



**City Commission**  
**REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**  
February 26, 2026

A **Regular Meeting** of the City of Winter Garden City Commission was called to order by Mayor Rees at 6:30 pm. at City Hall, 300 West Plant Street, Winter Garden, Florida. An opening invocation and pledge of allegiance were given.

**Present:**

Mayor John Rees  
Commissioner District 1 - Lisa L. Bennett  
Commissioner District 2 - Iliana R. Jones  
Commissioner District 3 - Chloe Johnson  
Commissioner District 4 - Colin Sharman

**Also Present:**

City Manager - Jon C. Williams  
City Attorney - Dan Langley  
City Clerk - Ronisha Martin

**1. Approval of Minutes**

A. Regular Meeting Minutes — February 12, 2026

**Motion by Commissioners Bennett and Johnson simultaneously to approve the regular meeting minutes of February 12, 2026, as submitted. Seconded by Commissioner Sharman and carried unanimously 5-0.**

**2. PRESENTATION**

A. Proclamation 26-03 – Proclaiming Earl Brigham Day was read and presented by Mayor and the City Commission. Congressman Webster stated that Mr. Brigham is a great man, recognizing his fifty years of positive impact. He shared that the Congressional Record preserves such meaningful moments in the archives and expressed gratitude and personal friendship.

Earl Brigham expressed gratitude for the honor and reflected on fifty years of growth. He thanked loyal customers for their support and thanked Congressman Webster, the mayor, and city leaders for the recognition.

**3. First Reading and Public Hearing of Proposed Ordinance**

A. **ORDINANCE 26-08:** AN ORDINANCE BY THE CITY WINTER GARDEN, FLORIDA, AMENDING CHAPTER 18, ARTICLE II, DIVISIONS 1, 2 AND 3 OF THE CITY OF WINTER GARDEN CODE OF ORDINANCES CONCERNING THE FLORIDA BUILDING CODE; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION, SEVERABILITY, CONFLICTS, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE  
City Attorney Dan Langley read Ordinance 26-08 by title only. Assistant City Manager for Public Services Steve Pash stated that the ordinance would amend Chapter 18, Divisions 1, 2, and 3 to make the local regulations consistent with state statutes and would change the method of building valuations from using the Southern Building Code to using values from the International Building Code. Staff recommended approval.

There was discussion on whether permit valuations can be adjusted if projects are delayed. Staff clarified that valuations are set at the time of permit issuance and are not adjusted later, though additional inspection fees may apply if inspections fail.

Mayor Rees opened the public hearing; hearing and seeing none, he closed the public hearing.

**Motion by Commissioner Bennett to approve Ordinance 26-08 with the second reading and public hearing being scheduled for March 12, 2026. Seconded by Commissioner Jones and carried unanimously 5-0.**

#### **4. Regular Business**

- A. **RESOLUTION 26-03:** A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF WINTER GARDEN, FLORIDA, RELATING TO THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION CLEAN WATER STATE REVOLVING FUND LOAN PROGRAM, SPECIAL APPROPRIATION FOR HURRICANES HELENE AND MILTON AND THE HAWAI'I WILDFIRES; MAKING FINDINGS; AUTHORIZING THE LOAN APPLICATION; AUTHORIZING THE LOAN AGREEMENT; DESIGNATING AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE; PROVIDING ASSURANCES; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTS, SEVERABILITY, AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE

City Attorney Dan Langley read Resolution 26-03 by title only. Assistant City Manager for Public Services Steve Pash stated that the resolution would designate the city manager as the authorized representative to apply for an additional State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan related to hurricane damage. He noted that the loan would be for \$19,166,503 for the wastewater plant, with fifty percent forgivable and the remaining fifty percent at zero percent interest. Staff recommended approval.

**Motion by Commissioner Johnson to approve Resolution 26-03. Seconded by Commissioner Sharman and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- B. **Recommendation to approve purchase of twelve Molok Waste Containers for installation at Tucker Ranch and throughout downtown in the amount of \$70,680**  
Assistant City Manager for Public Services Steve Pash stated that staff recommend purchasing twelve Molok semi-underground trash containers. He noted staff have worked with the company for several years and tested units at city facilities and a commercial site, which demonstrated improved odor control and cleanliness. Furthermore, Mr. Pash informed that four units will be installed at Tucker Ranch, with the remaining eight placed throughout the downtown area. Staff recommended approval.

