CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
OCTOBER 20, 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 October 20, 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. A modification to add Exhibit 10 to New Business Item VI.E., was requested. During the meeting, supplemental documents were added to Exhibits 6 and 9, and Exhibits 11 and 12 were added and placed in the official Minute File as noted.

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

A. Approve the September 2026 Warrant Register [in the amounts of: General Fund, $1,180,287.50; Capital Improvement Projects Fund, $397,886.35; Appropriations Grant Fund, $51,300.00; Public Facilities Improvement Fund, $29,242.77; and Other Grant Capital Fund, $6,175.56; as presented in **Exhibit 1**];

B. Temporarily close the section of Southwest (SW) 4th Street (ST) from SW 5th to 6th AVE on October 31, 2026, from 4:00 to 9:00 P.M. for the First Baptist Church Fall Festival [as presented in **Exhibit 2**];

C. Approve the purchase of four [police fleet] Dodge Durango's in the amount of $182,720.00 [from Woody Folsom CDJR of Douglas, Georgia and waive the award to the lowest bidder due to delivery date; as presented in **Exhibit 3**]; and

D. Approve the proposal [for Paving Project No. 1 for Fiscal Year 2026-27 as provided in the Piggyback Agreement from Okeechobee County RFP No. 2024-01] from C.W. Roberts Contracting, Inc., to pave Northwest (NW) 11th AVE, from NW Park ST/State Road 70 to NW 7th Court; NW 2nd ST, from NW 6th to 9th AVE; SW 6th ST, from SW 11th to 12th AVE; SW 8th ST, from SW 11th to 12th AVE; SW 9th ST, from South Parrott AVE/Highway 441 to SW 2nd AVE; and SW 6th ST, from SW 11th to 7th AVE, not to exceed $553,553.55 [as presented in **Exhibit 4**].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

V. MAYOR WATFORD OPENED THE QUASI-JUDICIAL REZONING PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:02 P.M.

The following item(s) are quasi-judicial in nature. In accordance with Section 286.0115, F.S., an opportunity for persons to speak on each item will be made available after the applicant and staff have made their presentations on each item. All testimony, including public testimony and evidence, may be made under oath or affirmation. Additionally, each person who gives testimony may be subject to cross-examination. If you do not wish to be either cross-examined or sworn, your testimony will be given its due weight. The general public may request the Council to ask questions of staff or witnesses on their behalf.

Any person presenting documents to the Council should provide the City Clerk with a minimum of ten copies. Further details of the quasi-judicial procedure may be obtained from the Clerk. No verbatim record by a certified court reporter is made of these proceedings. Accordingly, any person who may seek to appeal any decision involving the matters noticed herein will be responsible for making a verbatim record of the testimony and evidence at these proceedings upon which any appeal is to be based (see Section 286.0105, F.S.). In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 286.26, F.S., persons needing a special accommodation to participate in this proceeding should contact the City Clerk's office at 863-763-9814 seventy-two (72) hours in advance of this proceeding.

A. An Oath was administered by Assistant City Attorney Stephen Conteagüero to City Planner Marissa Fewell of Morris-Depew and Associates, 2914 Cleveland AVE, Fort Myers, FL 33901 and Mr. Jeffrey Sumner of 410 NW 2nd ST, Okeechobee, FL 34974.

V. QUASI-JUDICIAL PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUED

A. Continued. Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Council Member Chandler to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1334, requesting to rezone Lots 1 to 4 and 7 to 12, of Block 80, CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, Plat Book 5, Page 5, Okeechobee County public records; 1.61+/-acres, located between Northeast (NE) 4th to 5th AVE and NE 6th to 7th ST; from Residential Single Family-One (RSF-1) to Industrial (IND). Rezoning Petition No. 26-001-R submitted by Mr. Jeffrey Sumner, Agent on behalf of the property owner, Diamond R. Fertilizer Co., Inc. The proposed use is to expand the existing Diamond R business, including storage and retail sales [as presented in **Exhibit 5**]. **Motion Carried Unanimously**.

Assistant City Attorney Conteagüero read into the record the title of proposed Ordinance No. 1334 as follows: "**AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FL; AMENDING THE OFFICIAL ZONING MAP OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE BY REZONING A CERTAIN TRACT OF LAND MORE PARTICULARLY DESCRIBED HEREIN, FROM RSF-1 TO IND; PETITION NO. 26-001-R; AMENDING THE ZONING MAP ACCORDINGLY; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE**."

Motion by Council Member McAuley, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to approve the second reading and adopt proposed Ordinance No. 1334 [as recommended unanimously by the Planning Board and Planning Staff based on the findings of facts outlined in the Planning Staff Report in Exhibit 5. 1) Finds the Petition consistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan. 2) The proposed use is specifically authorized under the Zoning District Regulations applied for. 3) The request will not have an adverse effect on the public interest. 4) The proposed use is appropriate for the location, reasonably compatible with adjacent uses, and is not contrary or detrimental to urbanizing land use patterns. 5) The request will not adversely affect property values or living conditions, nor will it be a deterrent to the improvement or development of adjacent properties. 6) The proposed use can be suitably buffered from surrounding uses so as to reduce the impact of any nuisance or hazard to the neighborhood. 7) The request will not create a density pattern that would overburden public facilities. 8) The request will not create traffic congestions, flooding or drainage problems, or otherwise affect public safety. 9) The proposed use has not been inordinately burdened by unnecessary restrictions].

