A Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on Tuesday, May 5, 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

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ash, followed by an invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Adoption

Prior to adoption, Mayor Ash requested one amendment: that New Business Item 4 (Strategic Visioning) be moved to New Business Item 1.

Motion to adopt the agenda as amended was made by Commissioner Elliott and seconded by Commissioner Knutson. No Discussion, none opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Public Comment

Joe Taylor, Executive Director of Franklin's Promise Coalition and resident addressed the Commission regarding the SUNS project, a conservation corps initiative supported by The Nature Conservancy to explore community-envisioned, nature-based solutions to local flooding challenges. Mr. Taylor announced that a workshop would be held on May 12th beginning at 9:00 AM at ANERR. He noted that The Nature Conservancy has set aside limited funding to support implementation, and that individual community meetings would follow. Commissioner Knutson indicated her willingness to attend the May 12th workshop on behalf of the Commission.

Torben Matson, representing the Parks and Recreation Committee, addressed the Commission regarding the availability of Farmers Market funds and requested that the Commission consider allocating those monies to the Parks and Recreation Committee at a future meeting. He described the Committee's interest in promoting recreational programming and community engagement with the city's parks and outlined a process by which the Committee would convene park adopters to develop a proposed budget for Commission consideration. Commissioner Duncan inquired whether Parks and Recreation would consider taking over the Farmers Market operations at the old mill pond at Scipio Creek, and Mr. Matson indicated the Committee would be willing to explore that possibility.

Pete Weitzel, 112 Avenue D, addressed the Commission regarding the city's tree-trimming policies, urging elected officials to reject a blanket approach of cutting all trees to 14 feet above the roadway. He cited FDOT practices in Tallahassee, where canopy roads are protected and clearances are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and encouraged the Commission to adopt a vision for Apalachicola that balances aesthetic preservation with safety rather than prioritizing accommodation of oversized vehicles.

Anita Grove provided an update on the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve partnership, noting that the final commercial harvest numbers for January and February were still pending due to unreturned tickets. She reported that a letter had been submitted to the ACF Stakeholder and Tri Rivers Association meeting in Albany describing the deteriorating condition of the Bay Area due to the ongoing exceptional drought and lack of fresh water. Ms. Grove also requested that the Commission, through the City Manager or individually, add their names to a sign-on letter in support of federal funding for the Research Reserve, which employs 26 people, generates over $2,000,000 annually in the area, and is matched by state funds. She indicated the process could be handled digitally through the association.

Amy Hersey, 451 25th Avenue, spoke on behalf of constituent Josh Porter of 112 Dr. Frederick S. Humphries Street, who had been waiting for a water and sewer tap since paying his fee on February 4th. She noted that Mr. Porter's property cannot receive a Certificate of Occupancy—and therefore cannot be sold—until the tap is completed and requested that the city expedite the process.

<u>**New Business #1:** Strategic Visioning</u>

City Manager Anderson introduced Charles Chapman, owner and principal consultant of C4 Strategies, who was retained by the city following a Commission request for a strategic visioning process. Given the upcoming fall elections and the city's transitional phase, the Commission agreed to pursue a two-year strategic action plan rather than a longer-term vision.

Mr. Chapman provided an overview of his professional background, including 18 years of service to cities and counties across Florida, including nine years with Gadsden County and service as County Manager of Hendry County and City Manager of Naples. He described the three-phase process underway:

> **Phase 1 – Fact Finding:** Mr. Chapman reported that he had reviewed three years of the city's budgets and audits and had conducted individual interviews with each

Commissioner to understand their priorities noting that these were separate phone calls, not a joint meeting.

Phase 2 – Stakeholder Focus Group Workshop: A two-day, invitation-only workshop is planned for the first part of June, to be held at the Commission Chambers. Up to 20–25 participants will be invited from the community, including business leaders, educators, volunteers, county and school board representatives, and Chamber of Commerce members. Day one will focus on a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) as it pertains to city government. Day two will focus on developing broad strategic goals from the group's findings. Following the workshop, Mr. Chapman indicated he would return to the Commission in mid-June to present the strategic goals for review and refinement.

Phase 3 – Objectives and Final Adoption: Working with the City Manager and key staff, Mr. Chapman will develop measurable objectives under each strategic goal. He emphasized the critical importance of tying the plan to the city's budget, stating that a strategic plan not followed by financial commitments amounts to a plan that sits on the shelf. Final adoption is anticipated by mid-July, in time to integrate into the Fiscal Year 2027 budget development cycle.

Commissioner George confirmed that Commissioners should submit their stakeholder recommendations through the City Manager. Commissioner Elliott thanked Mr. Chapman for the clear outline of phases and deliverables. Commissioner Knutson asked about the final selection process for the 20–25 invitees, which City Manager Anderson confirmed would be coordinated through his office. Commissioner Knutson requested examples of previous strategic plans produced by C4 Strategies, which City Manager Anderson agreed to forward to the Commission. Commissioner Knutson further emphasized the need for a public communications plan to manage community expectations and feedback from those not directly included in the focus group. City Manager Anderson noted that a community workshop open to the public is being planned, tentatively for June 2nd, which also corresponds to a Commission meeting date. Commissioner Duncan asked whether public comment workshops had identified dates, and City Manager Anderson confirmed the tentative June 2nd date.

