

A Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on August 5, 2025 at 3:00 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, Interim City Manager Chris Holley, City Attorney Hartman, and City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings

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: Bill Williams- Franklin County Partnership

Bill Williams, representing the Franklin County Partnership, provided an update on Team Franklin, a governmental entity formed under Florida Statute 163 that brings together six governmental bodies. He explained that Commissioner Elliott serves as the chairman of the partnership.

Mr. Williams described their primary focus on developing 165 acres on Highway 65 in Sumatra for critical personnel housing, economic development, and an academic footprint. He noted that Tallahassee State College had agreed to establish a CDL program on the campus. He reported that the school board was using insurance money to relocate their bus barn to part of the 27 acres.

Mr. Williams explained they were developing an RFP for contractors to build the first 4-5 homes for critical personnel such as school teachers, city employees, and deputies. He mentioned that Team Franklin had been designated as the economic development council for all of Franklin County by the Board of County Commissioners two weeks prior.

He invited the commissioners to attend a meeting on August 15th at 9:00 AM at the school board building in East Point. The meeting would feature Becca Harden, Economic Development Alliance Director for Bay County, who would speak about economic development strategies. He noted that Team Franklin had been designated to lead development efforts for the Apalachicola Airport.

Mr. Williams requested the commission authorize Team Franklin to evaluate city-owned properties for potential workforce housing, academic, and economic development opportunities. Mayor Ash advised this would need to be placed on the next meeting agenda for a formal vote.

Public Comment

Krystal Hernandez commented.

Frenchie Haynes commented.

Dennis Green commented.

Dremel Worthen commented.

Greg Perkins commented.

New Business: Preliminary Audit for FY 23/24

Chris Moran, the city's auditor, presented a preliminary draft audit for FY 2023-2024. He explained the challenges faced during the year, including the abandonment of the Banyan accounting system and conversion to QuickBooks. Mr. Moran noted this was the first time in years they had a complete set of books for the entire fiscal year.

Mr. Moran reviewed key financial figures, reporting that as of September 30, 2024, the city had \$571,000 in cash, \$817,000 in investments, \$59,000 in accounts receivable, and \$219,000 due from the water fund. He explained that \$707,000 was due from other governments, primarily representing grant revenue received after year-end.

For the utility fund, he reported \$971,000 in cash, \$239,000 in receivables, and \$362,000 due from other governments. Mr. Moran noted that all debt service requirements were being met. He highlighted that despite tight budgetary constraints, the city had paid down long-term debt from \$647,000 to \$631,000.

Interim City Manager Holly emphasized the importance of the audit data for upcoming budget preparations and requested the commission consider adopting the audit at the next budget workshop on August 19th.

Unfinished Business: City Manager Recruitment and Selection Process

Manager Holley provided an update on the city manager recruitment process. He reported that the recruitment team of Kate Deloche, Emily Colon, and himself had ranked 23 applicants in three tiers, with two additional applications received after the commission packets were distributed.

Mr. Holley noted that a candidate, Mr. Anderson, had recently visited the city and could be considered as an interim option if the commission wished to take that route. He explained that using an interim manager would allow both parties to evaluate the fit before making a permanent commitment.

The commission discussed timeline concerns, noting that with the upcoming election in September and potential runoff in October, a permanent hire might not be in place until later in the fall. Commissioner Duncan emphasized the need for minimal changeover, while Commissioner Grove acknowledged the benefits of the "dating game" approach with an interim but expressed concern about having choices among the candidates.

After discussion, the consensus was to move forward expeditiously with interviews for the top candidates rather than pursuing the interim option. Mr. Holley indicated he would target scheduling interviews right after the Labor Day holiday.

Unfinished Business: Vulnerability Analysis Ranking

Cindy Clark of Bay Media explained this item was a follow-up to the April workshop where the vulnerability assessment was presented. She requested the commission formally approve the focus area prioritization they had previously agreed upon in the workshop, with Area 5 being the priority area.

Motion to approve the prioritization ranking agreed upon at the April 8th meeting was made by Commissioner Grove, seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business: Renewal of Grant Consulting Services

The request was to renew existing grant administration agreements with Bay Media Services for ongoing grant-funded projects. The original term of these agreements had expired, but the projects were continuing under grant funding.

Motion to renew the existing grant administration agreements was made by Commissioner Grove, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business: African American History Museum Bid Discussion and Recommendation

Brett Hammond presented information on bids received for the African American History Museum project. He explained that of two bids submitted, only one from Monolith Construction out of Port St. Joe met all requirements. The base bid was \$1,200,000, but with deductive alternates, including using a prefabricated aluminum canopy instead of a

custom one and changing the exterior finish system, the price could be reduced significantly.

