

**DeFuniak Springs City Council  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
Council Chambers  
January 12, 2026**

**1. Call to Order**

Mayor Bob Campbell called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Present: Mayor Bob Campbell; Councilmember Todd Bierbaum (Seat 1); Councilmember Josh Sconiers (Seat 2); Mayor Pro-Tempore Amy Heavilin (Seat 3); Councilmember Glen Harrison (Seat 4); Councilmember Danny Cosson (Seat 5).

Absent:

Also, present were City Manager Koby Townsend, City Attorney Clay Adkinson and City Clerk Rafael Ali.

**2. CONSENT AGENDA**

- A. Additions/Deletions to the Consent Agenda**
- B. Approval of the Consent Agenda**

**A motion was made to approve the consent agenda by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed without objection.**

**3. REGULAR AGENDA**

- A. Additions/Deletions to the Regular Agenda**
- B. Approval of the Regular Agenda**

Mr. Townsend requested the addition of item 3C1: Approval of project design and phase for the Runway 927 widening project.

**A motion was made to approve the regular agenda with additions by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed without objection.**

**C. City Manager K. Townsend**

**3C1: Approval of project design and phase for the Runway 927 widening project**

**A motion was made to approve project design and phase for the Runway 927 widening project and to allow Liberty Partners to pursue securing the additional \$1 million funding by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed without objection.**

**1. Wayfinding Signage Standards Project**

Mrs. Wennerberg presented on the Wayfinding Signage Standard project.

She stated that the City is looking to create standard signage throughout the City. She asked for the Council's support for a recommendation to create a board.

Mr. Bierbaum asked if the Council should approve the creation of a subcommittee. He also asked how this should be structured.

Mr. Adkinson stated that the group can create a workgroup. He noted that it depends on what the board is trying to establish and added that they can form a fact-finding board.

Mrs. Wennerberg stated that the discussion will come back with ideas from the group.

Mrs. Cosson commented that the board seems to be primarily for projecting information.

Mr. Adkinson stated that no motion is needed.

Mayor Campbell cautioned that the creation of the workgroup should avoid conflicts with dual membership on other committees.

The Council agreed to have the workgroup created.

## **2. Update on Finance Director Position**

Mr. Townsend presented an update on the Finance Director position.

He stated that Sumter will rank the applicants.

He added that if the current project is completed, the City will reopen the application process.

Mr. Cosson asked if the City is looking for candidates with experience in the State of Florida.

Mr. Townsend stated that they are using the approved job requirements.

## **3. Request to Remove Hazardous Tree**

Mr. Townsend presented the request to remove hazardous trees.

He stated that there have been multiple instances where the trees have fallen on both private and City-owned property.

Mr. Adkinson stated that he advised Mr. Townsend to present this matter to the public. He explained that while similar work is done for other citizens, because this involves the City Manager's property, it is appropriate to make it a public discussion.

Mayor Campbell asked who will perform the removal.

Mr. Townsend stated that Public Works will assess whether they can remove the trees.

Mrs. Heavilin asked if the City has conducted a site visit.

Mr. Strawn stated that he has inspected the site.

**A motion was made to approve as presented by Councilmember Bierbaum and seconded Councilmember Cosson; the motion passed without objection.**

#### **4. Approval of Amendment #1 - Interlocal Agreement with Walton County for Solid Waste Disposal**

Mr. Townsend stated that the old process is taxing on staff and operates as a cash-flow process for the City. He added that cash flow is the biggest problem and noted that the proposed change will address this issue.

**A motion was made to approve Amendment #1 - Interlocal Agreement with Walton County for Solid Waste Disposal by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed without objection.**

Mr. Townsend stated that he submitted the full amount, but the County did not agree with it.

Mr. Bierbaum stated that this is a great development and a long time coming.

Mr. Townsend stated that this item will be presented to the Board tomorrow.

