



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
AUGUST 4, 2026, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
AND BUDGET WORKSHOP FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-27
OFFICIAL MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watford called the regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on August 4, 2026, at 5:03 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast 3rd Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida. A moment of silence was held in honor of former City Council Member and Volunteer Fire Fighter, Mr. Clayton Williams, whose funeral services were held earlier today. The invocation was offered by Council Member McAuley; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member Chandler.

II. ATTENDANCE

City Clerk Lane Gamiotea called the roll. Members 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. Mayor Watford announced the following modifications to the published agenda: defer Presentations item IV.A. Add New Business item VI.A., Exhibit 11, renumber New Business items VI.A through VI.D. to VI.B. through VI.E., and correct the motion for newly renumbered New Business item VI.E. to Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26. Exhibits 7, 8, 9, and 10 were added and noted with their items.

B. Council Member Jarriel made a motion, 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. PRESENTATIONS

A. **DEFERRED TO AUGUST 18, 2026, MEETING.** Recognize the 2026 Okeechobee 12U All-Stars [A copy of the email requesting deferral has been added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 7**].

B. Mayor Watford recognized Council Member Noel Chandler for his twenty years of service. He was presented with a monetary award of \$750.00 and a framed certificate, which was read into the record as follows: "In recognition of completing twenty years of dedicated service for the City of Okeechobee, FL as an elected official January 3, 1995, through November 21, 2006, January 5, 2015, through January 7, 2019, and June 1, 2021, through July 31, 2026." [A copy of the certificate has been added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 8**].

C. Mayor Watford and Police Chief Donald Hagan recognized Sergeant Chad Troutman for his twenty years of service. He was presented with a monetary award of \$2,199.99, [three percent of his current annual salary], and a framed Longevity Service Certificate, read into the record as follows: "Longevity Service Certificate presented to Chad Troutman in recognition of your twenty years of service, hard work, and dedication to the City, its citizens, and your fellow employees from August 2, 2006, through August 2, 2026." [A copy of the certificate has been added to the official Minute File, labeled **Exhibit 9**].

V. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Vice Mayor Clark made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to dispense with the reading and approve the following Minutes:

1. July 7, 2026, [as presented in **Exhibit 1**]; and
2. July 21, 2026, [as revised in **Exhibit 2**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. **ITEM ADDED:** Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to reschedule the September 1, 2026, regular meeting and First Budget Public Hearing for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-27 [as previously adopted on July 21, 2026], to be held on September 3, 2026, commencing at 6:00 P.M., or soon thereafter [as presented in **Exhibit 10**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

- B. Public Works Director Willie Hall gave a Department update for January through June, advising they have completed more than 250 Work Orders to improve City streets, sidewalks, drainage systems, facilities, and public safety; as well as supporting major community events such as the Speckled Perch Festival and Parade, the Battle of Okeechobee, Touch-a-Truck, and the Okeechobee County Economic Development Corporation's (OCEDC) Junior Leadership Camp. Director Hall stated his Department remains committed to maintaining and improving the City's infrastructure while delivering dependable service to the community. The City Council expressed their gratitude to Director Hall and staff for their commitment and rapid response time. The presentation slides are included in **Exhibit 3**.
- C. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to appoint City Administrator Denise Whitehead, to the OCEDC Board [as presented in **Exhibit 4**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.
- D. Motion by Council Member Chandler, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to approve the [Amendment to Request for Proposal No. ADM 01-32-07-23] to approve the Engagement Letter from Carr, Riggs and Ingram, LLC., allowing them to audit the Financial Statements and the disclosures of the City for the FY 2025-26 [as presented in **Exhibit 4**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.
- E. Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Council Member Chandler to approve the Engagement Letter from Carr, Riggs and Ingram, LLC., allowing them to obtain reasonable assurance whether the City is free from material misstatement [conduct single audits as may be required] for the FY 2025-26 [as presented in **Exhibit 5**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.

VII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

A copy of the written update, as read by Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteagüero, was added to the official Minute File, labeled as **Exhibit 11**.