Hammond recommended adding back two alternates related to parking, bringing the total to \$1,028,000, which was \$28,000 over the million-dollar grant. He reported that Monolith Construction had excellent references and committed to completing the project within 12 months, meeting the critical September 2026 deadline.

Mr. Holley noted that representatives from North Florida African American Quarter Project were present and had committed to providing the additional \$28,000 needed to cover the budget shortfall.

Attorney Hartman addressed questions about zoning, explaining that while the property was zoned R1 residential, a special exception for public facilities was available. He noted they would apply for this exception at the September Planning and Zoning Commission meeting.

Motion to accept the bid proposal from Monolith Construction, subject to the contribution of the construction budget overrun by North Florida African American Quarter Project and contingent upon approval from the Planning and Zoning Commission for the special exception, was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Representatives from Monolith Construction thanked the commission for their confidence and committed to using as many local subcontractors as possible.

Unfinished Business: Area of Critical State Concern Project Prioritization

Mr. Holley presented a preliminary list of projects for consideration under the Area of Critical State Concern funding. He emphasized that this was a starting point for discussion, not a final list, as they were awaiting information on other potential funding sources.

He explained that the \$5 million in funding was restricted to stormwater and wastewater projects, not drinking water improvements, which was disappointing as drinking water had been a priority. Commissioner George noted that the public had been led to believe the funding would address drinking water needs and asked if there was any path forward to change that.

Mr. Holley mentioned that Representative Shoaf had indicated willingness to explore options through the legislative budget committee, but acknowledged it would be difficult. He also noted they hoped to learn more about additional funding sources in the coming week that might address some of the water system needs.

No action was taken as this was presented as an informational item to be refined further.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

The commission discussed the September meeting scheduled for September 2nd, which is Election Day. After discussion about various options, including temporarily adjourning to conduct canvassing board duties or moving the time:

Motion to move the September meeting to September 3rd at 6 PM was made by Commissioner Grove, seconded by Commissioner Elliott, Motion carried, 4-1. Commissioner George opposed.

The commission addressed the change of the current meeting time from 6 PM to 3 PM. Mr. Holley took responsibility for the change, explaining he had thought there was agreement on the 3 PM time and had scheduled presentations accordingly. He noted that the budget workshops were already scheduled for 3 PM and assured this would be the last regular meeting at 3 PM unless the commission decided otherwise.

Commissioner George provided historical context, noting that a 1987 city ordinance had established the 6 PM meeting time to promote public participation, and that the commission had voted 3-2 earlier in the year to return to the 6 PM time after a period of meeting at 4 PM.

Mr. Holley provided an update on the water system improvements. He reported that the delivery of the water scrubber had been delayed until the end of September due to slowed fabrication. He assured the public that the hydrogen peroxide injection system currently in use was keeping the water safe, with good test results. He also mentioned an upcoming project to recondition all three wells, starting with Well 6.

The commission also discussed space issues for city operations. Mr. Holley explained that the former plan to remodel the community center had been abandoned, as he felt it should be maintained for public use. He noted they were exploring options including using the second floor of the HCA building and potentially rehabilitating the Harbor Master House.

Attorney Hartman requested commission action on two items: 1) issuing a one-year termination notice to Forgotten Coast Fitness for the gym lease, and 2) authorizing negotiation of a new lease with HCA that would allow city use of the second floor.

Motion to direct Attorney Hartman to send the one-year termination notice to Forgotten Coast Fitness was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. None opposed, Motion carried, 5-0.

Motion to direct staff to negotiate a new lease for HCA and come back to the commission was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Commissioner Grove agreed to follow up on Coach Perkins' request regarding signage on Highway 98, explaining she would contact DOT about options for better traffic control at the bridge intersection.

Commissioner George raised the question of an operational audit as suggested by Senator Corey Simon at a town hall meeting. Attorney Hartman noted that multiple financial reviews were already underway, including the regular audit, the Attorney General's investigation, and the Department of Financial Services inquiry. The commission agreed to have staff contact Senator Simon's office to determine if he still recommended a separate operational audit.

Commissioner Elliott provided comments on the audit findings, the city charter, and staffing concerns. She emphasized the need for charter revisions, as the current charter was 78 years old and significantly outdated. She also highlighted staffing challenges, particularly in the wastewater department where they were down to one operator, and stressed the importance of appropriate compensation to retain qualified employees.

Consent Agenda Items

Motion to approve the consent agenda items (FCSB Request to Donate inoperable vehicle to FCSB Resource Program and Fire Hydrant Bid Award - Installation of 75 hydrants) was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner Elliott. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Adjournment

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

Meeting adjourned.

Brenda Ash, Mayor

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, City Clerk