

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Special Meeting
Monday, May 11, 2026

The City Commission met in formal session on Monday, May 11, 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
Melissa Burns, Director, Finance
Jon Marston, Police Chief, City Police Department
Elyse Wiemann, Senior Recording Secretary

2. General Public Comments

The Commissioners heard from the following members of the public:

- BJ Kalaidi

3. MID-YEAR BUDGET UPDATE

3.A. Mid-Year Budget Update (M. Burns, Director of Finance)

Melissa Burns, Finance Director, provided an update on the Mid-Year Budget for fiscal year (FY) 2026.

Commissioner Jim Springfield asked for further explanation on what Cultural and Recreation expenses were considered.

Ms. Burns replied that Recreation would include parks, park maintenance, and some events, and Culture included mostly events.

Commissioner Springfield said it seemed that West Augustine was overspending, but that was because the City provided startup capital and they would reimburse those funds.

Commissioner Barbara Blonder said she was pleased to see the expenses were below budget. She asked if there was a plan to help mitigate the rising cost of fuel.

Ms. Burns said fuel prices were being monitored closely.

Commissioner Blonder said she did not want services to be decreased due to escalating cost.

Commissioner Jon DePreter said he was pleased that the expenditure was lower than expected.

Mayor Sikes-Kline thanked Ms. Burns for the update. She said the budget was

moving in a positive direction as we move into the last half of the year.

4. STRATEGIC PLAN REVIEW AND DISCUSSION

4.A. Strategic Plan Review and Discussion (D. Birchim, City Manager)

David Birchim, City Manager, reviewed the Strategic Plan, and said it was the blueprint for the City's future and identified how resources were allocated to achieve the City's goals. He noted the themes of the Vision Plan were Livability, Authentic Character, Resiliency, and Vitality, and the plan contained eleven objectives to achieve the City's goals. He said this year the Strategic Plan had to be updated to reflect a new state law, which prohibited local governments from expending money on anything related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). He said he identified the DEI references that had to be removed and advised that if any other adjustments, additions or deletions were needed, it could be discussed. He said the updates would be presented in the summer.

Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline clarified that only the update would be the removal of DEI language.

Mr. Birchim replied that was correct as the Strategic Plan had been updated two years ago. He said the DEI language was throughout the plan, and those updates would be presented when updated. He said the update was to comply with state law.

Mayor Sikes-Kline questioned how the process would be implemented. She asked if the core value regarding DEI would be removed.

Mr. Birchim replied it would be removed. He said there was language in the plan that referenced 'diversity' that could be replaced with another that would not violate state law.

Commissioner DePreter asked if there were any financial impacts of removing the DEI language.

Mr. Birchim replied that there was not a financial impact, but the City did offer training for "Building Beloved Communities" that was centered on cultural education. He said that would no longer be available during annual training sessions. He said other than that, there was nothing directly tied to the budget other than the values throughout the Strategic Plan. He added that it was unfortunate that the language had to be removed and hoped one day it could be included again.

Commissioner Cynthia Garris asked if equality in the workplace was allowed.

Isabelle Lopez, City Attorney, replied that anything related to federal law was valid. She said what this removed was any DEI initiatives that were not required by federal law. She said discrimination based on race, gender, sex, religion etc., would remain; however, no official action could be taken in any form that would trigger the state definition of DEI, which was broad. She said the City would continue to comply with federal law.

Commissioner Garris asked if the classes offered by Pastor Marks, which aimed at bringing people of diverse backgrounds together, were considered DEI and would no longer be available, would employee who felt they were being discriminated against or had a complaint be addressed.

Ms. Lopez replied in the affirmative.

Commissioner Springfield felt this was another example of state overreach by not allowing money to be spent as the City saw fit. He said he took a lot of training through human resources, which helped teach about discrimination. He said he was disappointed this training would no longer be available as he thought it helped

employees understand the subtle ways discrimination could take place.

Ms. Lopez commented that it was implicit bias training that would not be allowed.

Commissioner Springfield added that he hoped these types of training would still be made available to those hiring new employees otherwise, he felt there would be an increase in lawsuits and an intrusion into the hiring process due to discrimination.