Attending remotely, City Planner Fewell reviewed the highlights of the Planning Staff Report. This Rezoning Petition accompanies Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map Amendment Application No. 26-001-SSA (adopted by Ordinance No. 1333 on September 21, 2026), which reclassified the subject property from Single-Family Residential to Industrial. Adopting the proposed Rezoning Petition is now required so the owner can develop the property and keep the City's maps consistent.

City Clerk Gamiotea noted for the record that 23 courtesy notices were mailed to surrounding property owners (with one returned as undeliverable), four signs announcing the Planning Board and City Council meeting dates were posted on the subject property, and the proposed Ordinance adoption was properly noticed. As recorded in the August 20, 2026 Planning Board Minutes, no objections were raised by surrounding property owners, and no comments or objections were received prior to tonight's meeting. There were no comments or questions from the public or the City Council.

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

MAYOR WATFORD CLOSED THE QUASI-JUDICIAL PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:12 P.M.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

A. Public Safety Director/County Fire Rescue Chief Justin Hazellief presented the third quarter (July through September) Fire Services update pursuant to the Interlocal Agreement [a ten page report was distributed and added to **Exhibit 6** of the official Minute File]. For the quarter, Fire Rescue recorded 343 calls for service, 89 fire prevention inspections, and 9 community outreach or training events. Average incident response times improved to 4 minutes and 38 seconds, down from 4 minutes and 52 seconds in Q2 2026 and 5 minutes and 23 seconds in Q1 2026. Additionally, Chief Hazellief reported that personnel are currently training to administer whole blood on all ambulances. As well as making changes to transfer protocols with HCA Lawnwood Hospital and Tradition Medical Center for critical care beyond local capabilities at HCA Raulerson Hospital. **This item was for informational purposes only**.

B. Motion by Vice Mayor Clark, seconded by Council Member McAuley to approve a [four year] Master Service Agreement and Statement of Work with CivicPlus for the general management of software solutions with an initial cost not to exceed $51,268.56, and with an annual recurring cost not to exceed $57,407.93 subject to a five percent uplift to be applied in year four [as presented in **Exhibit 7**]. **Motion Carried Unanimously**.

VI. NEW BUSINESS CONTINUED

C. Ahead of the meeting, the City Council received all 19 City Clerk applications and the rubric scores prepared by City Administrator Denise Whitehead, Executive Assistant Jacqueline Boer, and Finance Director Taylor Connell. **By consensus, the City Council scheduled a Special Meeting to be held on November 5, 2026, starting at 9:00 A.M. to interview the top four candidates (listed in alphabetical order): Katerri Johnson, Leanne LaLonde, Heather Prince, and Katie Rogers**. The City Clerk's Office will advertise the Special Meeting. Council Members are to submit their proposed interview questions to Administrator Whitehead by the end of the week; once compiled, the questions will undergo legal review. Each applicant will be asked the same set of questions, though Council Members may ask follow-up questions as needed during the interviews.

D. General Services Director Tammy Parker presented a Department update. As of September 30, 2026, 355 building permits have been issued (282 residential and 73 commercial), including 49 for new construction (47 residential and 2 commercial). Since May 14, 2026, the City has collected $391,975.76 in impact fees for Okeechobee County across 22 permits, retaining a 1.5 percent administrative fee. Highlighted or completed developments for the calendar year include the Mallard Landing subdivision and Marmelemy Villas townhomes. The Department also issued 26 specialty permits for parades, park use, temporary street closures, and temporary uses such as events and fireworks sales.

To comply with recent Florida legislative changes, the Department is updating the City's Code of Ordinances and procedures to streamline applications and improve efficiency:

1. Plat Approvals: A revised ordinance moving plat reviews to an administrative process, removing the requirement for board or committee review, is in its final stages and will be presented to the City Council.
2. Technical Review Committee (TRC): The City is preparing an ordinance to establish the TRC as a reviewing committee rather than a voting board to improve coordination among staff and outside agencies.
3. Private Providers: Forms and procedures are now in place allowing qualified private providers to perform certain plan reviews and inspections as required by state law. Eligible applicants receive at least a 25 percent discount on the standard permit fee.
4. Permit Exemptions: An exemption request form has been implemented for qualifying projects. Eligibility requires an existing single-family residential property located outside a flood zone, construction valued below $7,500.00, and no electrical, mechanical, gas, or plumbing work, along with other statutory criteria.