- Working on revisions to the Code of Ordinances allowing for Administrative review of plat procedures as now required by Florida Statutes (FS).
- Continuing work to remove the Technical Review Committee from under the purview of the Sunshine Law requirements.
- Updating the Site Plan Review procedures with City Planner Ben Smith, as now required by FS.
- Working with General Services Director Tammy Parker to update the Building Permit Review Guidelines, per House Bill 803 (2026).

VIII. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- Ongoing repairs to the Chamber of Commerce building revealed additional water damage caused by roof leaks. Roof repair estimates are being obtained, which may require a formal bidding process and a future Budget Amendment.
- The muralist will repaint the City Seal on the North exterior wall of City Hall as weather permits.
- State Representative Kaylee Tuck expressed interest in leasing office space in the Public Safety Building while her staff is displaced from the Chamber of Commerce building.
- Noted her attendance at the Florida League of Cities Conference from August 12 through 14, 2026.
- Reminder that the next Okeechobee Main Street Summer Concert Series takes place in Settlers Square of FLAGLER PARK on August 7, 2026.

IX. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Council Member Chandler expressed enthusiasm regarding the City's future direction and the newly appointed leadership team.
- Council Member Jarriel commended staff for completing the enclosure and painting of the exterior utility wires at City Hall.
- Council Member McAuley applauded the Public Works staff's exceptional quality of work and quick response times.
- Vice Mayor Clark extended congratulations to Council Member Chandler in recognition of his 20 years.
- Mayor Watford reported strong community attendance at the memorial service for former Council Member Williams. He noted that the visiting funeral director expressed gratitude for the exceptional escort and support provided by the Okeechobee Police Department and Sheriff's Office.

X. MAYOR WATFORD RECESSED THE REGULAR MEETING AND OPENED THE FY 2026-27 BUDGET WORKSHOP AT 5:34 P.M.

- A. The purpose of the Workshop is to review and discuss the proposed Budget for FY 2026-27.

X. **FY 2026-27 BUDGET WORKSHOP CONTINUED**

A. Continued: Finance Director Connell guided the overview of the estimated revenues and proposed expenditures as presented in **Exhibit 6** as well as the power point slides [with copy added to **Exhibit 6**], and fielded questions from the City Council, together with City Administrator Whitehead. The Budget booklet has been completely redesigned to offer a broader overview of municipal services, key accomplishments, and community improvements. Booklet pages 2 to 10 (new content) feature the City's Mission and Vision Statement with its elected and administration officials, a message from the City Administrator, the Organizational Chart, and "Budget-in-Brief" summaries.

Pages 11 to 13 provide the **General Fund** line item revenue breakdowns. Each spreadsheet within the booklet provides historical data with actual costs from FY 2023-24 and 2024-25; the current FY Budget as amended; the proposed amounts for FY 2026-27; and lastly the percentage of change between FYs 2025-26 and 2026-27. Official State revenue figures have not yet been released. Revenue estimates were conservatively calculated by Finance Director Connell using a three-year historical average. The proposed Budget is balanced at \$9,237,580.00 in revenues and expenditures. Maintaining the current Millage Rate of 5.9602 generates an estimated \$3,219,576.00 in ad valorem property tax revenue. Remaining General Fund revenues include \$2,227,250.00 from State revenue sharing, \$1,795,080.00 from charges for services, \$1,078,550.00 from other fees and revenues, \$350,000.00 to be transferred from the Public Facilities Improvement Fund, \$217,124.00 to be transferred from the Capital Improvement Projects Fund (Reserves), and \$350,000.00 from uses of money and property.