Commissioner Blonder said the following words would be eliminated:

- Diversity
- Equity
- Inclusion
- Climate Change

Commissioner Blonder was concerned about the overarching goals or objectives in the Strategic Plan being affected. She said not being able to adopt a 'net zero' initiative, which was sustainability. She felt there should be an increase to the Conservation Acquisition program, as it was one of the best ways to maintain resiliency and sustainability.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said she benefited personally and as an elected official from the diversity training she experienced. She said that training was life-changing, and she deeply regretted this would no longer be available. She understood the Plan had been updated recently, but after receiving feedback, she thought we had to be mindful of spending funds on Conservation Acquisitions and prioritize the spending of funds on additional drainage and stormwater within the City. She said it did not have to be added but it should be incorporated as an action item. She felt additional language should be added to the section on Education and Community, concerning the economic and cultural ties to Spain and our Sister City. She said under Partnerships Affordable Workforce Housing and Homelessness, as of now

nothing had taken place with affordable housing; however, felt the language should be kept. She stated there should be key performance indicators since the Drop-In Day Center was established and it was a major initiative for the City. She felt that there should be a goal specifically for that topic, as it would be an important component for resiliency, livability, and quality of life for the City as well as the economic vibrancy. She noted under 'Archeology Program and Historic Preservation' the building operation and maintenance of the new archeology center should be included.

Commissioner DePreter agreed that the language regarding resiliency and drainage needed to be added and the City's largest physical problem was mobility.

5. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATE

5. A. Capital Improvement Plan Update (S. Slaughter, Utilities and Public Works Director)

Stephen Slaughter, Utilities and Public Works Director, reviewed the Mid-Year Capital Improvement Plan for fiscal year 2025-2029. He provided details for each individual project, including the project status, construction cost, and the projected start and end dates.

Mayor Sikes-Kline questioned the coloring associated with the map for the Paving Management program.

Mr. Slaughter explained that each color was for a year the streets were planned for completion and the green on the map indicated the streets paved during FY2014-FY2023. He said this map was able to be viewed online and was interactive.

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked if there was an estimated cost for the Collier Heights lift station.

Mr. Slaughter replied that Lee and Ervin Street had a lift station and the for the expansion, the existing gravity sewer would be used; however, for the Collier Heights Gravity Sewer project, a new wastewater lift station would have to be purchased, which cost mover \$1million dollars for the station only, not including the other items that went with it.

Commissioner DePreter said he was pleased that Inlet Drive was close to completion and thanked them for the work on that project. He asked for further explanation on the South Davis Shores project to help tidal flooding.

Mr. Slaughter said the basins collected stormwater and those discharged to the river. He said at that point, the tidal was triggered. He said tide check valves, which would allow the rainfall driven water to flow to the river and during King Tides or Nor'easters, the vast majority of the water would not back up through the check valve and on to the street.

Commissioner DePreter asked if that was part of the general check valve system or was it separate.

Mr. Slaughter confirmed it was a separate project; however, similar techniques would be implemented. He said the culverts would need to be replaced.

Commissioner DePreter asked if there was a plan to help with the tidal flooding that could take place in the near future.

Ms. Slaughter said the City was always trying to improve the rainfall driven flooding and tidal flooding. He said other than what was included in the CIP, he did not have any other information available. He added that staff continuously looked for outfalls at a particular elevation that could be susceptible to tidal flooding. He stated the Poinciana Avenue Utility Improvements and the Sevilla Brick Roadway & Utility Improvements both had a stormwater aspect associated with it. He said many

projects were not focused on one singular utility.

Commissioner DePreter questioned the status of the Lighthouse Park project.

Mr. Slaughter stated that project was paused. He said the City had reached out to the neighborhood several years prior and had a meeting about introducing gravity sewer to the area; however, they received mixed feedback. He said staff looked for alternative solutions since, but those were not septic tanks nor gravity sewer. He said right now the neighborhood has a low-pressure sanitary sewer system and that was being built out as properties had failing septic tanks and wanted to switch to a pressure system.