Projects currently under review include Koss Truss (NW quadrant); the Okeechobee Health Care Facility expansion and Advance Medical Sanitation (NE quadrant); Action Kidz PPEC Corporation, Loumax/EcoTec, Take 5 Oil Change, and the Pearce-McAuley Right-of-Way Abandonment (SW quadrant); and Walmart's expansion (SE quadrant).

General Services has also centralized City procurement, managing Requests for Proposals, Requests for Qualifications, and Invitations to Bid from start to finish for all departments. While some building maintenance, equipment maintenance, and pest control duties have been reassigned to Public Works, General Services continues to manage elevator maintenance and State inspections, City Council Chamber recording equipment, copier and postage machine leases, City Planning services, Animal Control Service Agreements, Building Official services, and cleaning contracts. The Department also oversees building-related matters for the ongoing City Hall security hardening project and the upcoming Public Safety Building project.

Finally, the Department is pursuing two major operational improvements: updating the Building Permit Fee Schedule (last updated November 1, 2013) and Land Development Regulation Fee Schedule (last updated July 16, 2002) using data from nearby jurisdictions, and evaluating new City software to accept electronic payments, schedule inspections, streamline reviews, and improve application tracking and reporting. The City Council thanked Director Parker for her department's work. **This item was for informational purposes only**.

E. **ADDED ITEM**: Motion by Council Member Jarriel, seconded by Vice Mayor Clark to approve purchasing equipment for four police vehicles from HG2 Emergency Lighting in the amount of $43,014.64 [as presented in **Exhibit 10**]. **Motion Carried Unanimously**.

VII. 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 11**.

- Reviewed and finalized the CivicPlus Master Service Agreement as approved during tonight's meeting.

VII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE CONTINUED

- Advised that the real estate appraisal for the American Legion Post 64 property is due back to his office tomorrow.
- Continuing to work on the amendment to the Code of Ordinances to remove the TRC from Sunshine Law requirements.

VIII. CITY ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

A copy of the September 2026 Monthly Report, Upcoming Events List, and Career Source Heartland email were added to the official Minute File as **Exhibit 12**.

- Distributed an Upcoming Events List and CareerSource Heartland Region email prior to the meeting.
- Advised the General Services numbers listed in the September 2026 Monthly Report are year-to-date and stated she would be posting the report on the City's social media platforms.
- Asked City Clerk Gamiotea to provide an update on the "If I Were Mayor" essay contest. City Clerk Gamiotea reported that 147 essays were received, 140 from elementary students, five from middle school students, and two from high school students. The top three entrants in each category will be invited to the November 17, 2026, City Council meeting. The winners will be announced and honored, and the overall winner will join Mayor Watford at the Annual Tree Lighting to help light the City's Christmas Tree and displays.
- Reported on a meeting with the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) regarding City- and County-wide drainage issues, where local officials urged SFWMD to improve its pumping response. Currently, SFWMD must call in a technician located an hour away to turn on the local pump station, followed by another hour to prime and start the pump. Administrator Whitehead noted that SFWMD was receptive to staffing the pump station during severe weather.
- Noted that Public Works Director Willie Hall attended the National Weather Service meeting earlier in the day on her behalf and commended him and his staff for proactively working in the field to address potential drainage issues before they occur.
- Regarding the Public Safety Building renovations, she advised the City Council that she has access to Proctor Construction's daily tracking system and can share updates upon request.
- Noted that to comply with House Bill 1329, City staff is compiling a list of all employees and their annual salaries to be posted on the City's new website by the end of January 2027.
- Reminded everyone that Early Voting runs October 24 through 31, 2026, from 8:30 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. at the new Supervisor of Elections Office located at 307 NW 5th AVE and the deadline to request a Vote-by-Mail Ballot to be mailed to your residence is October 22, 2026.
- Announced the next Regular City Council meeting is scheduled for November 17, 2026.
- In response to an inquiry from Council Member Jarriel regarding the status of obtaining roofing bids for the Chamber of Commerce building, she advised that the bid document was forwarded to the City Attorney earlier today to review.

IX. COUNCIL COMMENTS

- Council Member Chandler thanked staff for their recent Department updates during City Council meetings.
- Council Member Jarriel thanked the Police and Public Works Departments for their assistance on Monday, October 19, 2026.
- Council Member McAuley noted he will attend the Treasure Coast Regional League of Cities meeting on Wednesday, October 21, 2026.
- Vice Mayor Clark thanked the Public Works staff for addressing neighborhood flooding on SW 5th AVE following recent storms and asked about Culver's new opening date. Assistant City Attorney Conteagüero advised the Easement between the Okeechobee Utility Authority and Park Street Property Owners Association, Inc., has not been finalized and remains months away.
- Mayor Watford reminded everyone of the updated schedule for this year's Veterans Day Service. In honor of the 250th Celebration, the service will take place on November 11, 2026, at 6:00 P.M. in Veterans Memorial Square and will feature a performance by the Okeechobee High School Ensemble Band.

X. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:29 P.M.

Submitted By:

Lane Gamiotea

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.