



MINUTES

City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, March 19, 2026 – City Hall

APPROVED 4/02/2026

Invocation: Mayor Emily A. Lee

Pledge of Allegiance: Vice Mayor Gary Ashcraft

Call to Order: 6:02 p.m.

Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice:

Present: Vice Mayor Gary Ashcraft, Commissioner Willie L. Hawkins, Commissioner George Asbate, and Mayor Emily A. Lee.

Absent: Commissioner Michael Holland

1. **Agenda Update**

1.1 City Commission Meeting Agenda Update

Interim City Manager Rick Gierok reported that agenda items previously advertised for WD of America and T&S FL Partners have been withdrawn to allow refinement of the public notice and scheduling process. These items will be returned for consideration at a future meeting.

2. **Approval of Minutes**

2.1 Approval of Minutes for March 5, 2026, City Commission Meeting

Motion by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve March 5, 2026, City Commission Meeting Minutes as presented. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, and Mayor Lee

3. **Presentations**

3.1 Amazing Race Update

Events and Communications Director Cheri Moan and Events Coordinator Anne Heslop presented updates on the upcoming Amazing Race event scheduled for Saturday, March 21, 2026, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event features a 5.4-mile race with seventeen challenges, including participation from twelve charities, five individual organizations, three City departments, Eustis High School GRTC, and Target of Mount Dora. The event will conclude with a finish line festival featuring awards, food from sponsors, and mini golf for participants and volunteers. Commissioner Hawkins was acknowledged for his planned participation in the race.

4. **Audience to be Heard**

City Attorney Sasha Garcia requested comments from the audience.

Daniel DiVenanzo, a local Eustis business owner, addressed the Commission regarding his experience with City Development Services Department and expressed concerns about the City attorney's performance. He noted that four developers have contacted him seeking guidance about navigating the department. He raised issues about a PowerPoint presentation from a previous meeting that he felt contained inaccuracies regarding legal costs. He questioned why staff members can contact the City attorney without oversight and suggested the Commission consider hiring a full-time attorney instead of continuing with the current arrangement with Bowen and Schroth. He offered to have developers contact commissioners individually to share their experiences with the City Attorney.

Latoya Young, administrator of Trinity Family Medical Center, requested the Commission reconsider the closure of Prevatt Street from David Walker Drive. The closure, implemented on March 4th, has created confusion for patients accessing medical offices, with five of the six offices on Prevatt Street being medical facilities. She described how GPS systems still direct patients to use the closed route, causing delays and missed appointments. She provided Google Maps documentation showing that navigation from surrounding areas still routes traffic through the closed connection.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft inquired about the reason for the road closure. Interim City Manager Gierok explained that the road section was originally designated solely for fire access during the development review process, serving as a second means of emergency access. When additional development plans were reviewed, Lake County (who maintains David Walker Drive) required the connection to be reestablished as emergency access only due to safety concerns about sight distance issues when pulling out onto David Walker Drive.

During the discussion, Commissioners explored potential solutions which could include making the connection one-way from David Walker Drive to allow entry but require exit via Kurt Street to address safety concerns while maintaining access for the medical offices.

Brian Kirstein, Eustis resident on East Floral Avenue, addressed ongoing issues with the sewer/water flooding that occurred at his home on October 26, 2025. He reported spending over \$45,000 on repairs and expressed frustration with the City's response through Phil Martin in Risk Management. Mr. Kirstein formally requested public records which included lift station inspection reports for the twelve months prior to the incident, SCADA information for twenty-four hours before and after October 26th, and all City communications regarding his case. He requested that the City repair the backflow issue at his property, noting that the City had addressed a similar problem on East Floral Avenue the previous year, which he believes may have contributed to his flooding. Mayor Lee directed staff to work with Mr. Kirstein to better understand his concerns.

Travis Sawchuk, representing WD of America and T&S FL Partners, expressed frustration with the development agreement process. He reported submitting documents ninety days ago, with the City attorney involved sixty days ago, but receiving heavily redlined revisions on March 18, 2026 at 3:58 pm. Mr. Sawchuk described the City attorney's revisions as removing voluntary provisions and creating contradictory language. He questioned whether the City wants his development projects and expressed concern about what he characterized as negligent response times.

