

A Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, at 6:00 PM, at the Commission Meeting Room located at 74 6th Street, Apalachicola, FL.

Present: Mayor Brenda Ash, Commissioner(s) Donna Knutson, Donna Duncan, Adrienne Elliott, Despina George, City Manager Chuck Anderson, City Attorney Dan Hartman, Chief Bobby Varnes, Lt. Chase Richards, and City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings

Meeting was called to order by Mayor Ash followed by invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Agenda Adoption**

Motion to adopt the agenda was made by Commissioner George and seconded by Commissioner Knutson. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

### **Public Comment**

Lynn Wilder commented.

Alan Olson commented.

Kai Fornes commented.

Anita grove commented.

### **New Business #1: Resolution 2026-04**

Attorney Hartman read Resolution 2026-04, which authorizes the city to apply for a loan from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection under the Drinking Water State Revolving fund loan program. The resolution covers funding for total organic carbon (TOC) reduction treatment plant, new well construction, and maintenance of existing wells, with 100 percent loan forgiveness and no pledge of revenues required.

City Manager Anderson explained that the city has the opportunity to be awarded over \$17 million in supplemental appropriations for hurricane Helene and Milton recovery through the drinking water state revolving loan program. The funding covers three components: new well construction for well number 8, five years of well rehabilitation for existing wells and any new wells built during the same period, and construction of a total organic carbon water treatment facility for the city's water plant.

Discussion held.

Attorney Hartman explained that the resolution could be revisited and or rescinded if needed, and that DEP would need to provide assurance that any obligations would transfer to a district if the local bill becomes law. He recommended approving the resolution to avoid losing the \$17 million opportunity while ensuring proper documentation from DEP.

Commissioner George referenced section 3 of the local bill, which states that the city may not incur additional obligations or indebtedness other than in the ordinary course of business once the act becomes law.

Attorney Hartman explained that DEP would add provisions similar to those being negotiated for the consent order, acknowledging that this loan is being entered into in the ordinary course of business and is consistent with the local bill terms.

A motion was made by Commissioner Duncan to adopt Resolution 2026-04. Commissioner Elliott seconded. No further discussion. Motion carried, 4-1 with Commissioner Knutson opposed.

#### **New Business #2: Resolution 2026-05**

Attorney Hartman read Resolution 2026-05 adopting the 2026 update to the Franklin County local mitigation strategy. Manager Anderson explained that the resolution adopts the county's updated mitigation strategy plan, which identifies approximately 80 projects for Apalachicola individually or as part of Franklin County. The plan helps set priorities and secure funding for mitigation projects, with the county requesting all participating municipalities to adopt the resolution.

A Motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to adopt Resolution 2026-05. Commissioner Knutson seconded. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

#### **New Business #3: National Volunteer Week Proclamation**

Attorney Hartman read the proclamation declaring the week of April 19th through 25th, 2026 as National Volunteer Week in Apalachicola. The proclamation recognized the commitment of volunteers and their essential role in building a caring and productive community.

A motion was made by Commissioner George to approve the National Volunteer Week Proclamation. Commissioner Elliott seconded. Motion carried, 5-0.

#### **New Business #4: Apalachicola Rodeo**

Amanda Lake presented a proposal for a two-day rodeo and concert event for December 4th and 5th at the site under the bridge where the seafood festival is held. The event would feature bull riding, bronc riding, and cowgirls barrel racing in a fast-paced, family-friendly show lasting no more than two hours. Lake emphasized community partnerships with organizations like River Keepers and local 4-H chapters, as well as creating a music-based scholarship in honor of Ashley Morgan.

Lake explained that early December is a slower tourism season and the event could bring visitors to support local restaurants, lodging, and small businesses. She committed to operating within city and county guidelines regarding alcohol sales and expressed willingness to collaborate with the commission to shape the event appropriately.

Mayor Ash inquired about property maintenance and restoration. Lake explained that local construction companies would haul in dirt and clay for the arena, then remove and recycle it afterward. She emphasized leaving the property better than found.

Commissioner Elliott asked about setup and takedown times. Lake estimated about two hours for arena teardown, with dirt removal taking longer but completed within one business day.

Commissioners discussed logistics including road closures, security requirements, and emergency response plans. Manager Anderson confirmed he had walked the property with Lake to ensure proper footprint and access.

Commissioner George questioned whether this was the applicant's first rodeo and asked about the organization structure. Lake explained that Bar C Performance is her LLC production company and described their approach of partnering with local non-profit organizations for various aspects of the event.

Commissioner Knutson requested to see an emergency response plan given the limited access at the 10-foot hole location. Commissioner Duncan supported the idea, noting similarities to other successful events at the location.

Commissioner Elliott expressed strong support, emphasizing the economic benefits during the slow December tourism season.

A motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to allow A-C Performance Horses LLC to host a two-day rodeo event in Apalachicola on December 4th and 5th, 2026. Commissioner Knutson seconded. No further discussion. Motion carried, 4-1. Commissioner George opposed.