Departmental Budgets (pages 15 to 36) now feature a standardized two-page format: an Overview, Staffing, Priorities, Summary Totals for Personnel, Operating and Capital, and an At a Glance bullet list on one page followed by a detailed spreadsheet splitting Personnel and Operating costs on the second. Each Department Budget (excluding Legislative and Legal Counsel) includes a 2.5 percent general wage increase effective October 1, 2026, distinguished from a cost-of-living-adjustment, as it is lower than the June 3.5 percent Consumer Price Index (CPI), and a 2 percent merit increase effective June 1, 2027, for satisfactory evaluations. Mayor and City Council (Legislative) salaries will increase by 3.84 percent based on the U.S. CPI, pursuant to Charter Section C-2.6. Additionally, each Department Budget reflects adjusted costs for health insurance, workers' compensation, property and casualty insurance, and City retirement fund contributions:

0511-Legislative/City Council, (pages 15 and 16)	Total Personnel:	\$ 81,900.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>94,100.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 176,000.00

Operating Line items: \$4,000.00 in 8100 Shared Services, specially earmarked for the Okeechobee County Educational Foundation and \$40,000.00 in 8202 Local Community Request, specially earmarked for the Okeechobee County Economic Development Corporation. Operating Line Item changes: moved \$30,000.00 for lobbying services to new 3100 Professional Services from 3400 Other Contractual Services. Moved \$1,500.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. After adjusting individual line items based on spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to increase by 5.20 percent, while the Department Total should decrease by 2.01 percent.

0512-Executive/Administration (pages 17 and 18)	Total Personnel:	\$ 234,250.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>74,200.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 308,450.00

Operating Line Item changes: moved the \$17,500.00 for grant writing services to new 3100 Professional Services from 3400 Other Contractual Services. 5200 Operating Supplies increased by \$24,350.00 and is earmarked for software to be purchased and used City-wide. Moved \$2,000.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. After adjusting individual line items based on spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to increase by 23.73 percent, while the Total Department Budget will only increase by 4.50 percent.

1512-Executive/Human Resources (pages 19 and 20)	Total Personnel:	\$ 84,150.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>28,000.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 112,150.00

Operating Line Item changes: new 3100 Professional Services \$3,000.00 to cover the costs for drug screens and physicals for new hires, promotions, workers compensation and/or return to work requirements city-wide, instead of by Department. Increased 4609 Repair and Maintenance Equipment by \$9,750.00 for the appropriate share of the Tyler software for this Department. Moved \$1,500.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. Following line item adjustments based on historical spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to increase by 45.08 percent, primarily due to reallocating costs from other Departments into this Budget. However, the Total Department Budget will increase by only 17.25 percent.

X. **FY 2026-27 BUDGET WORKSHOP CONTINUED**

A. Continued, General Fund projected Expenditures:

2512-Executive/City Clerk (pages 21 and 22)	Total Personnel:	\$ 302,900.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>84,350.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 387,250.00

The personnel cost changes include the accrued leave benefit payout for the current City Clerk's anticipated retirement in January. Proposed salary for the newly appointed City Clerk is \$79,250.00, which is the position's pay grade midpoint. Operating Line Item changes: moved \$1,250.00 to new 3100 Professional Services and \$1700.00 to new 5200 Operating Supplies from 3400 Other Contractual Services. 4909 Miscellaneous increased by \$4,000.00 to cover the costs of the City General Election. Moved \$2,500.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. Following line item adjustments based on historical spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to increase by 1.74 percent. The Total Department Budget will increase by 14.88 percent, primarily driven by retirement benefit payouts and the recruitment of a new Department Head.

0513-Finance (pages 23 and 24)	Total Personnel:	\$ 268,350.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>120,550.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 388,900.00

Operating Line Item changes: new 3100 Professional Services \$1,250.00; 4609 Repair and Maintenance Equipment reduced by \$11,100.00 with \$9,750.00 transferred to HR and General Services. Moved \$5,000.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. After adjusting individual line items based on spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to decrease by 8.13 percent. Overall, the Department's Total Budget will decrease by 3.64 percent.

0514-Legal Services (pages 25 and 26)	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 140,950.00
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The \$10,000.00 in 3300 Legal Cost earmarked for a Labor Attorney to review the Employee Personnel Policies and Procedures Handbook was not conducted as budgeted and will be rolled over to the proposed Budget. Moved \$500.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. Based on recent spending trends, several line items were reduced, resulting in an overall Department decrease of 0.32 percent.