5. Consent Agenda

- 5.1 Resolution Number 2026-14: Approval Amending FY2025/2026 Adopted Budget for the Sales Tax (010), Governmental Grants (018) and Utility Grants Funds (048) to recognize award of FY2025/2026 grants
- 5.2 Resolution Number 2026-29: Approving a Purchase in Excess of \$100,000 for a Public Utilities Emergency Generator Replacement for Lift Station 38
- 5.3 Resolution Number 2026-31: Approval Amending FY2025/2026 Adopted Budget for the General Fund (001) to Recognize Receipt of FY2025/2026 Donation from Duke Energy
- 5.4 Resolution Number 2026-32: Authorizing Multiple Annual Purchases in Excess of \$100,000 for Services Provided by RCM Utilities, Inc. for the Eustis Public Utilities Department

Motion by Commissioner Hawkins, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve the Consent Agenda as presented. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, and Mayor Lee

6. Ordinances, Public Hearings, & Quasi Judicial Hearings

- 6.1 Resolution Number 2026-33: Consideration of Fine Reduction/Release of Lien for 2024 Dixie Avenue, Code Case 11-00088 AND 19-00835

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-33 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, providing for Commission Determination of a Code Enforcement Lien on property located at 2024 Dixie Avenue; Authorizing Implementing Actions; and Providing for an Effective Date.

Code Enforcement Officer Eric Martin presented the resolution approving a code enforcement board order to reduce outstanding liens totaling \$101,375 to \$1,600 and release liens against 2024 Dixie Avenue. The property, owned by Swiss Quality Investments LLC., was purchased from Artlee Robins, who obtained title through probate after her daughter Sonya F. Young passed away in 2022. Mr. Martin explained that the family had considered keeping the property but decided to sell it to pay for Ms. Robins medical expenses. The current applicant invested in renovating the distressed property, cleaning up violations, and requested the reduction. Commissioner Asbate confirmed the code enforcement board unanimously approved the reduction.

Summarizing, the resolution would reduce the City's receivable from \$101,375 to \$1,600, representing a one-time revenue reduction of \$99,775 to facilitate property improvement and return to productive use. The significant reduction incentivizes property rehabilitation in distressed areas, directly benefiting surrounding residents through elimination of blight and increased property values, while ensuring some cost recovery for enforcement efforts.

City Attorney Garcia opened public comments at 6:27 p.m. There being no public comment, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:27 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Asbate, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins to approve Resolution Number 2026-33. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, and Mayor Lee

6.2 Resolution Number 2026-34: Legal Action Authorization for 1402 Morin Street, Code Enforcement Case 21-00851, 22-00087, 22-00162, 24-00835 and 24-01020

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-34 by title: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; Approving a Code Enforcement Board Action to Authorize the City Attorney to take Legal Action to Resolve Outstanding Code Violations at 1402 Morin Street.

Code Enforcement Officer Eric Martin presented authorization for legal action regarding persistent violations at 1402 Morin Street. The property owner, Jason Kirby, operates an automotive repair facility from his homesteaded residential property, accumulating fines exceeding \$500,000 across five cases dating to 2021. One case alone has accrued \$113,500 in fines. Mr. Martin described unsuccessful enforcement efforts, with Mr. Kirby ignoring notices and continuing operations despite multiple code enforcement board appearances.

Mr. Martin detailed the nuisance conditions including vehicles parked perpendicularly in the right-of-way, a semi-truck being repaired on-site, fifty-five-gallon barrels of oil, scattered car parts, and an engine block in the yard. He noted safety concerns for children walking to the nearby elementary school and complaints from neighboring businesses. Two vehicle thefts occurred on the property during operations.

City Attorney Garcia explained that because the property is homesteaded, the City cannot foreclose but can pursue money judgments against non-exempt personal property and seek injunctive relief. Violations of a court injunction could result in contempt charges and potential jail time. Commissioner Hawkins questioned enforcement effectiveness, while Mr. Martin emphasized the need to pursue all available legal remedies.

Police Chief Craig Capri offered to meet with the property owner to seek voluntary compliance before legal action proceeds.

