



**CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA**  
**MARCH 3, 2026, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING**  
**OFFICIAL MINUTES**

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Watford called the regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on March 3, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast (SE) 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue (AVE), Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida (FL). The invocation was offered by Interim Pastor Tom Pasquarella of Canal Point Baptist Church; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member Chandler.

**II. ATTENDANCE**

City Clerk Lane Gamiotea called the roll. Members physically present to establish a quorum: Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Vice Mayor Monica M. Clark, Council Members Noel A. Chandler, Robert "Bob" Jarriel, and David R. McAuley.

**III. AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMENTS**

A. There were no modifications made to the published agenda.

B. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to adopt the agenda as published.  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**

C. No comment cards were received for public participation for issues not on the agenda.

**IV. PROCLAMATIONS**

A. Mayor Watford proclaimed the month of March 2026, as Irish American Heritage Month, **Exhibit 1**. The Proclamation was presented to Mr. Greg Seán Canning of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America and was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, by 1776 nearly 300,000 Irish nationals had emigrated to the American Colonies and played a crucial role in America's War for Independence. Five signers of the Declaration of Independence were of Irish descent and three signers were Irish born. Irish Americans helped to fashion a system of government for our young Nation; and, twenty-two Presidents have proudly proclaimed their Irish American heritage; and Whereas, in 1792 Irish born James Hoban provided the architectural plans for the White House and served as one of the supervising architects for the construction of the Capitol; and Whereas, Irish born Commodore John Barry was recognized by the United States Congress in September of 2002 as the "First Flag Officer of the United States Navy" and fought the last sea battle of the American Revolution off the coast of FL. In 1813, Captain Oliver Perry, an Irish American, achieved a major naval victory in the Battle of Lake Erie; and Whereas, in 1942, the five Sullivan brothers made the ultimate sacrifice for democracy and freedom during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal and later had the Destroyer, the USS Sullivan commissioned in their memory. The Irish first came to Spanish "La Florida" in the 1500's, first as missionaries and mercenary soldiers and then as planters, traders, businessmen, doctors, and administrators; and, three of the Spanish Governors of "La Florida" were Irish military officers; and Whereas, Fr. Richard Arthur, an Irish-born priest from Limerick, was appointed parish priest for St. Augustine in 1597 and ecclesiastical judge of "La Florida," Andrew Jackson, whose family came from county Antrim, served as Florida's military governor following its acquisition by the United States; and Whereas, Irish Americans, since America's inception, have provided and continue to provide leadership and service to the nation's political, business, and religious establishments; and Whereas, it is fitting and proper to celebrate the rich cultural heritage and the many valuable contributions of Irish Americans. Now Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford, Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Okeechobee, FL, do hereby proclaim March 2026, as Irish American Heritage Month in Okeechobee and further call upon all citizens to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of all those Irish Americans who have provided leadership and service to their state, counties, and local communities."**

B. Mayor Watford proclaimed March 9 through 15, 2026, as Flood Awareness Week, **Exhibit 2**. The Proclamation was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, the City of Okeechobee has experienced severe weather in the past in the form of extreme rainfall or tropical system events resulting in flooding in riverine and lacustrine areas, and this flooding has caused damage and flood losses to homes and buildings in all areas whether they are high risk special flood hazard areas or low to moderate risk flood zones; and Whereas, the City of Okeechobee is a voluntary participant in the National Flood Insurance Program that provides residents with the opportunity to protect themselves against flood loss through the purchase of flood insurance at reduced insurance premium rates as well as setting higher regulatory standards to reduce the flood risk and potential flood damage to their property; and Whereas, the reduction of loss of life and property damage can be achieved when appropriate flood preparedness, control, and mitigation measures are taken before a flood; and Whereas, public education and awareness of potential weather hazards and methods of protection are critical to the health, safety and welfare of residents, the Florida Floodplain Managers Association, have declared the week of March 9 through 15, 2026, as Flood Awareness Week to promote awareness and increase knowledge of flood risk, the availability of flood insurance, flood protection methods, and how to prepare for emergencies."**

IV. PROCLAMATIONS CONTINUED

- B. Continued. Now, Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford, Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Okeechobee, FL, do hereby proclaim the week of March 9 through 15, 2026, as Flood Awareness Week in the City of Okeechobee and further encourage the citizens of Okeechobee to increase their knowledge of how to protect themselves and their property from flooding.”

V. CONSENT AGENDA

- A. Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to dispense with the reading and approve the February 17, 2026, Minutes [as presented in **Exhibit 3**].  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**

