



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
SEPTEMBER 3, 2026, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING AND
FIRST BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING 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 September 3, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast (SE) 3rd Avenue (AVE), Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida (FL). The invocation was offered by Council Member McAuley; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Vice Mayor Clark.

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. No modifications were made to the published agenda; however, additional materials were added to Exhibits 8 and 11. and Exhibit 12 was added for item VIII.

B. Vice Mayor Clark made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel 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. PRESENTATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS

A. Mayor Watford proclaimed the week of September 17 through 23, 2026, as Constitution Week, **Exhibit 1**. The Proclamation was presented to Ms. Lori Howard and Ms. Lonnie Kirsch of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, the Constitution of the United States of America, the guardian of our liberties, embodies the principles of limited government in a Republic dedicated to rule by law; and Whereas, September 17, 2026, marks the two hundred and thirty-eighth anniversary of the framing of the Constitution of the United States of America by the Constitutional Convention and by request of the Okeechobee Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution; and Whereas, it is fitting and proper to afford official recognition to this magnificent document and its memorable anniversary, and to urge all citizens to reaffirm the ideals the Framers of the Constitution had in 1787 by protecting the freedoms guaranteed to us through this guardian of our liberties, and to honor them with patriotic celebrations which will commemorate the occasion; and Whereas, Public Law 915 guarantees the issuing of a proclamation each year by the President of the United States of America designating September 17 through 23 as Constitution Week. Now, Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford, Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor by the City of Okeechobee, FL, do hereby proclaim the week of September 17 through 23, 2026, as Constitution Week in the City of Okeechobee, FL."**

V. CONSENT AGENDA

Council Member McAuley made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to:

A. Dispense with the reading and approve the August 18, 2026, Minutes [as presented in **Exhibit 2**]; and

B. Appoint Mr. Anthony Smith to the General Employees' Retirement System Fund Board of Trustees, City Resident 2 of 2, term [beginning] September 4, 2026, through December 31, 2028, [as presented in **Exhibit 3**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. MAYOR WATFORD OPENED THE FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2026-27 FIRST BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:07 P.M.

A. Mayor Watford announced the purpose of this Public Hearing is to consider the first reading of ordinances for the proposed Millage Rate levy and proposed Budget for FY October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027.

B. Mayor Watford announced the proposed Millage Rate levy represents the roll-back rate of 5.8321 computed pursuant to Florida Statutes (FS) 200.065(1).

VI. FY 2026-27 FIRST BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUED

- C. Vice Mayor Clark made a motion, seconded by Council Member Chandler to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1331, levying a Millage Rate of 5.8321 on all real and tangible personal property for proposed FY October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027 [as proposed in **Exhibit 4**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.

Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteagüero read into the record the title of Ordinance No. 1331 as follows: **"AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FL; LEVYING THE AD VALOREM PROPERTY TAX MILLAGE RATE FOR MUNICIPAL PURPOSES ON ALL TAXABLE PROPERTY WITHIN THE CITY IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF STATE LAW FOR THE FY BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2026, AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2027; PROVIDING THAT 5.8321 PER THOUSAND DOLLAR VALUATION SHALL NOT BE LEVIED ON HOMESTEAD PROPERTY; THAT 5.8321 VALUATION SHALL BE USED FOR GENERAL CITY PURPOSES; THAT SAID MILLAGE RATE IS 0.00 PERCENT MORE THAN THE ROLL-BACK RATE OF 5.8321 COMPUTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH FS 200.065(1); PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE."**

Vice Mayor Clark made a motion, seconded by Council Member Chandler to approve the first reading, and set September 21, 2026, at 6:00 P.M., or as soon thereafter as possible, as the second reading and final Public Hearing date for proposed Ordinance No. 1331. No comments or questions were offered from the Public.

Roll Call Vote: Chandler – Yea, Clark – Yea, Jarriel – Yea, McAuley – Yea, Watford – Yea.
Motion Carried Unanimously.

- D. Council Member McAuley made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1332, adopting the annual Budget for FY October 1, 2026, through September 30, 2027 [as proposed in **Exhibit 5**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.

Assistant City Attorney Conteagüero read into the record the title of Ordinance No. 1332 as follows: **"AN ORDINANCE ADOPTING AN ANNUAL BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FL; FOR THE FY BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2026, AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2027; APPROPRIATING FUNDS FOR OPERATING EXPENSES OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE FOR THE GENERAL OPERATION OF THE SEVERAL DEPARTMENTS OF THE CITY AND OTHER FIXED OBLIGATIONS OF THE CITY FOR AND DURING THE FY; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT AND SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE."**

Council Member Jarriel made a motion, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to approve the first reading, and set September 21, 2026, at 6:00 P.M., or as soon thereafter as possible, as the second reading and final Public Hearing date for proposed Ordinance No. 1332. No comments or questions were offered from the Public.