Code Enforcement Officer Martin explained that the legal action represents a one-time expense for court proceedings funded through the General Fund, with potential recovery of over \$500,000 in accumulated fines if successful. The enforcement protects residents from environmental hazards, maintains neighborhood property values, ensures pedestrian safety near the elementary school, and upholds zoning integrity that preserves residential character for all homeowners in the area.

City Attorney Garcia opened public comments at 6:41 p.m. There being no public comment, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:41 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Asbate, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution Number 2026-34. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, and Mayor Lee

6.3 Resolution Number 2026-35: Adoption of Resolution Establishing the Surplus Residential Lot and Infill Housing Development Program and Authorization to Issue Request for Proposals

City Attorney Garcia read Resolution Number 2026-35. A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, Establishing the City of Eustis Surplus Residential Lot and Infill Housing Development Program; Declaring certain City-Owned

Residential Parcels Surplus for Purposes of Affordable Housing and Infill Development; Authorizing Disposition of such Parcels within and Outside the Community Redevelopment Area; Authorizing the Use of Competitive Solicitations for Development Partners; Providing Program Requirements including Development Agreements, Affordability Covenants, and Development Milestones; Providing for Administration of the Program; and Providing an Effective Date.

City Attorney Garcia presented the resolution establishing the surplus residential lot and infill housing development program for affordable housing and infill development. The program covers City-owned residential parcels both within and outside the Community Redevelopment Area, utilizing competitive solicitations to select qualified development partners. The resolution authorizes an RFP process for four initial parcels on Gould, Getford, Dawes, and Pinkney Streets.

City Attorney Garcia explained the program requirements including development agreements with milestones tied to building permit issuance and certificate of occupancy completion. Affordability covenants will restrict properties for thirty years, prioritizing households at eighty percent or less of Area Median Income (AMI), with maximum eligibility at one hundred and twenty percent AMI. If development milestones are not met, properties revert to City ownership. However, the infill-development strengthens neighborhoods, increases property tax base, and addresses regional housing affordability challenges with built-in accountability measures.

Mayor Lee praised the reversion provision, noting past issues with properties given away without completion of promised development.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:46 pm. There being no public comment, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:46 pm.

Motion by Commissioner Hawkins, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Resolution Number 2026-35. Motion passed on the following vote:

VOTING YEA: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Mayor Lee

- 6.4 Explanation of Ordinance Numbers 24-05A, 24-06A, and 24-07A: Repeal of Previously Adopted Ordinance Numbers 24-05, 24-06, and 24-07 and Adoption of Replacement Ordinance Numbers 24-05A, 24-06A, and 24-07A for Annexation, Assignment of Future Land Use, and Assignment of Design District for Property with Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 And 1213347

Second Reading of Ordinance Number 24-05A: Repeal of Previously Adopted Ordinance Numbers 24-05

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 24-05A, Ordinance 24-06A and Ordinance 24-07A.

An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida, Repealing Ordinance Number 24-05 and Adopting a Replacement Ordinance providing for the Voluntary Annexation of Certain Real Property into the Corporate Limits of the City of Eustis pursuant to Section 171.044, Florida Statutes; Providing Legislative Findings and Recitals; Providing for the Incorporation of a Complete Metes-and-Bounds Legal Description and Location Map; Providing for Filing and Notice Requirements; Providing for Severability; and Providing an Effective Date.

An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, Repealing Ordinance Number 24-06 and Adopting a Replacement Small-Scale Amendment to the City of Eustis Comprehensive Plan Pursuant to Section 163.3187, Florida Statutes; Providing Legislative Findings and Recitals; Changing the Future Land Use Designation of Certain Real Property Generally Identified by Lake County Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347; Providing for Incorporation by Reference of a Complete Metes-and-Bounds Legal Description and Future Land Use Map Amendment on File with the City Clerk; Providing for Severability; and Providing for an Effective Date.

An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, Repealing Ordinance Number 24-07 and Adopting a Replacement Ordinance Assigning a Design District Designation to Certain Real Property Generally Identified by Lake County Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347; Providing Legislative Findings and Recitals; Providing for Incorporation by Reference of a Complete Metes-and-Bounds Legal Description and Design District Map on File with the City Clerk; Providing for Severability; and Providing for an Effective Date Contingent upon Annexation.