VI. NEW BUSINESS

- A. City property owner Mrs. Sandra Pearce McAuley approached the City Council with proposed changes to the Abandonment of Right-of-Way procedures and fees, advising the current process is costly and arduous. Highlighting the City stands to benefit from these abandonments by being released from liability and putting the property onto the tax roll. Aside from the costs, the petitioner is at the mercy of the five public utility companies as they must obtain written permission from each. She found it difficult to contact the companies who do not have a local office as they were not returning her calls/emails. Mrs. McAuley ended by stating her cost was less than many petitioners as she was able to complete most of the legwork herself. She obtained a quote of \$4,000.00 to outsource it. **It was the consensus of the City Council to have staff reevaluate the Abandonment Petition process, as well to set a timeframe in which the utility companies must respond to petitioners. Recommended amendments will need to be brought back to the City Council before being submitted as a Land Development Regulation Text Amendment.** The document Mrs. McAuley read during her presentation has been added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 10**.
- B. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to approve the Master Development Agreement Amendment No. 1 for Mallard Landing [as presented in **Exhibit 4**].  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**
- C. Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Council Member Chandler to approve an Agreement with Culpepper & Terpening, Inc. under RFQ No. ADM 01-32-07-21, in the amount of \$11,205.00 for Professional Engineering and Surveying Services with Design and Permitting for a dog park proposal on SE 7<sup>th</sup> Street (ST) [as presented in **Exhibit 5**]. **During discussion the City Council requested staff to obtain and provide them with more information from other municipalities with dog parks to compare the cost of maintenance required. Motion and Second Withdrawn from the floor.**
- D. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Council Member McAuley to approve a Grant Agreement with the State of Florida Department of Commerce for resurfacing the roads in the [City of Okeechobee] Commerce [Center] and Northeast 9<sup>th</sup> ST to North Parrott AVE/US Highway 441, in the amount of \$1,200,000.00 [as presented in **Exhibit 6**].  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**
- E. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to award a contract with B&B Site Development, Inc. to begin Phase I Roadway Work in the Park Street Commerce Center not to exceed \$677,326.00 [as presented in **Exhibit 7**].  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**
- F. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1327, amending the Elections Chapter 26 of the Code of Ordinances by removing the Office of the City Clerk as an elected position, repealing Sections superseded by the 2022 Charter or Interlocal Agreement with the Supervisor of Elections, changing the General Election Qualifying Period from August to June, amending the time period for Noticing City Elections, and clarifying certain procedures [as presented in **Exhibit 8**].  
**Motion Carried Unanimously.**

Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteaguero read into the record the title of proposed Ordinance No. 1327 as follows: **“AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FL; AMENDING THE CODE OF ORDINANCES CHAPTER 26-ELECTIONS, BY REMOVING THE ELECTED OFFICE OF THE CITY CLERK AND REPEALING VARIOUS SECTIONS AS SUPERSEDED BY THE 2022 CITY CHARTER; CHANGING THE QUALIFYING PERIOD TO JUNE FOR CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES DURING A GENERAL ELECTION; AMENDING THE NOTICE REQUIREMENTS FOR ELECTIONS; REPEALING CERTAIN SECTIONS WHOSE DUTIES ARE CONDUCTED BY THE OKEECHOBEE SUPERVISOR OF ELECTIONS OR CANVASSING BOARD; AMENDING THE PROCEDURES FOR ACCEPTING THE CANVASSING BOARD RETURNS OF ALL ELECTIONS AND ISSUING CERTIFICATES OF ELECTION; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.”**

## VI. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

- F. Continued. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Council Member McAuley to approve the first reading, and set April 7, 2026, as the final Public Hearing date for proposed Ordinance No. 1327.

Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to amend Ordinance No. 1327, newly renumbered Section 26-3 subparagraph (a) to read, ". . . noon on the third Monday in August, but not later than noon the following Friday prior to the date of the November General Election, . . ." **Motion to Amend Carried Three to Two, Mayor Watford and Council Member Chandler Voting No.** This will cause the Title and second Whereas of the Ordinance to be amended accordingly.

**Roll Call Vote: Chandler – No, Clark – Yea, Jarriel – Yea, McAuley – Yea, Watford – Yea. Motion Carried as Amended Four to One.**

- G. City Administrator Ritter distributed an official Letter of Retirement effective July 2, 2026, or until all are comfortable with a suitable replacement. A discussion was held to determine the job description, recruitment timeline, and pay scale of the City Administrator position [as presented in **Exhibit 9**]. **It was the consensus of the Council to advertise the Pay Grade at 114 using the sliding scale from the minimum range to the midpoint, and to advertise the position for 30 days using the City's normal means, then extending the advertisement nationally if no valid responses are received.** A copy of Administrator Ritter's Letter of Retirement was added to Exhibit 9 in the official Minute File.

## VII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

A copy of the update was added to the official Minute File, labeled as **Exhibit 11**.

- Preparing a 1-year term Interlocal Agreement with the County regarding the collection of Impact Fees.
- Reviewing Business Tax Receipt ordinances in preparation of revisions to the City's current process allowing fees and fines to be assessed by Code Enforcement.
- Advised the City Council there has been no new contact received from the owner of Okeechobee Estates, LLC, and the ball is currently in their court.

## VIII. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- The City Hall Resiliency Hardening Improvements project has begun; windows have been ordered with an estimated five to eight week delivery time, there were no issues found on the roof after the tiles were removed, and new tiles should be replaced by next week. The project's estimated completion date is July 1, 2026.
- The Design Build for the Public Safety Building will be on the March 17, 2026, agenda.
- He and Public Works Director Hall have a meeting with CW Roberts tomorrow regarding the resurfacing project presented in Item VI.D.
- Announced the new Finance Director, Mr. Taylor Connell, will be starting this week and will have a few weeks to train with current Director Riedel.

## IX. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Council Member Jarriel reminded all that the Speckled Perch Parade is coming up.
- Council Member McAuley advised everyone should continue watching what is happening with the State Legislature and talk to their Representatives.
- Mayor Watford stated everyone should keep the Military in their thoughts and prayers.

## X. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:46 P.M.

Submitted By:



Lane Gamiotea, CMC, City Clerk

Please take notice and be advised that when a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, s/he may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. City Clerk media are for the sole purpose of backup for official records of the Clerk.