of the meeting. She said the Commission was unable to attend the meeting unless it was advertised as a joint meeting with a resolution allowing them to meet outside of the City limits, and if those guidelines were met a liaison could be appointed; however, that was not the case at this time. She said if the goal was to make NOL better, she could support having City staff attend the special meeting as requested by County Commissioner Ann Taylor.

Commissioner Springfield said that NOL had been going on for the past thirty-one years and last year was a surprise with the influx of visitors. He said the City did not promote NOL other than dates and parking. He said the City did not profit from the event and the money given to the City was from the state and based on City population. He stated the hotel tax went to the County, and all citizens paid county taxes and supported the Sherrif and Fire Departments, which the City had a great relationship and collaborated well. He said it was much appreciated but those services were paid for by City taxpayers also. He said there were multiple public meetings that were well attended and advertised regarding NOL since last March. He said meetings with business owners had taken place and the City understood the value of NOL to employees and businesses. He said NOL was only shortened by one week because the resident's needed relief. He said the County wanted to be involved after one difficult year; however, the City Manager had established a great plan and had included the St. Johns County Sheriff, St. Augustine Police, and City Fire Departments and anyone else to participate. He felt it was late to discuss this year since plans were in place and plans were already adjusted due to lack of funding. He said he was happy with the plan in place and did not believe the meeting should be attended. He said if a committee were formed it should wait until after this year as changes had been made in accordance with the feedback from residents, businesses, and the County funding.

Commissioner Garris explained that she understood the meeting would include City staff and not elected officials. She said this year the City asked the County for $850,000 and in years prior that had never been done. She said this was more of a consideration to gather more information and she felt the County was allowing the City to handle NOL since it was within the City limits. She suggested asking business owners to sponsor different locations for NOL, which could help offset the financial burden and it could be more of a joint effort. She said there was no way to know how many people would come during the season until it happened. She said out of courtesy, the City should have staff attend the meeting that was requested.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked Commissioner Garris if she knew the purpose of the task force and the goals.

Commissioner Garris replied she had one meeting regarding a task force, but this was to be more of a brainstorming meeting about NOL.

Commissioner DePreter felt the decision should be left to the City Manager if City staff should attend the meeting. He agreed that for this NOL season, it was too late. He said this was more of a planning event and not a political event. He said last year was difficult, and he felt that making a good decision without the proper information would be to make a cautious planning decision. He said his ultimate goal was to follow through with the plan and review the outcome. He asked if the plan for NOL was solidified.

Mr. Birchim confirmed the plan was solidified and in motion. He said this NOL season was already underway.

Commissioner DePreter felt there was a tremendous amount of speculation and what mattered was how the plan was implemented and how effective it was. He thanked the County for the financial contribution and felt they should have a financial stake in NOL. He reiterated that the event should take place as it was and have a post-season analysis to see what worked and what did not. He said he was looking at this from a business standpoint, and the goal was public safety, reduce traffic congestion, and pay for the event responsibly.

Commissioner Blonder explained they were trying to establish a balance between livability and hosting a fifty-eight-day event. She said the cost was astronomical at almost half a million dollars and she was frustrated because so much time had been spent on developing and presenting the plan that was outstanding in response to the influx of visitors last year. She said the plan was in place and moving forward. She said there were many meetings regarding NOL allowing residents, business owners, and anyone else who wanted to provide input to come and participate. She said that was considered and decisions were made.

Commission Springfield clarified he thought the City Commission should not attend the meeting, but City staff should attend primarily answer questions and correct any inaccurate information.

Mayor Sikes-Kline stated that staff's time was very valuable, and they had done an amazing job of being available, speaking to the media repeatedly, and continuing to develop a great plan. She said the county, after receiving a unanimous request from the Tourist Development Council (TDC) to increase the funds for NOL, the County listened to that recommendation and voted to add $850,000 in addition to $600,000. She said contracts were signed and NOL was well underway. She said even though she was frustrated there was nothing wrong with reviewing the plan if the goal would have a positive impact, she would be in favor of the meeting.

Commissioner DePreter felt it should be left to staff to answer questions as it was too late to make changes.

There was consensus to have the City Manager, David Birchim, select City Staff to attend the meeting.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:11 P.M.[1]

Nancy Sikes-Kline, MAYOR

Darlene Galambos

Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK

CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

[1] Transcribed by Elyse Wiemann