Commissioner DePreter asked about the St. Johns River-to-Sea Loop.

Mr. Birchim replied that would not be included; however, he could provide details about the state project, but it was not in the City CIP and not funded by the City.

Commissioner Garris asked for clarity about the Lake Maria Sanchez project as it had been an ongoing project.

Mr. Slaughter said this project would be completed in two phases. He said the design for phase one was underway. He said the design improvements for King Street were being incorporated into this project to have them work better together. He said Phase 1 included Cordova, Granada, and Bridge Street stormwater improvements, and Phase 2 would include the pump station on the south end of Lake Maria Sanchez and the wall.

Commissioner Garris stated she was concerned about the sidewalks on South Whitney, Anderson Street, and South Dixie Highway. She asked what progress had been made for that to into construction.

Mr. Slaughter replied there were 29 more easements that had to be obtained.

Commissioner Garris said the septic to sewer program in West Augustine should be kept as there was a vast need for this service in the area.

Mr. Slaughter replied this program was in active operation.

Commissioner Blonder inquired about the Back Bay Feasibility Study and the cost benefit analysis.

Mr. Slaughter replied that there had been several reviewed designs and each had a benefit cost study and each design came back at less than one on the benefit cost, which meant no action would be taken based on the rules in place by the Army Corp of Engineers.

Commissioner Blonder felt the funds used on this project was money well spent. She said approximately \$52 million dollars plus was being spent or in the process of planning on being used for resiliency. She pointed out the vast majority of those funds were grants and not money from local taxpayers.

Mayor Sikes-Kline supported continuing the septic to sewer program as it was a crucial need in the community. She said not having septic tanks could help increase the number of affordable houses in West Augustine. She thanked Mr. Slaughter for the 136 connected to sewer with the improvements on Lee and Ervin Street. She mentioned that a bond for the Fire Department would be made in the future and suggested including the 1-million-dollar cost of the lift station needed for the Collier Heights project. She said there were two items that were not considered Utilities and Public Works but were a part of the CIP, which were the Drop-In Center Phase 2 and the Archeology Center.

Mr. Birchim replied those two items were not paid for by Utilities and Public Works.

Mayor Sikes-Kline stated that even though they were not paid for by the Utilities and

Public Works, they were included in Capital Improvement Plans that the City had. She said with that bond the City would obtain, she felt the Fire Station, Drop-In Center Phase 2, Archology Center, and the Collier Heights project could be included. She felt there was a need to be more aggressive since Affordable Housing was very important.

Mr. Birchim commented that when obtaining a bond, project funds could not be mixed. He suggested if this was a budgetary request, the funds could be found in other ways. He said bonding for the Fire Station, the Middleton Archology House, and the Drop-In Center Phase two would be heard in August 2026.

Mr. Slaughter stated that the lift station for Collier Heights was only one aspect of the project. He said the other aspect was gravity sewer, which had a estimated cost of \$450 per linear foot.

Mayor Sikes-Kline said the critical component was the lift station and that could be acquired first. She said since the affordable housing project was not done on the 82 acres on Holmes Boulevard, she felt they still should be mindful and responsible.

Commissioner Blonder added that it was not just affordable housing, but water quality by switching from septic to sewer.

6. ITEMS BY MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS

Mayor Sikes-Kline asked Mr. Birchim to explain what happened at the meeting with the Department of Transportation (DOT) regarding King Street Bridge.

Mr. Birchim replied that they met with the DOT District Chief in Green Cove Springs regarding various DOT projects that were scheduled or ongoing. He said the King Street Bridge rehabilitation was in progress and on schedule. He said the construction widow was indicated to be seven months,

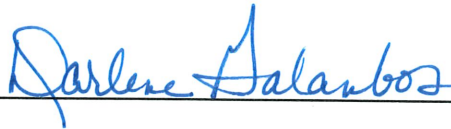
and they hoped that this would extend the life of the bridge by ten years.

7. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:38P.M.¹



Nancy Sikes-Kline, MAYOR



Darlene Galambos, CITY CLERK



¹ Transcribed by Elyse Wiemann