

## CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Meeting  
Monday, February 23, 2026

The City Commission met in formal session on Monday, February 23, 2026, at 3:30 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  
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  
Jaime D. Perkins, Director, Community Services  
Melissa Burns, Director, Finance  
Jon Marston, Police Chief  
Carlos Aviles, Fire Chief  
Elyse Wiemann, Senior Recording Secretary

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### **2. PUBLIC COMMENTS FOR GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENTS (3 MINUTES PER INDIVIDUAL)**

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

- Susan Gregory
- Roger White
- Devona Bell
- Vicki Pepper
- Jeffrey Levowitz

### **3. PROPERTY TAX REFORM PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

**3.A. Property Tax Reform Presentation and Discussion (M. Breidenstein, Assistant City Manager and M. Burns, Finance Director)**

Meredith Breidenstein, Assistance City Manager, provided a brief overview of the potential property tax reform bills and the different outcomes regarding how the City could be affected.

Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline commented that HJR203 was the one that passed in the House of Representatives; however, there was no matching bill yet from the Senate.

Commissioner Jim Springfield clarified that if \$7.8 million dollars were to be eliminated, police nor fire could be altered, which was 58% of the General Fund revenues, leaving \$23 million to run the rest of the City. He said the estimated \$8 million would have to come out of that leaving an estimated \$15 million. He said that was a 60/40 decrease for streets, maintenance,

and anything else that was done in the City.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that some expenses were tied directly to certain revenues, such as parking revenues, which were specifically used for street paving, mobility and parking expenses. She said gas tax funds received from the state had to be used for street paving. She noted that not all of the general fund expenses were funded by ad valorem tax.

Mayor Sikes-Kline requested to understand how \$7.8 million would affect each homesteaded property.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that information could be provided by the tax collector; however, it would differ for each home as it was based on their assessed value.

Ms. Breidenstein said the departments that were exempt from budget reductions were Police and Fire, which both were funded by ad valorem taxes. She said the departments that would be affected if property taxes were eliminated would include:

- City Commission
- City Manager
- City Attorney
- Communications
- Human Resources & Risk Management
- Planning
- Finance & Accounting
- Information Technology
- General Services, Purchasing & Grants
- Historic Preservation to include Archeology
- Fleet Maintenance
- Public Works & Engineering
- Grounds
- Events & Galimore Center
- Community Services
- Facilities
- Property Services

Ms. Breidenstein said these were all fully or partially funded by ad valorem taxes. She said some departments had small fees that could be associated with them, but it did not fund the department.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked what services were included with community services.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that the community services department included the homeless outreach, mobility and parking, Galimore Center, events, and the Community Redevelopment Area; however, those were a separate fund.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked what services were associated with the planning and building department.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that under planning and building department, code enforcement was included but funded by building permits, and vacation rentals permits. She said other services in the planning department included:

- Business licenses
- Building permits
- Subdividing land
- Planning and Zoning Board (PZB)
- Historical Architectural Review Board (HARB)
- All Land Development Regulations
- Zoning
- Code Enforcement

Commissioner Barbara Blonder said that each department was very important to the City, such as Information Technology (IT), which protected the City's data, also, there were many complaints when the grounds were not kept and that department was important to keep the area nice. She said each department had a critical function, which was important to the City.

Ms. Breidenstein commented that each department helped support the other, including the Police and Fire Departments.

Ms. Breidenstein explained that there were some departments not funded by property taxes as they were funded by other revenue sources, which were:

- Building Permits & Inspections
- Streets
- Mobility
- Parking
- Customer Service

Ms. Breidenstein explained that the total number of employees that were fully or partially funded by ad valorem tax was about 118 in total. She said the potential \$7.8 million loss would result in 73 out of the 118 positions being eliminated.

Mayor Sikes-Kline clarified that 73 positions would be reduced, out of the 118 that were currently held.

Ms. Breidenstein replied in the affirmative. She said if the full reduction was people; however, there were some contractual services but the majority of the budget, over 50%, was people.

Mayor Sikes-Kline commented that would leave 45 employees.

Ms. Breidenstein replied that would be what was left in those listed departments.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked how many employees were associated with Police and Fire.

Ms. Breidenstein replied for both departments, there was a total of 107 employees.

Commissioner Blonder stated that if the workforce was reduced to 45 employees, the wait times for services would increase significantly.

Ms. Breidenstein clarified that there were several City programs that would not be impacted as they were not funded by ad valorem tax or any taxes, which were:

- Water, Wastewater and Stormwater Utilities
- Garbage and Recycling
- Municipal Marina
- Visitors Information Center(VIC)
- VIC Parking Garage

Ms. Breidenstein pointed out that all these services were supported by the other City departments.

Commissioner Jon DePreter asked if taxes could be raised by the City on homesteaded properties and commercial properties.

David Birchim, City Manager, pointed out that the millage rate could be increased, affecting the commercial properties and non-homesteaded properties.

