

A Public Hearing and Regular Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on May 6, 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

Mayor Ash requested the adoption of the agenda with one amendment to include a new item number 9, which was a letter of support for FWC.

A motion was made by Commissioner Grove to adopt the agenda with stated amendment. Motion seconded by Commissioner Elliott. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

PUBLIC HEARING - 2nd Reading: Tree Ordinance 2025-02

Attorney Hartman read Ordinance 2025-02 by title and provided information about the amendment to Part 2 of Chapter 105, Article 2, Tree Protection Sections 105. Mayor Ash clarified that this was the second reading of Tree Ordinance 2025-02 and opened the floor for public comments. There were no public comments or comments from the commission. Mayor Ash closed the public hearing.

Public Comment

Carol Brasky inquired about the progress on addressing the water smell issue. Mayor Ash informed her that a report in the packet addressed this, stating that a part for the odor scrubber had been ordered and was expected to arrive around July. Brasky also asked about banning Styrofoam in the town, citing environmental concerns.

Jeanine Gedman commented on a cleanup effort, mentioning that the county had conducted cleanup on the north side for debris. She noted that mattresses and other items still needed to be addressed, and Mayor Ash assured her it would be taken care of.

Cathy Buell expressed a desire to open lines of communication on behalf of nonprofits to address challenging situations in the community.

Commissioner Croom provided updates on activities in the city and district, emphasizing the partnership between the city and county.

Frenchie Hayes requested an 11-day extension for a camp program due to the program was due to start soon, citing concerns about the recent developments etc.

Representatives from Florida A&M Cooperative Extension, Vonda Richardson and Dremel Worthen, requested consideration to maintain their space at 1 Bay Avenue or be given 5-6 months to find another location.

New Business: Resolution & Application Submission: DHR Grant for Phase IV (Harrison-Raney Bldg.)

Cindy Clark presented two board action requests. The first was for authorization to apply for a Phase 3 grant of \$300,000 from the Department of State Division of Historic Preservation for the Harrison-Raney Building. The grant would require a 25% match from the city, totaling \$75,000, with \$18,750 required in cash.

Commissioner Grove made a motion to adopt the resolution to support the application to DHR for the special categories grant in the amount of \$300,000. Commissioner Elliott seconded the motion. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: Resolution & Application Submission: HHR Grant for Phase IV (HCA Project [Warden/Books Bldg.]

Cindy Clark presented the second request for a Phase 4 grant of \$300,000 for the HCA project (Warden/Books Building). This grant also required a 25% match from the city, totaling \$75,000, with \$18,750 required in cash.

Commissioner Elliott made a motion to approve Resolution 2025-03 with the amendment of adding the \$18,750 match amount. Commissioner Grove seconded the motion.

New Business: Margaret Key Library Conceptual Landscape Master Plan Approval

Elizabeth Parkins from PALS presented a conceptual landscape master plan for the Margaret Key Library. The plan included addressing drainage issues in the parking lot and adding shade to the area. The commission discussed the ownership of the land and the permissions required for the improvements.

A motion was made by Commissioner George to authorize the County to pave the parking lot at the library, seconded by Commissioner Grove. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

A motion was made by Commissioner Grove to approve the library's conceptual landscape plan, seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: AAHS Match Request and Resolution - Raney House Phase II

Ken Essex of the Apalachicola Area Historical Society requested matching funds for a DHR grant application. He explained they're looking at Phase 2 funding after completing Phase 1, initially requesting \$60,000 in city matching funds. Mr. Essex stated that the \$300,000 grant would cover critical structural items including foundation work, gutters, and interior repairs. He emphasized this is for FY 26-27 funds, so it wouldn't affect the current budget.

Kevin Sumner, AAHS Director of Operations, clarified they are a rural community with a 25% match requirement instead of 50%. Between AAHS resources and fundraising, they have about \$17,000, and with the city's contribution would have everything needed for structural repairs.

Commissioner Grove inquired about reducing the cash requirement through in-kind contributions.

