

A Workshop Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on March 26, 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 Planner/Interim City Manager Bree Robinson, City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings, Attorney Hartman, Chief Bobby Varnes

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

Agenda Adoption

A motion was made by Commissioner Grove, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. Motion carried, 5-0.

Public Comment

Dennis Winterringer commented.
LaRaela Coxwell commented.
Jeanine Gedman commented.
Wes Warren commented.
Steve Rash commented.

CDBG-DR Discussion

Taylor Dillon from Gouras & Associates, who previously worked at Florida Commerce as the program manager for the Hometown Revitalization program, provided detailed information about the rules and requirements of the CDBG-DR grant.

Mr. Dillon explained that all projects must be located within the city jurisdiction and in a disaster area designated for Hurricane Michael. Projects must meet one of three national objectives: benefiting low-moderate income persons, repairing slum and blight, or meeting an urgent need. Both the Hill and riverfront projects are classified as meeting the slum and blight objective.

He clarified that all activities need to be eligible under Florida's action plan for Hurricane Michael and HUD guidelines. The process involves environmental reviews and proper procurement of consultants, engineers, and construction services. Projects must have a solid damage tie-back to Hurricane Michael, or the city risks clawback (repayment) of funds to the state.

The Hometown Revitalization program specifically addresses revitalization of businesses, private community areas, and public spaces. Eligible funds include public facility improvements, lighting, streetscapes, sidewalks, acquisition, demolition, site preparation, rehabilitation of commercial structures, and assistance to small businesses.

Mr. Dillon emphasized that any property receiving funding must maintain its current zoning designation for five years after the grant closes, but businesses were not required to remain operational for that entire period.

City Planner & Grant Coordinator Bree Robinson reported that out of the approximately \$935,000 total budget, \$235,000 has been spent on plans, environmental assessments, and technical specifications, leaving about \$700,000 for construction.

Regarding the Game Room property owned by the McNair's, two engineering reports had been completed. The reports indicated that while there was Hurricane Michael-related roof damage, there were also structural issues that predated the storm. The estimated cost to stabilize the building was approximately \$225,000, significantly exceeding their allocated \$9,600.

For the Mini Mall, Mr. Warren noted that while his allocation was only \$25,500, the estimated repair costs were \$114,600. He stated they have already invested about \$60,000 of their own money into the property.

Ms. Lee Coxwell expressed frustration with the protracted timeline of the grant process, noting that the initial application stated photo evidence of damage from Hurricane Michael was optional. She felt the prolonged rollout had negatively impacted the Hill's African American community.

After extensive discussion, the Commission decided to have Commissioner Duncan and Commissioner Grove meet with the engineer who assessed the Game Room to ask further questions before making a decision on that property.

The Commission established priorities for both the riverfront and Hill projects. For the riverfront, the consensus was to prioritize: 1) city projects (docks, demolition), 2) private businesses, and 3) sidewalks. For the Hill, the priority would be private businesses over sidewalks and lighting. The Commission also agreed that the lighting design for the Hill should be dark sky compliant.

Ms. Robinson noted that the Hill project could proceed to bidding in approximately 90 days if no changes were made to the current scope, while the riverfront project was waiting on SHPO approval and permitting, estimated to take 60-90 days.

CDBG-DR – Hill Lighting Choice Discussion

This item was discussed as part of the overall CDBG-DR program discussion. The Commission agreed that the proposed Victorian-style lighting was not appropriate for the Hill area. They directed staff to explore dark sky compliant options similar to those at Lafayette Park, noting there were less expensive options that could be considered.

Mayor, Commissioner, and Staff Comments

No separate comments were made under this agenda item as the discussion continued from the previous items.

Adjournment

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