New Business #2: Election Ordinance 2026-02

City Attorney Hartman presented the first reading of Ordinance 2026-02, an ordinance amending Apalachicola Code of Ordinances Part I, Article 2, Section 17, to adjust the date on which elected officials assume the duties of office so as to correspond with the city's new November election schedule. Under the amendment, commissioners will be seated in December rather than October. Attorney Hartman described the measure as housekeeping to align the seating date with the recently updated election ordinance.

Commissioner Duncan asked whether the qualification date had been addressed. Attorney Hartman explained that the qualifying period remains in June, consistent with county practice, and that while some concern has been raised about the extended campaign period this creates, the qualifying date is not currently codified in ordinance. He indicated that coordination with the Supervisor of Elections would be the appropriate mechanism to adjust qualifying dates for future elections, beginning in 2028 if the Commission desires.

Motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2026-O2 and to advertise for a second reading at public hearing was made by Commissioner George and seconded by Commissioner Elliott. No further discussion was held. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business #3: Housing Authority Board Appointment(s)

City Manager Anderson presented the recommendation of the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners to appoint Ms. Valentina Webb and Mr. David Walker as Commissioners on the Housing Authority Board. The nominations had been voted on by the Housing Authority Board at their March 25th meeting.

Motion to approve the appointment of Valentina Webb and David Walker to the Housing Authority Board was made by Commissioner Elliott and seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business #4: DHR Grant Application re-submission-Phase IV (City Hall, Ave E)

City Manager Anderson requested Commission authorization to resubmit a grant application to the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, under the Special Category funding program, for **Phase 4 structural repair of the Middlebrook Building (City Hall, Avenue E)**. The application seeks $300,000 to complete ADA access improvements and needed structural repairs. Due to the Governor's removal of historical funding from the state budget, the city must reapply for the same grant it had been awarded in the prior fiscal year. The required match totals $75,000, of which only $18,750 must be in cash; the remainder may be in-kind. City Manager Anderson confirmed that the match funds were set aside when the Commission approved the same application on May 6, 2025, and have not been otherwise obligated.

City Attorney Hartman read **Resolution 2026-06** in its entirety noting that it was a Resolution of Match Support certifying that the required cash match is available and execute the grant application.

Motion to adopt Resolution 2026-06 was made by Commissioner George and seconded by Commissioner Elliott. No discussion. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business #5: DEP WWTP Consent Order

City Attorney Hartman reported that this item had been tabled at the previous meeting due to concerns about the interaction between the consent order and a pending local act that would transfer ownership and operational responsibility of the city's wastewater treatment facilities to the Apalachicola Water and Sewer District. Following that meeting, City Manager Anderson arranged a meeting with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which agreed to incorporate protective language into the consent order at Sections 4 and 6. That language acknowledges the pending local act, envisions the potential transfer of facility ownership, and expressly provides that entering into the consent order constitutes a contractual obligation incurred in the ordinary course of business and does not violate the terms of the act. **Attorney Hartman stated that the city now has certainty that executing the consent order will not result in any repercussions under the act.**

Motion to adopt the proposed DEP Consent Order and authorize the Mayor to execute the same was made by Commissioner Duncan and seconded by Commissioner George. No Discussion. Motion carried, 5-0.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

Commissioner Knutson announced her availability to attend the May 12th SUNS workshop on behalf of the Commission. She also urged the Commission and City Manager to pursue signing the sign-on letter in support of the Apalachicola National Estuarine Research Reserve via email prior to the next meeting. Commissioner Knutson reported attending the second installment of the Institute for Elected Municipal Officials, which covered topics including council effectiveness, planning and land use, home rule, and municipal finance. She highlighted growing concern among Florida municipalities about proposed state-level property tax changes, noting that the Florida League of Cities communicated that some form of change is likely. She requested that City Manager Anderson begin compiling data to assess the potential impact of various property tax reform scenarios on the city's budget and emphasized the need for a proactive communications strategy to inform property taxpayers of the potential consequences.

Commissioner Duncan extended thanks to the city administration for organizing a well-attended community cookout, commending City Manager Anderson, City staff, and all who assisted with setup and cleanup.

Commissioner George raised the issue of Planning and Zoning Board member term compliance. She noted that the Land Development Code establishes a four-year term for board members but that this provision has not been consistently enforced. Of the seven current members, four have expired terms and at least two have served for a decade or more. Commissioner George requested that this matter be placed on the next meeting's agenda to develop a transition strategy—such as a phased first-in, first-out rotation—that brings the board into compliance without disrupting continuity. She also highlighted the Parks and Recreation Committee's participation in the county's Earth Day celebration at Riverfront Park, where committee members successfully recruited new park adopters on the spot, and expressed enthusiasm for relaunching the park adoption program.