0519-General Services (pages 27 and 28)	Total Personnel:	\$ 232,100.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>481,600.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 713,700.00

Operating Line Item changes: \$5,500.00 to new 4200 Freight and Postage from 5204 Postage and Supplies and reduced by \$1,500.00. Decreased 3401 Public Meeting Contract Costs by \$4,200.00. 4609 Repair and Maintenance Equipment increased by \$2,100.00. Moved \$2,000.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. Following line item adjustments based on historical spending trends, the Operating Budget is projected to decrease by 1.75 percent, resulting in a 1.31 percent overall decrease in the Department total.

0521-Police Department (pages 29 through 31)	Total Personnel:	\$ 3,436,480.00
	Total Operating:	\$ <u>614,650.00</u>
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 4,051,130.00

Personnel costs include funding for two proposed positions, a second School Resource Officer (SRO), as initially presented at the July 7, 2026 meeting, and a new Evidence Clerk/Crime Scene Technician position. Line item 1203 was created to separate Code Enforcement salaries from 1200 regular salaries. New dedicated line items were established, and corresponding funds were reallocated, to track for Code Enforcement operational costs separately: \$6,000.00 (corrected from \$2,000.00) to new 3101 Professional Services/Code Enforcement for the Special Magistrate services from 3100 Professional Services and amount is to be corrected to \$41,000.00 from \$45,000.00; \$3,000.00 to new 3401 Other Contractual Services/Code Enforcement from 3400 Professional Services; \$500.00 to new 4001 Travel and Per Diem/Code Enforcement from 4000 Travel and Per Diem. These line items were added: 4601 Repair and Maintenance Vehicles/Code Enforcement \$750.00; 5204 Operating Supplies-Uniforms/Code Enforcement \$1,200.00; 5205 Operating Supplies/Code Enforcement \$9,500.00; and 5501 Training and Education/Code Enforcement \$1,500.00. Additionally, \$5,000.00 moved to new 3500 Investigation Fees from 5102 Investigation Fees. \$350.00 to new 4200 Freight and Postage Services. Following minor adjustments across various line items based on spending trends, the overall Operating Budget is projected to increase by just 1.84 percent, while the Total Department Budget will increase by 6.04 percent.

X. FY 2026-27 BUDGET WORKSHOP CONTINUED

A. Continued, General Fund projected Expenditures:

0522-Fire and 0529-Public Safety	Total Personnel (Retirement):	\$ 55,000.00
(pages 33 and 34)	Fire Contractual Services:	\$ 975,000.00
	Operating for Public Safety Building:	\$ 54,500.00
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 1,084,500.00

The Fire Contractual Services amount is an estimate as the confirmed contractual fee has not been provided by the County to date. Various Line Items were increased and decreased based on trends, the Operating Budget is projected to increase by 6.74 percent, with Department Total increasing by 6.77 percent.

0541-Public Works	Total Personnel:	\$ 829,500.00
(pages 35 and 36)	Total Operational:	\$ 1,045,050.00
	FY 2026-27 Proposed Total:	\$ 1,874,550.00

The only line item change in the Operational expense was to move \$7,500.00 to new 5500 Training and Education from 4901 Education. Various Line Items were increased and decreased based on trends, the Operating Budget is projected to decrease by 0.62 percent, with Department Total increasing by only 1.26 percent.

The **Public Facilities Improvement (Transportation) Fund** (pages 37 and 38), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance, \$419,982.00; projected Revenues, \$787,500; estimated Expenditures, \$812,500.00; plus \$350,000.00 to be transferred to the General Fund. Fund Balance, \$44,982.00. The decrease in revenues is due to electric vehicles not being required to pay the various gas and fuel taxes. Finance Director Connell noted it appears unlikely to be able to continue transferring \$350,000.00 after this FY. He and Administrator Whitehead will be reviewing the Funds' recent history and solutions before planning for FY 2027/28 Budget begins.