Roll Call Vote: Chandler – Yea, Clark – Yea, Jarriel – Yea, McAuley – Yea, Watford – Yea.
Motion Carried Unanimously.

MAYOR WATFORD CLOSED THE FY 2026-27 FIRST BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:13 P.M.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Council Member Jarriel made a motion, seconded by Council Member McAuley to accept a Right-of-Way Dedication from Park Street Property Owners Association, Inc, for the Roadway Tract as shown on Park Street Commerce Center Plat Book 8, Page 91, 0.386+/- acres located along the East boundary line of Lot 5 and Stormwater Tract "B" [as presented in **Exhibit 6**], and contingent upon receiving a recorded deed transferring ownership to Park Street Property Owners Association, Inc., proof of lenders release of mortgage for the Roadway Tract, and signature pages.
Motion Carried Unanimously.
- B. Vice Mayor Clark made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to approve a Federal Financial Assistance Subrecipient Agreement with the FL Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services in the amount of \$22,500.00 to plant 69 trees at seven different locations in the City [as presented in **Exhibit 7**].
Motion Carried Unanimously.

VII. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

- C. Council Member McAuley made a motion, seconded by Council Member Jarriel to approve and authorize the Mayor and City Clerk to execute a Subordination of City Utility Interest as requested by Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) for vacated alleyways lying East to West in Block 1 between Lots 1 to 4 and 5 to 8, and Block 2 between Lots 1 to 10 and 17 to 26, and a portion of vacated Northeast (NE) 3rd AVE between NE 13th and 14th Streets (ST), OKEECHOBEE, Plat Book 5, Page 5, Okeechobee County public records [as presented in revised **Exhibit 8**].

Motion Carried Four to One, Council Member Chandler Voting No.

- D. Council Member Jarriel made a motion, seconded by Council Member McAuley to approve Prime Contract Potential Change Order #006 to Proctor Construction to purchase Door Panic Hardware [as presented in **Exhibit 9**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

- E. City Administrator Denise Whitehead presented an opportunity for the City to acquire 3.946 acres located directly south of City Hall at 501 SE 2nd ST from American Legion Post 64, **Exhibit 10**. The property includes one storage building totaling 2,400 square-feet and two connected structures totaling 13,136 square-feet, currently used as a social club and community hall. While the American Legion has not set an asking price, representatives expressed a desire to work with the City and establish an arrangement to lease back a portion of the facilities post-purchase. Proceeding with negotiations will require upfront expenditures for preliminary steps, including two independent real estate appraisals. Following the sale, the City may be eligible to apply for partial reimbursement through Land Acquisition Grants. Two representatives from American Legion Post 64 were present for the discussion, though their names were not provided for the record. **By unanimous consensus, the City Council directed Administrator Whitehead to initiate negotiations and schedule the appraisals.**

[Legal Description: Lots 2 to 6 of Block 253, FIRST ADDITION TO CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, Plat Book 5, Page 6, Okeechobee County public records, and Beginning at the intersection of Hiawassee ST (n/k/a East 4th AVE) and North 7th ST (n/k/a South 2nd ST), run East along the North boundary line of 7th ST (n/k/a South 2nd ST) 200-feet to the SE corner of Lot 6 of said Block 253; then run North on dividing line between Lots 6 and 7 of said Block 253, to the South boundary line of South Park ST; then run West along the South boundary line of South Park ST to the intersection of Hiawassee ST (n/k/a East 4th AVE); then run South along the East boundary line of Hiawassee ST (n/k/a East 4th AVE) to the Point of Beginning less Lots 2 to 6 of said Block 253; together with Lots 1 to 6 of Block 203, said FIRST ADDITION TO CITY OF OKEECHOBEE and Beginning at the SE corner of said Block 203, run East along the North boundary line of 7th ST (n/k/a South 2nd ST) 70-feet; then run North along the East boundary line of Hiawassee ST (n/k/a East 4th AVE) 300-feet to the South boundary line of South Park ST; then run West 370-feet to the intersection of Cherokee ST (n/k/a East 3rd AVE); then run South along the East boundary line of Cherokee ST (n/k/a East 3rd AVE) 300-feet to the intersection of 7th ST (n/k/a South 2nd ST); then run East along the North boundary line of 7th ST (n/k/a South 2nd ST) to the Point of Beginning. Block 203 includes the abandoned portion of SE 4th AVE lying between South Park ST and SE 2nd ST. Parcel Identification No. 3-21-37-35-0020-02530-0020.]

