

A Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on June 3, 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 Bree Robinson, City Manager Michael Brillhart, 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.

Presentation: Code Enforcement Partnership

A presentation was given regarding a code enforcement partnership with Franklin County. The presenter, Courtney Bankston, explained that the county has had success with a countywide nuisance sanitary code enforcement program, particularly in the East Point Ridge Road area. They shared that the county approach focuses on heart-to-heart conversations, helping people develop resource lists, and taking pride in their properties.

Commissioner Croom explained that the county partners with the health department, specifically Sissy Smith, who also partners with the City of Carabelle for code enforcement. She suggested this would be a great starting point for Apalachicola to address sanitary nuisances. Commissioner Croom emphasized that their goal is not to take people's properties but to connect them with resources they might not know are available.

The presentation highlighted resources available through this partnership, including:

- Helping Hands organization
- County dumpster resources with waived tipping fees for open cases
- SHIP program
- CDBG program that can help replace mobile homes

Commissioner Croom noted that filing a formal complaint is necessary to begin the process. She explained that a partnership between the health department and city code enforcement would be most effective, as the health department alone has limited capabilities.

Commissioner Grove thanked them for offering their resources and noted that the city's code enforcement officer, Scott, was present. The Mayor expressed appreciation for their initiative and requested that an email summary of the available resources be provided.

Public Comments

Rob Zingarelli commented.

Greg Perkins commented.

New Business: Proposal for General Planning Assistance

Bree Robinson, who is leaving city employment, discussed the need for planning services. Due to difficulties finding qualified planning professionals, the city contacted the Apalachicola Regional Planning Council (ARPC) for assistance.

Quentin Eastberg from ARPC attended to answer questions about their proposal. Commissioner Grove expressed concerns about potential issues based on the city's previous experience with a contracted firm, EPCI, which had not properly maintained permit records. Mr. Eastberg assured the Commission that ARPC staff have extensive experience in planning and records management, with staff member Justin having worked at the Department of Commerce in the Areas of Critical Concern and as Growth Management Director in Gadsden County.

Commissioner Elliott clarified that the planning duties would not include taking over the permitting department as EPCI had done. The ARPC would provide coordinating services for application reviews, support the development review process, help prepare grant applications, and provide staff support at meetings as needed. She emphasized the importance of maintaining professional services given that both the city planner and city manager would be leaving.

Commissioner Duncan expressed concern about hiring outside the community and the additional expense of mileage. She asked if there was someone in-house who could be trained.

Ron Nippe, from the permitting department, spoke to say he was interested in taking on planning responsibilities. He explained that he had established good relationships with people in the city regarding permits, worked efficiently to process permits quickly, and was willing to learn planning tasks.

Bree Robinson noted that it would be difficult to train someone with no one in the building to provide guidance. She also mentioned the proposal was meant to be a temporary

solution until the right candidate was found, and the ARPC would assist with the transition to a new employee if one was hired.

A motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to approve the proposal for general planning services with the Apalachicola Regional Planning Council dated May 16, 2025 in an amount not to exceed \$55,000 annually, seconded by Commissioner Grove. Motion carried unanimously.

New Business: Space for Moving In Action- Frenchie Haynes

Frenchie Haynes of the Moving Education Institute, Inc. requested an extension of the vacate order from June 30, 2025, to July 15, 2025. He explained that Community Moving Education (CME) is in its fifth year and scheduled to conclude on July 11, 2025. The program provides youth ages 6-19 with arts programming, technology workshops, and food justice curriculum free of charge.

Mr. Haynes emphasized that the final weeks of the program are critical as they include the annual finale and a youth-written play to be presented at the Chapman Theater.

The Mayor recommended that Mr. Haynes speak with Attorney Hartman and City Manager Brillhart, noting that a workshop was scheduled for the following day. She emphasized that while everyone has been emotionally affected by the situation, the health and safety of everyone must be the priority.

Unfinished Business: Floodplain Variance 2025-01 (125 Water St)

Mr. Cutler Edwards with White Sands Investments explained that White Sands acquired the Boss Oyster site in July 2022. At that time, they were told by the building department that the Boston Oyster building could not be saved, despite having a letter from professional engineers stating it was structurally sound and could be preserved if allowed to exceed the 51% rule.

The submitted plans for Boss Marina and restaurant were designed with the understanding that the entire site would need to be raised. However, after learning more about the floodplain exemption variance, they are seeking approval to preserve the historic Boss Oyster Building. Mr. Cutler emphasized that they are only asking for approval to preserve this building so they can reconfigure the site plan.

Attorney Hartman explained this is a routine flood administrator variance under Section 100-163 of the adopted model flood ordinance. He noted that the historic structure qualifies for the variance, which is designed to encourage developers to maintain historic buildings.

Commissioner George expressed concern that the flood plain administrator had previously only reviewed a checklist without drawings. Attorney Hartman confirmed that he had spoken with the administrator, who determined that the request met the criteria for a variance.

Mr. Cutler clarified that they were not seeking approval for substantial improvements or alterations to the footprint or exterior of the building. Attorney Hartman confirmed that if plans changed radically or altered the historic character of the building, the variance would not be effective, and the building permit would be denied.

Commissioner Elliott moved to ratify the flood plain variance, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business: Riverfront Park Fountain

City Manager Brillhart explained that the current fountain equipment was not capable of being restored to its original design. He proposed removing the fountain and installing decorative brick to create a flat surface as an interim solution until a long-term design could be determined.

Commissioner Elliott noted that while this had been previously discussed, the current proposal specifically requested removing the entire fountain structure and installing decorative brick to create a walkable area.

Commissioner Elliott moved to remove the fountain and landscape the area to add the paved walkway, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. Motion carried, 5-0.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

The Mayor requested an update on the aerator system for the water quality issue raised earlier by Mr. Perkins.

City Manager Brillhart reported that the manufacturer of the scrubber believes it will be constructed by June 30. After inspection, which will take 2-3 weeks, installation should begin by August. He also noted ongoing issues with drinking water well #6, and that the city is working to get well #7 back online, which will allow them to take well #6 offline and use wells #5 and #7 as the primary sources. He apologized for the water quality issues and stated that both the water scrubber and getting well #7 back online would help improve the situation.

The Mayor also addressed the high turnover rate of city staff and suggested the need to re-engage in strategic planning to retain quality employees. She noted that this would require

pay increases, respect, and morale boosters. She announced that City Manager Brillhart had submitted his resignation effective July 3.

A motion was made by Commissioner Duncan to open an RFP to advertise and hire a new city manager. Motion seconded by Commissioner Grove. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

The Mayor indicated that they might need to discuss an interim city manager if a replacement is not found before July 3.

Commissioner Grove shared information about a partnership meeting focused on oyster restoration in the bay. He also inquired about air testing done at City Hall and expressed concern about the splash pad being unavailable to children all summer.

Commissioner George raised concerns about the lack of a posted agenda for the special meeting scheduled for the following day. After discussion, Attorney Hartman advised that there was no legal impediment to proceeding with the meeting as scheduled, as it had been properly noticed even without the agenda attachment.

City Manager Brillhart did not add comments beyond answering questions about his resignation and the water quality issues.

Attorney Hartman reported that the Davis property had been sold, with the city expecting a check for \$65,750.

Consent Agenda

A motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to approve the consent agenda, seconded by Commissioner Grove. Motion carried, 5-0.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Grove. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Meeting adjourned.

Brenda Ash, Mayor

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, City Clerk