Commissioner George also acknowledged the tragic drowning of Mr. Jerome Collins at Scipio Creek, noting that volunteer Chip Sanders located Mr. Collins' remains, providing closure to the family. Both Mr. Sanders and a member of Mr. Collins' family expressed a desire for the city to install security cameras at the Scipio Creek boat ramp. Commissioner George confirmed that City Manager Anderson was already in discussion with the Police Chief regarding grant funding for cameras and the possibility of borrowing cameras from the county in the interim.

Joe Taylor, currently serving as Chair of the Planning and Zoning Board, briefly addressed the Commission to note that he had been unaware of the term limitation provisions and stated that he serves at the pleasure of the Commission and would support whatever transition plan is deemed appropriate.

Commissioner Elliott echoed Commissioner George's support for installing cameras at the mill pond, noting she had already discussed the matter with City Manager Anderson the prior week. She stated her belief that installing cameras is the most responsible course of action for the city as the owner of the mill pond property, particularly as electrical upgrades are being completed there. Commissioner Elliott also expressed interest in convening a marina workshop in the summer or early fall to revisit rules, regulations, and a formalized management plan for Battery Park Marina, especially in light of the anticipated retirement of the current harbor master. She further noted that the first floor of the Middlebrook Building is expected to be ready for occupancy in August and suggested the Commission begin discussing the future use of that space. Finally, Commissioner Elliott inquired whether Local Bill 4103 had been transmitted to the Governor's office.

Mayor Ash concurred with comments regarding camera installation at the mill pond and expressed appreciation for the efforts of Chief Barnes and Lt. Chase Richards in connection with the recent tragedy at Scipio Creek. She noted that she had received the Weems Hospital survey and forwarded it to City Attorney Hartman and City Manager Anderson, requesting an update at the next meeting. Mayor Ash also expressed support for the SUNS project and the Aynor workshop.

City Manager & Attorney Communications

City Manager Anderson provided the following updates:

- Finance Director Lee Mathes and Grants Manager Leslie Glaze will undergo a CDBG-DR (Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery) audit from May 11–13, conducted by the Department of Commerce, focusing on grants awarded following Hurricane Michael.
- The incoming harbor master has implemented new boat slip management and billing software called **DOCKWA**, which will automate contract finalization, billing, and slip reservations, and allow users to check availability and book slips online.
- The Police Department is obtaining quotes to install security cameras at Mill Pond, 6th Street Park, and Battery Park Marina. The city is simultaneously pursuing grant funding for a more robust camera system but will not delay action at Mill Pond pending grant approval.
- Code Enforcement Officer Brandon Henderson completed all required training and passed the state certification exam in the fundamentals of code enforcement.
- The city has issued two RFPs for disaster debris removal and disposal and for disaster debris monitoring services, with bids opening May 22nd.
- The city is in the process of creating a new official Facebook page due to access and permissions issues with the previous page. The new page will be linked to the old page to facilitate a smooth transition, and ongoing communication to the community will be provided. Commissioner Knutson asked whether the city would also mirror content to Instagram, which City Manager Anderson confirmed.

- Local Bill 4103 has not yet been transmitted to the Governor's office. A special legislative session is scheduled for the following week for budget matters, with a second special session anticipated in June for property taxes.
- With the retirement of Greg Harris, Tracy Boone, who had been filling in on a temporary basis as Public Works Supervisor, has accepted the position on a full-time basis.
- Candace Burke will join the city as the new Utility Front Office Clerk beginning May 11th.
- Colin Wefing has been hired as Special Projects Coordinator and will begin on May 20th.
- Regarding Mr. Porter's water and sewer tap at 112 Dr. Frederick Humphrey Street, City Manager Anderson reported that city crews began work that morning. An underground air vac pit was discovered to be disconnected from the main line, requiring additional repair before the tap can be completed. Mr. Porter's project has been prioritized as the first applicant on the list indicated they are not in a rush.

Commissioner George mentioned the resolution 2026-060 that was approved at the last regular meeting in regard to applying for grant funds for a carbon filtration water treatment system. Commissioner George requested that a representative from Dewberry come before the Commission to discuss their findings and provide clarification on their recommendation in an effort to inform and update the Commission. Commissioner George went on to state that the Commission has not previously been made aware of Dewberry's recommendation via a technical memorandum that was submitted to the former city manager in January 2025.

City Attorney Hartman reported that a $70,000 payment from the Denton Cove matter is expected imminently—he was informed approximately ten days prior that a check was being processed—but had not yet been received. He indicated he would pursue court enforcement promptly if payment is not received.

<u>Consent Agenda</u>

Motion to approve the Consent Agenda, including the 4.7.26 City Commission Regular Meeting Minutes, the P&Z April 13, 2026 Meeting Minutes, and the P&Z March 9, 2026 Meeting Minutes, was made by Commissioner Elliott and seconded by Commissioner George. No discussion. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Department Reports

Department reports were made available for Commission review. No discussion was held.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Elliott and seconded by Commissioner George. No further discussion. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Brenda Ash, MAYOR

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, CITY CLERK