- F. City Administrator Whitehead presented information and requested direction regarding the recruitment for the appointed City Clerk position, following the announced retirement of elected City Clerk Gamiotea at the end of her term on January 4, 2027. Supporting materials provided in **Exhibit 11** included an updated job description based on Charter and Ordinance duties, current salary grade assignments, the standard pay plan, and a memorandum outlining key decisions for City Council review. Additionally, a comparative salary list of 11 municipalities was distributed, detailing population sizes and reporting structures. **By majority consensus, the City Council directed staff to move forward with advertising for the position with the following parameters: Salary Range, approved the recommended Pay Grade 109 (\$63,369.21 to \$71,290.37). Reporting Structure, the City Clerk will report directly to the City Council. Recruitment Posting and Timeline, the position will be posted as soon as possible for 30 days, open to both internal and external applicants.** To maintain neutral oversight due to current qualified City employees expressing interest in the position, City Administrator Whitehead's office will coordinate the recruitment process. Qualified applications will be presented to the City Council to determine interviews.

VIII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

A copy of the written update, as read by Assistant City Attorney Conteagüero, was added to the official Minute File, labeled as **Exhibit 12**.

- Finalized the real estate closing with Cel & Mor Properties, LLC., (f/k/a WSF Properties) for the East 1.69 acres at 850 NE 9th ST, Tract A, CITY OF OKEECHOBEE COMMERCE CENTER, Plat Book 7, Page 10, Okeechobee County public records.

VIII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE CONTINUED

- Reviewed the FDOT Subordination Agreement approved on tonight's agenda.
- Received the Design Build Agreement for the Public Safety Building from Proctor Construction and began reviewing their remarks/revisions.
- The potential property purchase of the American Legion Post 64 will now be under review.
- Met remotely with City Attorney John Fumero, City Planner Ben Smith, and staff to discuss exempting the Technical Review Committee (TRC) meetings from Sunshine Law requirements. The draft Ordinance will go to the City Council at a future meeting; Administrator Whitehead confirmed the TRC meetings will remain open for public attendance and comment.
- Reviewing recent edits to the Building Permit and Site Plan Review Guidelines provided by City Planner Smith and staff.

IX. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- Realigned operations between Public Works and General Services to protect the Public Works Administrative Secretary. The public facing elements of Public Works, such as Centennial Park Permitting, are now handled at City Hall in General Services, while all facilities and maintenance will be managed by Public Works.
- Posted a Strategic Plan Survey on the City's Facebook page for all citizens and staff to complete. Results will be summarized by staff for the City Council.
- Inquired and confirmed Vice Mayor Clark and Council Members Chandler and Jarriel would be riding on Fire Engine One in the Labor Day Parade on Monday.
- The Mayor, City Council, and City Clerk Gamiotea received a postcard at their seat on the dais, from Ms. Magi Cable, inviting them to attend the Traveling Smithsonian Exhibit's Open House being held at the Okeechobee County Historic Court House on October 17, 2026.
- Eight staff members enrolled in an 8-month Leadership Training Class starting September 9, 2026, held once a month. They will be paired with mentors from Henrico County, Virginia (VA).
- Announced Finance Director Connell's acceptance as a mentee in the FL Government Finance Officers Association Mentoring Program.
- Expressed gratitude to the City Council and staff for their support during her family's recent loss.

X. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Council Member Chandler thanked City Administrator Whitehead for realigning duties to protect Public Works Administrative Secretary Matchett. He also lightheartedly noted Council Member McAuley's wife recently appeared in a video featuring the Historic Courthouse.
- Council Member Jarriel highlighted the Public Works Department's quick response time. He commended crews for clearing debris after the August 20, 2026, rains which prevented further flooding during recent storms. Administrator Whitehead echoed praise for the Department's hard work.
- Council Member McAuley shared that the FL League of Cities is asking elected officials to speak on Proposed Amendment 3 and submit a photo alongside their video or Letter to the Editor.
- Vice Mayor Clark gave notice she will miss the September 21, 2026, City Council meeting. She then asked about attending the Pete Clemons Labor Day Rodeo, and Administrator Whitehead offered to coordinate her attendance with the Okeechobee Cattlemen's Association.
- Mayor Watford reported on the September 2, 2026, Treasure Coast Council of Local Governments meeting which featured a presentation on Data Centers by Mr. Mike Turner, Vice Chair and Ashburn District Supervisor for Loudoun County, VA., as well as a lively discussion regarding Flock Cameras. He commended the City Council for maintaining decorum during meetings, contrasting it to surrounding local governments facing criticism for their lack of civility towards each other and staff at their public meetings.

XI. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of discussion, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:30 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.