Commissioner DePreter said the City was unique with over 7 million visitors annually, and that was where some of the City budget was used. He asked if other options were a possibility.

Mr. Birchim replied that there had been discussions to approach the legislature to have a food and beverage tax like Miami-Dade County, but for that to be enacted it would have to be approved by the state.

Commissioner DePreter asked if there had been a 55% increase in the City's revenue since 2019.

Ms. Breidenstein stated that since 2022 the general fund had increased 22% over the past five years, from \$36 million to \$51 million. She said the millage rate had not been increased.

Mr. Birchim commented that it included the increase in development and new homes.

Commissioner Springfield asked for verification regarding what had been said by various speakers in public comments. He said most of the taxes did not come from residential, and homestead

exemptions were not lost if moving or downsizing. He said the inequality of property taxes was not something the City had authority over unless it was specifically the millage rate. He said the value of your home was what governed the amount of property taxes paid, and if the property value increased more than 5% the homeowner would receive a 3% increase, which was a protection of homesteaded properties. He agreed that no one liked taxes but that was how government functioned. He said that this type of cut would hurt some of the services offered. He stated he hoped there could be an alternative funding source or make extremely selective cuts that would not affect the services. He said the best solution, although controversial, was to eliminate police or fire and consolidated those services with St. Johns County. He said those services were already being paid for through the County. He said if the City needed to cut a majority, those services could be consolidated.

Commissioner Cynthia Garris pointed out that Fire nor Police was able to be affected, therefore, no cuts would be made in those departments. She said there were several citizens that had come before them concerned with the millage and she understood how elimination of property taxes would seem beneficial for citizens. She said no one wanted to hear about job cuts or the City services being affected but knew that something that would affect property taxes was coming as the legislature was pushing hard for it. She said the City should consider obtaining more State funding but if that was not an option, there may be an option for state taxes to help the City, which would not only tax citizens but visitors alike.

Commissioner Blonder commented that there were inequities all over from the City, schools, and throughout the Country. She said one way to address those inequities in communities that needed them the most was through the CRA and reducing that

budget by 5% would cripple them. She said she was fearful that these could be eliminated.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked how this could affect the City's ability to bond or how it could affect the City's debt. She said a new bond would be needed for the new fire station on Anastasia Island.

Ms. Breidenstein said the current debt was secure by all non-ad valorem revenues and if there was a need for a bond to be secured by ad valorem revenues, it would have to be on the ballot. She said the concern was not only being able to secure the bond but being able to make payments.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said that one program that was essential was the septic to sewer program in West Augustine and asked if that would be affected.

Mr. Birchim advised that the state had been assisting with that annually, along with utility fees generated by customers. He said he did not feel that program specifically would be affected but other areas of the organization that support the utilities department could be impacted.

Mayor Sikes-Kline commented that Nights of Lights was advertised through the Visitors & Convention Bureau (VCB) and the City did not have any control over who came; however, there was an obligation to care for those guests when they were in the City, which came with a tremendous amount of expense. She said the bed tax provided to the City still did not encompass the total cost resulting in the City being more in debt.

Ms. Breidenstein stated the there was a total of \$350,000 from the general fund that was not reimbursable by tourism development dollars.

Mr. Birchim commented that NoL cost around \$1.2 million and customarily, the City received annually \$200,000 in bed tax.

He said the City would be asking for more funds to help supplement the upcoming NoL season. He said if those revenues were not received the money would have to come from other areas.

Mayor Sikes-Kline noted that nothing impacted the City's residents more than tourism.

Mr. Birchim replied in the affirmative.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said her understanding was in this bill HJR203 were passed, this would affect the budget in 2028.

Mr. Birchim replied that it would not go into effect until 2027, and the follow fiscal year would be when it was implemented. He said the house bill had been introduced and passed; however, there was no companion senate bill at this time.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said the governor had expressed his desire for this to take place. She expressed that the City would do its best moving forward; however, felt there were more questions than answers at this time. She said when it came to generating revenue, there were few things that could be done to increase revenue. She said the millage rate could be increased but the majority of sales tax would go to the County. She noted the county would have similar issues. She asked what ways were the City could raise revenue.

Mr. Birchim replied that the fees collected were tied to the services provided, and the fees associated could not be excessive or used for other services. He said all departments were intertwined and everyone worked together.

Ms. Breidenstein said the yearly budget meeting identified the revenues and noted the fire assessment fee, was being reviewed and any user fee as long as it was covering the cost of the program it would be assessed. She said there were some opportunities; however, there was a

not a direct tie that was not associated with revenues.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said moving forward when this happened, it would be a combination of income increases and cuts.

Ms. Breidenstein said that sales tax was received throughout the country and a portion was given to the City based on population.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said the portion of sales tax was not tied to what was created but to the population, which was 16,400 in FY 2025.

#### 4. ITEMS BY MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS

#### 5. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:31P.M.<sup>1</sup>

  
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Nancy Sikes-Kline, MAYOR

  
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Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK

Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK



<sup>1</sup> Transcribed by Elyse Wiemann