Commissioner George asked detailed questions about the total project cost and available funds. Discussion ensued about TDC grant possibilities and timing constraints, with Mr. Sumner explaining the June 1st application deadline prevents using future TDC funding as match.

Attorney Hartman clarified that passing the resolution does not compel the City to fund the request noting that the Commission would have to include it in the 26/27 FY budget to officially obligate requested funds.

After an extensive discussion, Attorney Hartman went on to read Resolution 2025-04.

A motion by Commissioner Elliott to approve Resolution 2025-04, seconded by Commissioner Grove. After discussion about financial concerns and the commission's ability to fund the request, motion carried 4-1 with Commissioner George opposing.

New Business: Proclamation - Professional Municipal Clerks Week

Commissioner Elliott made a motion to adopt the proclamation of the 56th Annual Professional Municipal Clerks Week. Commissioner Grove seconded the motion. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: Proclamation - Mayor's Election Proclamation

Attorney Hartman read the Mayor's Election Proclamation, which announced the upcoming election on Tuesday, September 2, 2025, for City Commissioner seats 3 and 4, each for a term of 3 years.

Commissioner George made a motion to approve the Mayor's Election Proclamation. Commissioner Grove seconded the motion. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: CDBG/SHIP/Hill Lighting Choices

The commission discussed lighting fixture options for a project.

Commissioner Elliott made a motion to approve option number 2, the Lumet Metroscape LED post top. Commissioner Grove seconded the motion. Motion carried, 5-0.

New Business: 251 7th Street - Karen Dennis

Karen Dennis of 224 Center Street requested the city abandon Avenue B that runs through the middle of her property. She explained that previous mayors (excluding Sandy Howse and Allen Pierce) had visited the site and declared it abandoned. The street provides no public benefit as it dead-ends into swampland, creates liability for the city, and costs the city approximately \$6,000 annually in lost tax revenue. She noted her husband had previously offered the city \$280,000 to conduct a historic overlay study that would have prevented such issues.

Discussion held.

City Planner Bree confirmed she wasn't opposed from a planning perspective and suggested two adjacent properties should be considered similarly if requested.

Attorney Hartman cautioned about setting precedent and the need for demonstrating public benefit.

Extensive discussion followed with commissioners asking questions about uniqueness of the situation, liability concerns, and precedent-setting implications. Commissioner Duncan noted similarities to the Denton Cove situation but recognized this as unique. Commissioner Elliott emphasized the liability issues given Florida's stand your ground laws and the lost tax revenue.

Ms. Dennis stressed that with a projected sale, new owners would pay \$55,000 annually in taxes versus the current \$8,000, representing a 600% increase in tax revenue.

Motion by Commissioner Grove to table this request until next month to allow questions to be answered. Second by Commissioner Duncan. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

Mayor Ash directed commissioners to submit their questions to Attorney Hartman and City Planner Bree.

New Business: Letter of Support for FWC Funding

Commissioner Grove presented a letter of support for state senator representatives regarding FWC funding for a substrate project.

Commissioner Elliott made a motion to approve the letter of support to state senator representatives for FWC funding. Commissioner Duncan seconded the motion. Motion carried, 5-0.

Unfinished Business: 2nd Reading & Adoption: Tree Ordinance 2025-02

Attorney Hartman read Ordinance 2025-02 by title.

Commissioner Elliott made a motion to adopt Ordinance 2025-02. Commissioner Grove seconded the motion. None opposed. Motion carried, 5-0.

City Manager Communications

The city manager provided brief updates on the game room situation and ongoing communications with affected parties.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

The Mayor and commissioners discussed various topics, including:

1. The situation with tenants at 1 Bay Avenue and the need to relocate due to mold issues.
2. Requests for extensions from various organizations using the affected building.
3. The impact on community programs, such as the Nature Center and its educational initiatives.
4. Parking issues at the Veterans Memorial parking lot and potential revenue opportunities.
5. Personnel matters that were suggested to be discussed with the city manager outside of the commission meeting.

Adjournment

A motion was made by Commissioner Elliott to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. Motion carried, 5-0.

Meeting adjourned.

Brenda Ash, MAYOR

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, CITY CLERK