



**CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA**  
**MARCH 17, 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 17, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida. The invocation was offered by Pastor Don Hanna, of First Methodist Church; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member McAuley.

**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. Modifications to the published agenda: under New Business item V.A., "in the amount of \$33,619.10" was added to the Motion, item V.B. Exhibit 5 was corrected to Exhibit 3, and an Exhibit 5 was added to item V.E.

B. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Council Member McAuley to adopt the agenda as amended. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

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

**IV. CONSENT AGENDA**

Motion by Vice Mayor Clark, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to:

A. Dispense with the reading and approve the March 3, 2026, Minutes [as presented in **Exhibit 1**];

B. Approve the designation of Finance Director, Mr. Taylor Connell as the City's Representative and Board Member and Human Resources (HR) Generalist, Mrs. Heather Prince as Alternate to the PRM Property and Casualty Insurance Trust per the requirements of Article 6.1 of the Bylaws; and

C. Approve the designation of HR Generalist Prince as the City's Representative and Board Member and Finance Director Connell as Alternate to the PRM Group Health Insurance Trust per the requirements of Article 6.1 of the Bylaws.

**Motion Carried Unanimously.**

**V. NEW BUSINESS**

A. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Council Member McAuley to approve [a] Contract with Proctor Construction Company, LLC., to provide Design Build Consultation Services for Architectural and Structural Systems for the exterior hardening of the Public Safety Building [under the \$2 million Grant awarded by the Division of State Fire Marshals] in the amount of \$33,619.10 [as presented in **Exhibit 2**]. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

B. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to award a paving project [No. 3] to C.W. Roberts Contracting, Inc., under Grant Agreement No. D0339 [for \$1.2 million] with the [State of Florida] Department of Commerce [obtained by Grant Administrator/Writer, RMPK Funding], to pave Northeast (NE) 9<sup>th</sup> Street (ST) to not exceed \$678,003.70 [as presented in **Exhibit 3**]. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

C. Following the discussion at the February 17, 2026, meeting regarding the maintenance of Cattlemen's Square of Flagler Park, Administrator Ritter wanted to remind everyone that the City Council approved the Flagler Park Master Redevelopment Plan that is to be conceptually followed when the City Council approves requests for improvements. The segment of that Master Plan pertaining to Veteran's Memorial Square/Block E of FLAGLER PARK was provided in **Exhibit 4**. The goals as outlined for this Square/Block are to erect signage on the NE corner; move some of the existing monuments to create a functional seating area around them; leave the center open for event accommodations; add bronze statues honoring soldiers from each branch of the military; add a landscape buffer along North Park ST/State Road 70 West to mitigate road noise and debris; and install barriers around the monuments, all while remaining within the \$300,000.00 budgeted cost. Some of the monuments have already been relocated and other improvements have been made, although not as specifically provided on the Plan but conceptually followed. These have been completed thanks to fundraising by the Chamber Leadership Class and generous donations, spearheaded and organized by Mr. Gregg Maynard.