### **New Business #5: P&Z Board Appointment**

A motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to appoint Ashley Leonard to the Planning and Zoning Board as the Alternate Member. Commissioner Duncan seconded. Motion initially tied 2-2, then carried 3-2 with Mayor Ash's tie-breaking vote. Commissioners Knutson and George opposed.

### **New Business #6: Election Ordinance Discussion**

Attorney Hartman presented a housekeeping ordinance to update the basic election ordinance passed in 2023, specifically changing the date when newly elected officials assume office from October to December to correspond with new election dates.

Commissioner Elliott questioned whether qualifying period dates should also be updated to avoid an extended campaign period. Attorney Hartman agreed to verify current qualifying dates and include corresponding adjustments if desired by the commission.

Commissioner Duncan supported adjusting all dates to coincide with the new election date. The commission agreed to move the ordinance forward for first reading at the May meeting, including qualifying date changes.

### **New Business #7: DEP Consent Order**

Attorney Hartman reported on the wastewater treatment plant consent order received from DEP. Due to concerns about whether entering into this long-term agreement through 2030 constituted ordinary course of business under the pending local bill, staff arranged a meeting with DEP representatives.

DEP agreed to revise the consent order to include language stating that the parties agree the city entering into this order is incurred in the ordinary course of business and not a violation of the local bill. This provides the city cover from accusations of operating contrary to the local bill while ensuring necessary facility construction proceeds.

The deadline for signing was extended, and DEP will provide a revised draft for commission review, likely at the May meeting.

Discussion held.

## **Mayor and Commissioner Comments**

Commissioner Knutson announced that Keep Franklin County Beautiful received a cigarette reduction grant and requested permission to place cigarette butt receptacles around town, with volunteers responsible for emptying them. The collected butts would be recycled. She also requested trash cans and fishing line receptacles at Lafayette Pier and 10-foot hole, and at the shooting range. Commissioner Knutson also explained her opposition to the first resolution (2026-04) was based on consistency concerns with how both the loan and consent order should be handled similarly given similar uncertainties.

Commissioner Duncan thanked Lt. Chase Richards for conducting a concealed weapons class and discussed potential formation of a gun club to sponsor and fundraise for range improvements. She congratulated Lt. Richards as the incoming Chief.

Commissioner George clarified that she believed both resolutions were being handled consistently, with the first resolution just starting the process to avoid losing funding while allowing time for engineer input and DEP discussions. She thanked the Parks and Recreation Committee and Happy organization for the successful Lafayette Park rededication event.

Commissioner Elliott reported on public safety issues including a fire hydrant blocked by a parking space downtown and requested review of parking arrangements near fire hydrants. She encouraged feedback on FDOT's 5-year plan, which includes \$4 million for Highway 98 resurfacing in 2027, and submitted requests for improved crosswalk visibility and pedestrian safety features. She announced the next Team Franklin meeting scheduled for April 24th to discuss workforce housing proposals for essential workers.

## **City Manager Communications**

Manager Anderson provided updates on several items: auditors arriving April 16-17 for fieldwork within the Finance Dept and reported that the City's ledgers are in good shape; Librarian Lucy Carter being invited to attend a state library conference May 11-13 focused on small rural libraries; negative test results for volatile organic compounds near well number 5 following the Chapman oil spill; permit approval for downtown revitalization project; HUD audit scheduled April 20-22 for CDBG program participation; V-pier progress; selection of C4 Consultants for strategic planning with a short-term two-year plan.

Regarding the local bill, Anderson reported it has not moved to the governor's office and no dates announced for budget special session. He is seeking a meeting with Kim Kramer from Office of Policy and Budget.

On utility billing, Anderson and City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings clarified that delinquent accounts average \$30,000-\$60,000, not the half million dollars mentioned in public comment. They explained the monthly billing process, validation procedures, and shutoff procedures for overdue accounts.

Anderson provided updates on wastewater treatment plant preparation work, African American history museum on track for September completion, and Pop-On building demolition still scheduled as part of downtown revitalization after new state director confirmed structural unsoundness.

Mayor Ash requested updates on WWTP, African American History Museum, and the Popham Building demolition. Mayor Ash also informed Manager Anderson on lighting outages at Riverfront Park.

**Attorney Communications: Discussion on Draft Encroachment Ordinance**

Attorney Hartman reported no additional comments received on the encroachment ordinance. He will work with the Happy organization to revise the draft according to their comments and provide a new version to the commission, possibly for workshop discussion, by the May meeting.

**Consent Agenda**

A motion was made Commissioner Elliott to approve the consent agenda. Commissioner Knutson seconded. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

**Adjournment**

A Motion was made by Commissioner Elliott moved to adjourn. Commissioner Knutson seconded. None Opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

**Meeting adjourned.**

**ATTEST:**

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**Sheneidra Cummings, CITY CLERK**

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**Brenda Ash, MAYOR**