There was discussion regarding the container design, capacity, collection process, and plans for future equipment.

**Motion by Commissioner Sharman to approve purchase of twelve Molok Waste Containers for installation at Tucker Ranch and throughout downtown in the amount of \$70,680. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- C. Recommendation to approve purchase of Aurelian AI system for the Communications Center and authorize City Manager sign Master Services Agreement for a three-year contract in the amount of \$55,000 per year

Police Chief Steve Graham stated that the Police Communication Center handles over ninety thousand calls annually, with two-thirds being administrative. He noted that the system would reduce workload, create a less stressful environment for telecommunicators, and, if approved, reduce staffing by one full-time equivalent under a three-year contract.

Mr. Graham acknowledged David Jones from Aurelian AI to give a brief presentation. Mr. Jones explained that their system automates non-emergency administrative calls by detecting emergent calls, routing routine inquiries to the proper department, and capturing information for follow-up. He informed that a study of the Police Department's administrative line showed over seventy percent of calls could be automated, potentially reducing call volume by fifty percent and allowing telecommunicators to focus on 911 calls.

There was discussion regarding staffing impacts, workload reduction, system functionality, and potential benefits for telecommunicator efficiency and emergency call response.

**Motion by Commissioner Sharman to approve purchase of Aurelian AI system for the Communications Center and authorize City Manager to sign Master Services Agreement for a three-year contract in the amount of \$55,000 per year. Seconded by Commissioner Bennett and Jones simultaneously and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- D. BOARD APPOINTMENT: Code Enforcement Board

Police Chief Steve Graham stated the resignation of former Code Enforcement Board member Eddie Young and recommended the appointment of one new member for the unexpired seat.

**Motion by Commissioner Sharman to appoint Christopher Wyszynski to the Code Enforcement Board to fill the unexpired seat. Seconded by Commissioner Jones and Johnson simultaneously and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- E. Recommendation to award Purchase Order to Mead and Hunt, Inc. to design Smith Street Reclaimed Water Ground Storage Tank and Pumping Station in the amount of \$618,631

City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that this proposal is for the design of a 6-million-gallon reclaimed water ground storage tank and pump station at 440 East Smith Street. He informed that the ground storage tanks will receive reclaimed water from a 20-inch transmission main from the Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant. Mr. Monahan

further noted that this project is part of the short-term plan (RW-2) in the Reclaimed Water Facility Plan, which will allow the city to use at least ninety percent of reclaimed water and reduce reliance on supplemental sources. Staff recommended approval.

There was discussion on the project timeline, integration with existing facilities, construction impacts, and expected benefits for reclaimed water use.

**Motion by Commissioner Jones to award Purchase Order to Mead and Hunt, Inc. to design Smith Street Reclaimed Water Ground Storage Tank and Pumping Station in the amount of \$618,631. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and Sharman simultaneously and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- F. Recommendation to award Purchase Order to Mead and Hunt, Inc. to design a 20-inch Reclaimed Water Transmission Main for Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant in the amount of \$412,124

City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that this proposal is for the design of a 20-inch reclaimed water transmission main to convey water from the Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant to the future 6-million-gallon storage tank and pump station at 440 East Smith Street. He noted that this is a short-term project (RW-1) in the Reclaimed Water Facility Plan and will help the city use at least ninety percent of reclaimed water, reducing reliance on supplemental Conserv II water. Staff recommended approval.

**Motion by Commissioner Sharman to award Purchase Order to Mead and Hunt, Inc. to design a 20-inch Reclaimed Water Transmission Main for Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Plant in the amount of \$412,124. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- G. Recommendation to award Purchase Order to T.D. Thomson Construction, Inc. for Roadway Underdrain in Valencia Shores in the amount of \$157,595.25

City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that this is a request for a purchase order for roadway underdrain at Valencia Shores. He explained that the subdivision, developed in the early 1970s, was recently resurfaced, but high groundwater is causing the new pavement to lift due to the absence of cracks that previously allowed drainage. He noted that the underdrain will be installed along approximately seven hundred and twenty-five feet on both sides of the roadway to lower groundwater levels and prevent further pavement issues, after which pavement repairs will be completed using an existing contract with Middlesex Paving. Staff recommended approval.