The **Capital Improvement Projects Fund** (pages 39 to 41), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance, \$2,508,367.00; projected Revenues, \$40,000.00; estimated Expenditures, \$1,356,000.00; plus \$217,124.00 to be transferred to General Fund. Fund Balance, \$975,243.00. The Capital Projects earmarked are: \$17,000.00 the Finance Department interior remodel and \$3,000.00 for furniture. Under the General Services Department: \$40,000.00 to replace the Landscaping City Hall, \$10,000.00 to replace the lampposts along North Park Street and the City Hall parking lot, and \$1,000.00 for a new computer. Under Law Enforcement: \$195,000.00 to replace four Police vehicles, \$30,000.00 equipment for four vehicles, \$4,000.00 to replace four laptops, \$3,500.00 to replace tasers, and \$2,500.00 to replace radars. For the Public Works Department: \$5,000.00 to purchase a 16-foot utility trailer for the mowers; \$13,000.00 for security scan entry doors; and \$7,000.00 for office furniture and upgrades to the restrooms. Then finally, \$1,000,000.00 is earmarked for road improvements.

Industrial Development (305) Grant Fund (page 44), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance and Revenue Total \$21,508.00; and projected Expenditures of \$21,508.00 for stormwater infrastructure. This is the remaining America Rescue Plan Act Funds.

Appropriations (307) Grant Fund (page 45), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance and Revenue Total \$1,200,000.00; and projected Expenditures of \$1,200,000.00 for City Commerce Center and Park Street Commerce Center roadway improvements. This is the State Department of Commerce Rural Infrastructure Fund Grant.

The **Other Grants (309) Capital Fund** (page 46), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance and Revenue Total \$1,971,515.00; projected Expenditures, \$1,971,515.00 for the Public Safety Building Renovation Project. This is the State Department of Financial Services, Fire Marshal Division Appropriations Grant.

The final proposed Budget was the **Law Enforcement Special Fund** (pages 48 and 49), figures were presented as follows: beginning Fund Balance, \$12,900.00; estimated Revenues, \$1,000.00; projected Expenditures, \$6,000.00 for equipment; Fund Balance, \$7,900.00.

Staff emphasized the City is growing and requiring more services. Since the 2020 census, population is up by 9.3 percent, employment has risen 17 percent, median household income grew 13.3 percent in the last year, 25 net businesses have opened since FY 2023-24, and overall property values continue to rise. The City Council has decreased the Millage Rate by 21.6 percent since 2021 and has not raised the Rate in 10 consecutive years. Regarding proposed Amendment No. 3 on the November ballot, which alters homestead property taxes (see various presentations in the Minutes for July 7, 2026, and July 21, 2026), Council Members were reminded that 66 percent of the homesteaded property values fall below \$150,000.00, 91 percent are valued under \$250,000.00, and 99.7 percent are valued under \$500,000.00.

X. FY 2026-27 BUDGET WORKSHOP CONTINUED

A. Continued: Several members of the City Council requested that staff conduct a review departmental Budgets to identify a minimum of \$35,000.00 in expenditure reductions. County Administrator Jessica Bezares, who was in attendance, informed City Administrator Whitehead that the finalized Fire Services contract amount is \$928,205.00, representing a \$46,795.00 reduction from the budgeted amount. Additionally, **by majority consensus**, the City Council denied the request to add and fund the second SRO position. By further **majority consensus**, the Millage Rate was reduced to 5.8962, which represents the midpoint between the current Rate and the Roll-Back Rate as a City Council compromise.

A second but not as in depth Budget Workshop will be necessary to be held on August 18, 2026, immediately following the regular 6:00 P.M. meeting. By City Council consensus and discussions, staff was directed to prepare a revised FY 2026-27 proposed Budget incorporating several adjustments. These include removing the funding and allocation for the proposed second SRO position, implement the two minor corrections noted in the Police Department Budget, and reduce the Fire Services contractual amount. Recalculate the estimated ad valorem tax revenues using the compromised 5.8962 Millage Rate; and incorporate the official State revenue estimates, provided they are released timely.

XI. MAYOR WATFORD ADJOURNED THE BUDGET WORKSHOP AND RECONVENED IN REGULAR SESSION AT 7:17 P.M.

A. There were no unfinished items or issues from the Budget Workshop requiring official action.

XII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of discussion, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:18 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.