

A Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on October 7, 2025 at 6:00 PM at the Commission Meeting Room located at 74 6th Street, Apalachicola, Florida.

Present: Mayor Brenda Ash, Commissioner Anita Grove, Commissioner Despina George, Commissioner Donna Duncan, Commissioner Adriane Elliott, City Manager Chuck Anderson, City Attorney Dan Hartman, Finance Director Lee Mathes, City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings, Police Chief Bobby Varnes

Meeting was called to order by Mayor Ash followed by invocation and pledge of allegiance.

PRESENTATION: Honoring Commissioner Grove

The commission recognized Commissioner Anita Grove for her years of service from 2017-2025. Commissioner Grove expressed her appreciation for the recognition and stated her intention to remain involved with the city as a volunteer, emphasizing the importance of community service and leadership.

Swearing in of Commissioner Donna Knutson, Seat 3

Commissioner Donna Knutson was sworn in for Seat 3 by Father Steven Peacock and Elder Valentina Webb.

Swearing in of Commissioner Donna Duncan, Seat 4

Commissioner Donna Duncan was sworn in for Seat 4 by Attorney Hartman.

Public Comment

Kai Fornes commented.

Mayor Pro Tem Appointment

Motion to appoint Commissioner Donna Knutson as Mayor Pro Tem was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Agenda Adoption

Mayor requested an amendment to the agenda to include a presentation before the swearing in of commissioners.

A motion to adopt the agenda with the inclusion as stated was made by Commissioner Grove, seconded by Commissioner George. Motion carried, 5-0.

Public Comment (continued)

Karen Kessel commented.

Ken Essex commented.

Greg Perkins commented.

New Business: Approval of Architectural Services - Old City Hall (Middlebrook Bldg.)

Cindy Clark provided an update on the grant ranking by Florida Trust stating that Phase 4 of the Middlebrook Reno project was ranked favorably at #10. Mrs. Clark requested approval for the selection of 4MS Design Architects to continue work on the Middlebrook warehouse (Old City Hall) with Phase 3 funds received from the Department of State Division of Historic Resources. She explained that RFQ 2501 was properly advertised, two firms responded (4MS Design and Hammond Design), and staff ranked 4MS the highest.

She noted that 4MS was originally procured to work on city hall following Hurricane Michael in 2019 and was approved to continue work on Phase 2 in November 2023. Their services have been instrumental to the project's progress, and the contract is fully funded by the Department of State Division of Historic Resources. Since 2022, 4MS and Mark Tarmey have pledged \$87,500 in in-kind services for the project.

A motion to approve 4MS on a continuing services contract for the Middlebrook warehouse repair project was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: Florida SSF Parade Road Closure

Mr. Whaley requested approval for road closures for the Florida Seafood Festival parade. He explained that despite a previous resolution in perpetuity, the state requires annual approval. The festival will be held on October 31 and November 1, 2025, with the parade road closure needed from approximately 9:30 AM to 1:00 PM on November 1, though the road will reopen as soon as the parade finishes.

Motion to approve the road closure of Highway 98/Avenue E from 17th Street to Water Street for the Florida Seafood Festival Parade on November 1, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: Board Appointment Request to The Partnership for a Resilient Florida Org.

The Partnership for Resilient Apalachicola Bay requested that former Commissioner Anita Grove continue to serve as the city's representative to the partnership. She has been instrumental to the organization's success through her knowledge of the bay and surrounding communities, providing valuable insights from her experience and serving as chair of the education and outreach committee.

Motion to approve Anita Grove continuing to serve as the city's representative in the Partnership for Resilient Apalachicola Bay was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: 1st Reading FY 24/25 Budget Amendment (Ordinance 2025-04)

Attorney Hartman read Ordinance 2025-04 by title and body, amending the fiscal year 2024-2025 budget as required by Florida Statutes 166.241(4), which requires municipalities to complete budget amendments within 60 days after the end of the fiscal year.

Motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2025-04 for the fiscal year 24/25 budget amendment was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Knutson. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: Board Appointment(s) - Tree Committee

The Apalachicola Tree Committee presented applications from Alexandria Akins and Patricia Seay-Dollar to serve on the committee. The committee has vacancies and will be losing at least one member this fall.