**Motion by Commissioner Jones to award Purchase Order to T.D. Thomson Construction, Inc. for Roadway Underdrain in Valencia Shores in the amount of \$157,595.25. Seconded by Commissioner Sharman and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- H. Recommendation to approve Purchase Order with Middlesex Paving LLC, for resurfacing services in the amount of \$1,051,258.50

City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that the Fiscal Year 2026 street resurfacing project includes milling and resurfacing of city roadways that have exceeded their service life,

including Summer Street, East Lafayette Street, South Boyd Street, Miller Street, and Maple Street, as well as Sterling Pointe and Fullers Crossing Phase III. He noted that the work will be completed through a piggyback agreement with Orange County Contract. Staff recommended approval.

**Motion by Commissioner Sharman to approve Purchase Order with Middlesex Paving LLC, for resurfacing services in the amount of \$1,051,258.50. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried unanimously 5-0.**

- I. Recommendation to approve SPECIAL EVENT - Rotary Club of Winter Garden - Evening at the Pops Concert Event at Newton Park on Saturday, March 28, 2026, and waive the \$1000 permit fee, subject to conditions

Planning Director Kelly Carson stated that the Rotary Club of Winter Garden requests holding their annual Evening at the Pops Concert at Newton Park. She noted the event date, event set up and activities being the same as the previous year and that the musicians would be The Plant Street Pops Orchestra. Ms. Carson further informed that a formal letter was submitted requesting to waive the \$1000 permit fee due to the event being a fundraiser which is a charitable organization (501 (C)(3)). Staff recommended approval.

**Motion by Commissioner Bennett to approve SPECIAL EVENT - Rotary Club of Winter Garden - Evening at the Pops Concert Event at Newton Park on Saturday, March 28, 2026, and waive the \$1000 permit fee, subject to conditions. Seconded by Commissioner Sharman and carried unanimously 5-0.**

**Mayor Rees** stated that before public comments there would be a presentation given. He noted that the presentation is to address community concerns regarding recent downtown changes. He emphasized the city's long-standing investment in the community and commitment to preserving the character and charm of downtown.

**Planning Director Kelly Carson** stated that the presentation is intended to provide clarity on the city's role in downtown development and to outline the tools available to maintain the area's vitality. She noted that recent property acquisitions and changes to small businesses have raised public concern and emphasized the city's commitment to preserving the small-town character of downtown. Ms. Carson explained that while the city cannot regulate private property sales or lease agreements, it actively monitors development and uses available planning tools to support local businesses and maintain the unique character of the area. Ms. Carson then acknowledged City Attorney Dan Langley to speak regarding the legal framework.

**City Attorney Dan Langley** explained that the city has legal limitations regarding private property transactions, stating that restricting property sales or lease agreements could violate constitutional protections, including contract and property rights under both the Florida and U.S. Constitutions. He further noted that attempts to prohibit national chains could conflict with federal commerce protections and expose the City to legal challenges. Mr. Langley also referenced state property rights laws, including the Bert J. Harris Act,

which limits government actions that burden private property rights.

**Planning Director Kelly Carson** stated that while the city cannot block property sales, leases, or national chains directly, it has legal authority to protect downtown's character through zoning, land-use regulations, architectural standards, building setbacks, and signage requirements. She noted that all new or modified buildings downtown are reviewed by the Architecture Review and Historic Preservation Board, which helps maintain the historic charm. She explained that these standards can make it more difficult for national chains to locate downtown while supporting small, locally owned businesses. Ms. Carson added that Winter Garden's protections are among the most stringent in the area and that the city can further strengthen them by updating the historic district overlay code, refining signage and building height rules, and monitoring state regulations.

**Economic Director Marc Hutchinson** stated that in response to recent property changes affecting local businesses, staff have actively worked to help impacted merchants, including Polka Dotz and Three Birds Cafe, secure alternative locations within historic downtown. Furthermore, he informed that staff explored options, contacted tenants, and engaged in discussions, primarily focusing on side streets near Plant Street due to limited availability on the main corridor. He noted that one business owner expressed conditional interest in relocating; not all efforts were successful. Mr. Hutchinson emphasized that the city would continue to assist these businesses to ensure they remain part of the downtown community.