City Attorney Garcia presented the second readings of corrective ordinances 24-05A, 24-06A, and 24-07A, which repeal and replace previously adopted ordinances 24-05, 24-06, and 24-07. The replacements include parcel identification numbers that were omitted from the original ordinances for voluntary annexation of parcels with alternate key numbers 1213355 and 1213347, along with corresponding future land use and design district assignments.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:47 pm. There being no public comment, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:47 pm.

Commissioner Hawkins made a motion to approve Ordinance 24-05A, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Mayor Lee

6.5 Second Reading of Ordinance Number 24-06A: Repeal of Ordinance 24-06 and Re Adoption of 24-06A, Assignment of Future Land Use for Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternate Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:49 pm. There being no public comment, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:49 pm.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft made a motion to approve Ordinance 24-06A, Seconded by Commissioner Hawkins. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Mayor Lee

6.6 Second Reading of Ordinance Number 24-07A: Repeal of Ordinance 24-07 and Re Adoption of 24-07A, Assignment of Design District for Voluntary Annexation of Parcels with Alternat Key Numbers 1213355 and 1213347

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:50 pm. There being no public comments offered, the City Attorney closed the public hearing at 6:50 pm.

Commissioner Hawkins made a motion to approve Ordinance No. 24-07A, Seconded by Vice Mayor Ashcraft. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Mayor Lee

6.7 First Reading of Ordinance Number 2026-13: Conditional Use for an Accessory Dwelling Unit at 228 S Center Street (AK 1631157)

City Attorney Garcia read Ordinance Number 2026-13. An Ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Lake County, Florida, Approving a Conditional Use Permit for an Accessory Dwelling Unit to an Existing Single-Family Residence in the Suburban Residential (SR) Future Land Use District on Approximately 0.33 Acres Located at 228 South Center Street.

Senior Planner Kyle Wilkes presented the conditional use permit request for an 879-square-foot freestanding accessory dwelling unit at 228 South Center Street. The applicant, AAA Remodeling and Services, represents property owners Terry Lowmiller and Lisa Lane on the 0.33-acre parcel in the suburban residential future land use district and urban neighborhood design district.

Mr. Wilkes explained that accessory dwelling units require conditional use permits in suburban residential districts, though they are permitted by right in other residential zones. The proposed accessory dwelling unit (ADU) meets setback requirements of at least five feet from side and rear property lines and will utilize architectural elements similar to the existing home. The project will increase impervious surface ratio to thirty-five-point one percent, remaining well below the forty percent maximum allowed. Staff received one call from a concerned neighbor about the size and intensity relative to the property size. The applicant confirmed the ADU will have wood siding consistent with the main house and adequate driveway parking for both structures.

City Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 6:57 pm.

Mateusz Arias, AAA Remolding and Services stated he was there representing the owners of the property. They are hoping to obtain a conditional use permit to allow a structure near the rear of the property. It is a low impact residential use that will remain consistent with the surrounding neighborhood. They would comply with all required setbacks.

There being no further public comments, City Attorney Garcia closed the public hearing at 6:59 pm.

Motion by Vice Mayor Ashcraft to approve Ordinance 2026-13, Seconded by Commissioner Asbate. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Commissioner Hawkins, Commissioner Asbate, Mayor Lee

7. Future Agenda Items and Comments

7.1 City Commission

Commissioner Asbate expressed concern about reports that a large marijuana company is seeking to establish a major distribution and sales facility in downtown Eustis. He discovered that the marijuana dispensary limitation ordinance previously discussed by the Commission was never completed due to SB 180 restrictions on comprehensive plan amendments. He requested immediate action to implement the previously discussed three-dispensary limit and downtown prohibition to prevent unwanted development before the legislative session concludes.

City Attorney Garcia explained that SB 180 created restrictions on municipal comprehensive plan amendments, including those covering marijuana, hookah, tattoo, and massage parlor uses. She noted that similar to the land development regulations, the City could proceed with conditional ordinances that would be subject to state law changes.

Commissioner Asbate also requested updates on the Spring Ridge community's repayment agreement for approximately \$700,000 in City expenses. He expressed concern about potential delays given new legislation allowing HOAs to disband by majority vote, which could jeopardize repayment.