Motion to appoint Alexandria Akins as a full-time member of the tree committee and Patricia Seay-Dollar as the alternate member was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business: Amended Lease Agreement - Sylvester Williams Park

Attorney Hartman explained the amendments to the lease agreement for Sylvester Williams Park, a 50-year lease entered into with the county last year. The county requested amendments to enable them to apply for state funding for park improvements. The amendments primarily ensure that improvements made with grant funding remain in use for their intended purpose during a 25-year post-completion period.

Attorney Hartman also brought up an issue with the legal description of the park property. A portion of the park that was assumed to be under city ownership is actually owned by the Apalachicola Housing Authority. The county planner, Brie Robinson, explained that the current grant application is for improvements (basketball court and shaded picnic pavilion) on the portion of the property not in dispute, while the area in question is a triangle shape where the dugouts on the softball field are located.

After discussion about how to address this issue, the commission decided to proceed with approving the lease amendment and to separately authorize the city attorney to work with the Housing Authority to deed the disputed portion back to the city.

Motion to approve the amended lease agreement for Sylvester Williams Park was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. Motion carried, 5-0.

Motion to authorize the City Attorney to research and coordinate with the housing authority to deed back their portion of Sylvester Williams Park was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. Motion carried, 5-0.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

The Mayor did not have specific comments.

Commissioner Elliott brought up two issues:

1. She requested that the city attorney investigate liquidated damages as part of the contract for the water treatment scrubber, which has been delayed.
2. She discussed the need for a public information officer or designated role for city communications, including defining social media policies and procedures for disseminating information to the public. She also mentioned the need to address Airbnb enforcement and to consider how to restructure and make the city marinas profitable as federal and state funding comes in for waterfront revitalization.

Commissioner Duncan had no comments.

Commissioner Knutson thanked those who supported her election, congratulated City Manager Anderson, and expressed appreciation to Attorney Hartman, the Mayor, commissioners, and former Commissioner Grove. She described herself as dedicated, analytical, and supportive of the commission, city staff, and citizens. She concluded with an analogy about the importance of steering rather than drifting, working together to guide the city's direction.

Commissioner George welcomed City Manager Anderson and Commissioner Knutson, and thanked former Commissioner Grove for her substantial contributions, particularly her work toward preserving the natural environment and supporting the volunteer fire department.

City Manager & Attorney Communications

City Manager Chuck Anderson thanked the commission for the opportunity to serve as city manager. He reported on his first week in the position, including meetings with department heads, community members, elected officials, engineering representatives, and FEMA personnel.

He provided updates on:

- Water and wastewater systems: The city is arranging formal meetings with DEP to discuss consent and judicial orders.
- Well repairs: Subsurface Technology is installing 100 feet of new pipe and a new pump at well #6, with completion expected by the end of the week, followed by bacterial testing. They are also checking pumps at wells 5 and 7, and ordering new pumps proactively.
- Personnel: Working on a job description for Public Works and Utilities Director.
- Infrastructure: Water and sewer crews are overseeing the installation of 75 new fire hydrants, with 33 already completed.
- Water treatment: The forced draft aerator (scrubber) is scheduled to be shipped on October 17, with expected arrival 2-3 days later.
- Florida Seafood Festival: Preparations for the October 31-November 1 event, noting that City Hall will be closed on October 31.
- Grant management: The tree grant has been expanded to include maintenance of existing city trees, not just planting new ones.

Attorney Hartman recommended scheduling a workshop to discuss options regarding the city's utility system, as there are discussions about expanding the East Point Water and Sewer District to encompass the city and St. George Island, but the city is not currently part of these conversations. After discussion, the commission scheduled a workshop for October 28 at 4:00 PM.

In response to a question from Commissioner Elliott, Attorney Hartman provided updates on the Denton Cove lift station issue and the ongoing state investigation, noting he has been providing financial information as requested.

Consent Agenda

Motion to adopt the consent agenda was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. Motion carried, 5-0.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner George. Motion carried, 5-0.

Meeting adjourned.

Brenda Ash, Mayor

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, City Clerk