## 5. Matters From Public

Sheri Heitker, 135 Oak Laurel Drive, Winter Garden, Florida, expressed concerns about the consolidation of downtown property ownership, potential absentee ownership, and the risk of successful small businesses leaving. She urged the city to monitor vacant properties and ensure owners are actively leasing spaces.

Cheri Janetzke, 234 Stanton Estates Circle, Winter Garden, Florida, praised the downtown revitalization efforts but expressed concerns about a single owner acquiring multiple downtown properties. She urged the city to use political leverage, incentives, and marketing to encourage the new owner to maintain active businesses.

Katie Bush, South Highland Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, expressed concerns about vacant homes in the neighborhood and requested the commission consider strengthening property maintenance regulation and implementing a vacant property registration program.

Heidi Hardman, 505 Macchi Avenue, Oakland, Florida, and owner of Polka Dotz, expressed concern over her lease termination, lack of transparency from the property owner, and the impact on small businesses. She emphasized that residents and businesses play a key role in shaping downtown's future.

Joseph Richardson, 220 North Highland Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, voiced concerns about the exclusivity of the meeting invocation, noting it may exclude residents of different faiths or non-faiths. He suggested a silent or inclusive moment of reflection instead.

**Mayor Rees** stated that each commission has an opportunity to pray in rotation, focusing on seeking knowledge and wisdom to make decisions. He further clarified that the intention is not to exclude anyone.

Dylon Torres, 15514 Firelight Drive, Winter Garden, Florida, expressed concerns over city finances and tax relief for small businesses.

**Mayor Rees** noted he could meet with the City Manager to discuss it further.

Tayler Boyer, 445 Newhearth Circle, Winter Garden, Florida, shared that she moved to Winter Garden for its small-town charm but is concerned about one investor acquiring significant property. She urged leadership to protect zoning decisions, prioritize residents, and promote transparency and community engagement.

Christy Reynold, 22 North Brock Street, Oakland, Florida, and owner of Doxology, thanked the city for supporting small businesses and encouraged unity. She urged residents not to boycott local businesses and instead continue supporting them through shopping local and maintaining community unity.

Ken Brown, 432 Newhearth Circle, Winter Garden, Florida, expressed concern about potential state homestead exemption changes, warning they could reduce local revenues and shift financial burdens to municipalities. He encouraged the city to educate the public and advocate at the state level. Mr. Brown also shared a personal anecdote emphasizing perspective and appreciation for the community.

**City Manager Jon C. Williams** informed of a document created called Tax Facts, available on the city's website, explaining the potential financial impact of the proposed homestead exemption changes on local services. Mr. Williams encouraged residents to review the information, stay informed, and reach out to their state representative to share their concerns.

Norine Dworkin, VoxPopuli news organization of Winter Garden, shared information about \$500 journalism scholarship being awarded to a public high school senior pursuing journalism. She noted that applications are due March 20, 2026, with additional details available on their website.

Bob Buchanan, 148 Roper Drive, Winter Garden, Florida encouraged residents to stay informed by reviewing information posted on the city's website, noting that many decisions, such as variances, are publicly noticed in advance. He also expressed appreciation for community engagement.

**6. Matters From City Attorney** – There were no items.

**7. Matters From City Manager - Jon C. Williams**

City Manager Jon C. Williams commended staff on the success of the Music Festival.

## 8. Matters From Mayor and Commissioners

**Commissioner Lisa L. Bennett** thanked staff and residents for attending and sharing their voices, emphasizing that the city listens, cares, and is committed to the community.

**Commissioner Iliana R. Jones** thanked residents for attending and sharing their concerns and thanked staff for a successful music festival.

**Commissioner Chloe Johnson** thanked staff for their hard work and encouraged residents to stay engaged and attend commission meetings to remain informed about city matters.

**Commissioner Colin Sharman** spoke of financial limitations regarding private property matters, noting that funding impacts what actions the city can take, and encouraged positive thinking and community involvement.

**Mayor John Rees** shared that shortly after becoming mayor, the city conducted a strategic planning process with residents, business owners, and the city commission. He noted that through that process, the city established its mission, vision, core values, and key performance indicators, which remain unchanged and continue to guide the city's direction. He thanked the attendees for a polite and orderly meeting.

## 9. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

APPROVED:

\_\_\_\_\_/S/\_\_\_\_\_  
Mayor John Rees

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_/S/\_\_\_\_\_  
Interim City Clerk Ronisha Martin