City Attorney Garcia reported ongoing discussions with the association's attorney regarding budget contributions and engineering reviews, with a draft agreement in development.

Commissioner Asbate suggested a thirty-day deadline for resolution or moving to special assessment procedures.

Regarding John Keating's development agreement, City Attorney Garcia reported that a draft was provided in December with the last meeting on January 14th, but no response has been received from Keating's counsel despite expectations for revisions or feedback.

Commissioner Asbate welcomed City Manager Gierok and expressed optimism about the City's future direction.

Commissioner Hawkins praised the new printed commission packet format and commended Parks and Recreation for the Teen Night Out event that attracted nearly forty teenagers on a Friday evening. He also mentioned the successful 4th Annual Cops and Bobbers Fishing event.

Police Chief Capri detailed the Cops and Bobbers event, which featured sixty-five children, twelve police officers, and twenty-two volunteers. He thanked organizers Elena and Ed Pasek, Fire Chief Swanson, Eric Martin for the food service, Men of the Cross volunteers, and the Alee Academy for partnership. The Chief noted plans for dock improvements to enhance future events and kayak programs.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft requested county discussions about extending the right turn lane on County Road 44 near the Stavros Restaurant to alleviate traffic congestion. He also advocated reviving the Downtown Business Alliance to improve City-business relationships and reported the City softball team's 2-0 record. He promoted the upcoming Japanese Festival on March 28th it will run from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., featuring over fifty vendors and a visit from Secretary of State Cord Byrd.

Commissioner Hawkins raised concerns about the flooding house owned on Estes, which has flooded repeatedly since 2010. He reported contacting a county commissioner about potential solutions, with the county considering purchasing the property for a retention pond. He requested a future agenda item to discuss City participation in a solution.

7.2 City Manager

Interim City Manager Gierok outlined several ongoing initiatives to keep commissioners informed. Palmetto Plaza has been resurfaced with in-house design underway for playground installation and parking improvements on the southern side. Cemetery construction continues with the Veterans Memorial targeted for a Memorial Day ribbon cutting and Greenwood improvements scheduled for early summer completion.

The Department of Transportation issued notice to proceed with Coolidge Avenue improvements, with a preconstruction meeting scheduled for Tuesday and construction

beginning shortly thereafter. A Capital Improvement Program Workshop is scheduled for May 22nd at 9 a.m., covering both five-year planning and midyear project reviews.

The downtown master plan workshop is scheduled for Tuesday, April 7th from 1-3 p.m., with Dr. Levey contracted to facilitate under a continuing services agreement. The economic development marketing services bid attracted ten submitters, with the selection committee completing short-list recommendations.

Mr. Gierok reported progress on the City Attorney evaluation form, incorporating commissioner feedback with a revised version expected by afternoon. The timeline includes one week for completion followed by individual meetings. County discussions continue regarding road transfers including Lakeshore Drive and David Walker, though budget impacts require careful consideration.

Fire Chief Swanson received regional recognition with the Chief Craig Haun Leadership Award from the Central Florida Fire Chiefs Association, submitted by Mount Dora's Chief Hightower, with family present at the ceremony.

7.3 City Attorney

City Attorney Garcia reported no additional items requiring discussion.

7.4 Mayor

Mayor Lee reported continued expansion of the Butterflies through the Eustis in Bloom program with new installations at Methodist Church and Trout Lake Center, and potential participation with the Lake County Fair. She attended the League of Cities luncheon featuring Dr. Levey as speaker.

Mayor Lee emphasized the importance of commissioners communicating with each other about their individual actions to avoid duplication of efforts and maintain coordination, citing a recent incident where multiple commissioners became involved in the same issue without awareness of each other's participation.

8. Adjournment: 7:35 p.m.

**These minutes reflect the actions taken and portions of the discussion during the meeting. To review the entire discussion concerning any agenda item, go to www.eustis.org and click on the video for the meeting. If available, the video recording may be accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/@EustisComRel/streams> or an audio recording may be requested from the office of the City Clerk.*


CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk


EMILY A. LEE
Mayor/Commissioner