#### **5. Discussion/Direction on Sanitation (Garbage) Services**

Mr. Townsend presented the discussion regarding direction on sanitation services.

He stated that the City is considering entering negotiations with Waste Management or going back out for bid.

Mrs. Heavilin asked whether, when the City went out for bid previously, there was any interest from other providers besides Waste Management. She also asked if there had been any issues with Waste Management.

Mr. Townsend responded that, from a staff perspective, no major issues have occurred with the current provider.

Mayor Campbell asked how difficult it would be for the City to monitor garbage placed at the side of the road. He added that garbage service is better than it used to be.

**A motion was made to begin negotiation on renewal on Sanitation (Garbage) Services by Councilmember Bierbaum and seconded by Councilmember Heavilin; the motion passed without objection.**

Mrs. Heavilin asked if there was another competitor that bid last time.

Mr. Cosson stated that customers did not know who to call for garbage services. He noted that Waste Management is a Catholic company. He further stated that all taxpayer-funded services should be put out for bid and that the Council should review what options are available.

Mr. Cosson added that the Council should consider all available options.

Mr. Harrison stated that he was not certain that only one bid was received.

Mayor Campbell stated that there was plenty of time for the bidding process.

Mr. Harrison stated that the City may get a better bidder or may not. He explained that while prices could be compared, there could be other issues to consider. He added that he is satisfied with the current arrangements.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he agrees with the thought process Mr. Cosson described. He noted that he has reviewed who submitted bids and explained that many potential providers would need significant infrastructure to come to the City and provide services.

Mayor Campbell stated that Waste Management helps the City handle many expensive and complex issues.

Mr. Adkinson [stated that staff is also involved in negotiations / clarification needed].

## **6. Information Requested For Process to Implement a Non-Ad Valorem Assessment for Fire Services**

Mr. Townsend presented the information requested regarding the process to implement a non-ad valorem assessment for fire services.

Mr. Townsend stated that the presentation would begin on page 3. He explained that he reached out to several departments to understand how the process works and noted that both the County and the City utilize the same consultant.

Mr. Townsend stated that the resolution of intent does not obligate the City to proceed with the assessment. He explained that the consultant fee is a lump sum and that, if the City moves forward, public hearings would be required. He further stated that the assessment would need to be adopted prior to March 1 and communicated to the State and the County. -

Mr. Townsend stated that mailing costs are included as part of the overall cost and that the General Fund would be responsible for those expenses. He stated that approximately \$40,000 is

allocated to cover these costs. He added that the assessment would apply to every parcel within the City and that several formulas are available for calculating the assessment.

Mr. Townsend stated that the City would need to obtain a quote from the consultant and noted that the consultant is familiar with Walton County. He directed the Council to page 13 of the presentation and stated that there are multiple funding options available, with certain items added to the plan.

Mr. Townsend presented the various options and stated that the City currently does not account for future debt. He explained that staff is reviewing the base fire budget as it continues to grow and noted that some debt obligations are structured as five-year notes.

Mr. Townsend asked if the Council had any questions regarding the slides presented. He stated that the top line reflects the base fire budget and that the current fire budget is approximately \$1.9 million.

Mr. Townsend stated that the five- and ten-year projections show a range of anticipated costs. He noted that the fire station renovation drops off in the later years of the plan and that the green column reflects when design work should begin for the fire station south of Highway 10. He stated that the station south of Highway 10 would be paid for by 2031, and that by that year, staffing would include two six-person shifts.

Mr. Townsend moved to the final page of the presentation and stated that staff reviewed how much of a city's fire station budget is typically covered by a non-ad valorem assessment. He explained that the current rate would require the City to assess nearly double what the County currently charges. He noted that the City's current fire budget is approximately \$1.8 million and that costs will continue to increase.

Mr. Townsend stated that Option B reflects the County's current rates and explained that, if the City adopts those rates, it would fall short of funding future needs. He added that once the assessment is implemented, it must continue and cannot be discontinued.