## V. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

- C. Continued. Additional improvements are being organized by Mr. Maynard. Mayor Watford also noted for the record that Okeechobee Main Street has agreed to raise the funds to purchase the bronze military statues. The City Council is being cautious of what improvements they approve and the improvements they approve to be fundraised/donated to the Park, as the City is responsible for all maintenance of Flagler Park. By doing this the City will ensure the annual maintenance costs do not get out of hand, or the Parks are not properly maintained. [Notation for Information: Veteran's Memorial Square is one of nine Blocks that make up **FLAGLER PARK**. In 1916, Blocks R and K were abandoned to be used as public parks for lands being dedicated to the construction of the East Coast Railroad]. **This item was for information purposes.**
- D. HR Generalist Prince asked for the City Council to provide direction regarding the City Administrator candidate selection and interview process. She gave a summary of the various processes followed for past selections. The closing date to apply is April 10, 2026. She will compile and provide them with a spreadsheet of pertinent information on each qualified applicant, as well as their complete application packet by April 14, 2026. **The City Council confirmed they could review and have their top applicant picks ready for the April 21, 2026, regularly scheduled meeting. This will need to be an agenda item. The City Council requested previously used interview questions and Mrs. Prince's recommended questions be emailed to them. Should they have different questions they want added or re-worded, they are to submit them to her. The final list will be forwarded to the City Attorney for review and ensure their legality. Mayor Watford will call a Special Meeting to conduct the interviews at a date and time to be determined. Until then, the City Council will need to be cognizant of their schedules and dates they are not available from April 21<sup>st</sup> through mid-May.**
- E. In an effort to seek alternative requirements for providing legal Notices to the public that could provide a faster method for Public Meetings/Hearings to be held, Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteaguero was asked to present the steps necessary to meet the Florida Statutes criteria. The County recently adopted this method. The one-page summary was distributed at the meeting, a copy was added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 5**. First, the City Council must conduct a Public Hearing to formally determine whether its residents have sufficient internet access and that publishing these Notices on a publicly accessible website will not unreasonably restrict public access. Second, an Online Notice System must be set up using the County's website which includes searchable Notices with publication dates displayed and include a conspicuous link to legal Notices on the City's website homepage. This will require the City Council to enter into an Interlocal Agreement with the County to provide this service and associated costs. Third, annually publish Notices in the newspaper or mail to all residents and property owners who opt to receive legal Notices by mail or by email. The City Clerk will be required to purchase and maintain registry software to accept the written requests from residents and property owners who want Notices by mail or email. This registry will be a database that must maintain with their names, addresses, and email. It will also be the City Clerk's responsibility to deliver Notices to all registrants each time the City publishes an online Notice. Additionally, by moving to this method, it will require the City to provide a method for Notices for all Bids (Requests for Qualifications and Requests for Proposals) be sent electronically and provide for them to be accepted electronically, [this would fall under the General Services staff's responsibilities].

Before the City Council makes their decision to adopt this method, City Clerk Gamiotea requested time to research the software costs, confirm the additional responsibilities required of her staff, and clarify which Notices would still be required to be published in the newspaper. This research will provide the City Council with the necessary information for them to make an informed decision, ensuring changing to this Notice method would in fact speed up the process for Public Hearings to be conducted for adopting Ordinances and/or other matters requiring Public Hearings. **It was the consensus of the City Council for City Clerk Gamiotea to complete the research and for the City Attorney to review the documentation the County used at their Public Hearing to determine sufficient internet access for County residents, as the City Council could use the same data should they move forward with step one. All will be provided back to the City Council for further discussion.**

## VI. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

A copy of the update was added to the official Minute File, labeled as **Exhibit 6**.

- Researched online Public Notice requirements.
- The Fire Services Interlocal Agreement will be presented at the April 7, 2026, meeting.
- The draft for a potential Impact Fees Interlocal Agreement with Okeechobee County is ready to be presented to the County for their input prior to bringing it before the City Council.
- Working on a Debris Removal Interlocal Agreement with the County to replace the expired Agreement from 2022.

### VII. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- Announced there will be an added item to the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget for the City website and Social Media Accounts to be updated to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The City's current provider does not offer this service, so the Website Host Services will be bid out to other providers.
- Advised the new General Services Director, Tammy Parker, is doing a fantastic job, but has run into problems with having no guidance as the General Services Coordinator is out on leave for an indefinite amount of time and there are no written standard operating procedures in place for her to follow. Administrator Ritter requested authorization to contact former General Services Director, Patty Burnette, to offer compensation for her to work for a set amount of time to help. After Assistant City Attorney Conteaguero confirmed official action could be taken under the City Administrator Update of the agenda, **a motion was made by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to allow Administrator Ritter to negotiate with the former General Services Director for Consultation Services with the new General Services Director. Motion Carried Unanimously.**

### VIII. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- This being the last official meeting before her retirement on March 31, 2026, Mayor Watford thanked Finance Director India Riedel for everything she has done for the City during her tenure. After a round of applause, Finance Director Riedel thanked the City Council and took the time to introduce Mr. Taylor Connell as her successor who is joining the City from the private sector.
- Council Member Chandler reminded everyone of the Huey Dedication being held in Veteran's Memorial Square of Flagler Park on Sunday, March 29, 2026, at 1:00 P.M.
- Council Member Jarriel thanked Finance Director Riedel for her willingness to explain the Budget procedures to him and her hard work.
- Council Member McAuley reminded all in attendance of the Okeechobee County Fair and Youth Livestock Show happening at the Okeechobee County Agri-Civic Center this week; advising the Youth Livestock Sale Day is Saturday, with 30 graduating Seniors participating.
- Vice Mayor Clark also extended her gratitude to Finance Director Riedel and wished her luck in her future endeavors.

### VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:20 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.