Mayor Campbell asked what the assessment would look like for residents.

Mr. Townsend responded that it would equate to approximately \$155 per household, or \$0.03 per square foot.

Mr. Sconiers asked what assessment amount would be needed to fully cover fire services.

Mr. Bierbaum responded that it would be approximately \$275 per residential unit.

Mr. Sconiers stated that this would not incorporate new businesses annexed into the City.

Mr. Cosson asked about the different fire assessment options.

Mrs. Heavilin asked how many rooftops currently exist within the City.

Mr. Townsend responded [specific number not stated during the meeting].

Mrs. Heavilin asked how changes are calculated.

Mr. Townsend stated that the revenue itself does not change.

Mr. Harrison stated that very few communities do not have fire assessments. He noted that by 2033, there will be a substantial amount of funding available to help support the Fire Department. He explained that as development increases, both revenue and assessments will increase.

Mr. Harrison stated that the City could evaluate higher assessments for larger commercial buildings and asked that the Council consider how the assessment would appear from a property owner's perspective. He noted that impact fees have not increased and stated that there has been little discussion about long-term sustainability of the Fire Department.

Mr. Harrison stated that the City will not be able to sustain fire services with slow revenue growth. He added that a fire assessment should not scare residents and noted projections showing approximately 2,000 dwelling units by 2030, effectively doubling by that time. He stated that this represents significant population growth and corresponding revenue increases.

Mr. Harrison stated that other cities are implementing similar assessments and acknowledged there are uncertainties. He added that federal grants are not currently being considered to address these needs.

Mr. Adkinson stated that staff is also evaluating other assessments for fire and police services and that he was glad the issue was raised during the meeting.

Mr. Cosson asked why a ladder truck is needed and noted that there is a checklist used by insurance companies to lower residents' insurance rates. He referenced Birmingham, Alabama, as an example and asked Fire Chief Sheffield to address operational needs.

Chief Sheffield stated that he does not have authority over the Council's decision but explained that fair and adequate funding is essential for operations. Mr. Cosson asked whether the assessment would be fair to property owners and businesses.

Mr. Bierbaum presented information regarding projected tax increases and asked how this would affect the City's ISO rating.

Chief Sheffield responded that he would like to see the City achieve at least an ISO rating of 4.

Mr. Bierbaum asked what would be required to reach that rating and whether adopting the assessment would lower the ISO score.

Chief Sheffield stated that he believes it would.

Mr. Bierbaum stated that the issue is ultimately about public safety and ensuring firefighters have proper equipment, facilities, and training. He noted that the City received an excellent training rating.

Mr. Bierbaum asked whether discussions have occurred with the County regarding reducing the ISO rating.

Chief Sheffield responded that ISO ratings are directly tied to the Fire Department's budget.

Mr. Harrison asked what infrastructure improvements could reduce the ISO rating.

Chief Sheffield responded that improvements to the water system would have the greatest impact.

Mr. Harrison stated that discussions about transferring fire services to the County have occurred for over 20 years and that this conversation should have happened sooner. He acknowledged that people do not like taxes but stated that the issue has been building for a long time. He expressed confidence in the Fire Department and stated that the community shares that confidence.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that she appreciates the comments but believes the discussion may be premature. She stated that the Council needs to determine whether management of fire services will remain with the City and expressed concern that the process is being rushed.

Mr. Bierbaum asked Mr. Townsend, as City Manager, for his recommendation regarding the Fire Department.

Mr. Townsend responded that his recommendation is always to select the provider that can deliver services more efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Sconiers asked how the City can continue funding fire services while minimizing transfers. He noted that the City has other liabilities and questioned whether it is prudent to assume the burden if the County is willing to provide services at half the cost and fund renovations.

Mr. Sconiers stated that the City's ability to attract businesses is important and emphasized that service levels would not be reduced. He added that the City provides mutual aid throughout the County and expressed difficulty balancing services for citizens and employees.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that the Council could vote to eliminate the Fire Department but noted that residents would still be taxed.

Mr. Harrison stated that he does not want minimal service levels and expressed concern about that outcome.

Mr. Harrison stated that the CRA could potentially fund fire station renovations and noted that the public may not fully understand the scope of what is being discussed. He stated that a future agenda item would address how the CRA could assist.

Mr. Hamilton stated that funding for renovations is currently available and that the Council previously discussed waiting three years before removing the project from the Capital Improvement Plan.

Ms. Kaitlyn Powell asked how much savings would result from moving from an ISO rating of 4 to 3. She stated that paying \$155 per year compared to \$75 to the County would be a significant burden for residents.

Mrs. Wennerberg asked whether residents are paying the same tax rate but receiving less service. She questioned why the Fire Department has been disproportionately scrutinized and stated that she does not support higher taxes. She emphasized that the conversation still needs to occur.

Donna Harold stated that the County Commission has never been formally asked to address this issue.

Mr. Townsend stated that he has not been directed to ask the County Commission.

Mrs. Harold stated that the County Fire District has sought an increase and expressed concern that residents would continue paying taxes without local control. She stated that the Board has not agreed to cover added expenses and that it is unclear how much the City would save.

Mr. Adkinson stated that negotiations with the Walton County Fire District are ongoing and that the County has authority—but not a mandate—to provide fire protection.

Mr. Harrison asked how far outside the City limits DeFuniak Springs currently responds to assist the County.

Ms. Jane Robinson asked whether the \$40,000 consultant fee includes mailing costs. She noted that Freeport contracts with the County at \$75 per household and asked whether the City is currently paying fire costs through the General Fund.

Mayor Campbell stated that staff is exploring multiple options to increase revenue.

Mr. Cosson stated that the Council must determine what is reasonable and fair for both residents and businesses. He noted that Commissioner Glidewell indicated the County is also facing financial challenges and asked whether the County would eliminate funding sources that have resulted in lawsuits.

Mr. Adkinson stated that any such decision would rest with the County and emphasized the importance of retaining as much local control as possible through contractual agreements.

Mr. McKnight stated that responsible cities provide fire and police services for their residents.

Mr. Kneller stated that the increase in the assessment would equate to approximately \$0.30 per square foot. He encouraged the City to engage the County and noted that businesses may realize savings under a revised service model.

Mr. Sconiers requested that staff obtain a written proposal from the Sheriff and present it to the Board of County Commissioners, including funding amounts up to \$1.5 million or another specified level.

Mr. Harrison asked how long implementation of a fire assessment would take and why this had not been pursued previously. He also asked whether an incremental implementation was possible.

Mr. Adkinson responded yes, noting that increases would be exponential rather than linear.

Mr. Harrison stated that incremental implementation would provide a clearer long-term picture.

Mayor Campbell stated that there have been years when cities received no external funding and that such funding could dry up again.

Ms. Henderson stated that many services have already been transferred to the County and expressed concern about job losses if additional services are transferred.

Mr. Townsend clarified that the presentation was for informational purposes only and that there was no action item before the Council. He stated that January 23 is the latest date the City would need to decide whether to proceed and noted that the study is built around the Capital Improvement Plan.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that it is concerning that someone could provide the same service for \$900,000 less.

Mr. Cosson stated that the most critical factor is response time, which he believes the County cannot match. He stated that the County is overstretched and experiencing mandatory overtime.

Mr. Cosson stated that Council members were elected to represent citizens and must explore revenue options. He added that business rate increases are unreasonable and concluded that while the issue would not be resolved that night, the discussion provided a starting point.

Mr. Sconiers stated that the City Manager should formally request information from the County, rather than relying on draft documents.

Mrs. Heavilin asked [question not clearly audible or stated].

Mr. Harrison stated that the City does not want to miss the County's deadline.

Mr. Townsend stated that he could appear before the Board of County Commissioners on January 27.

Mr. Cosson noted that County meetings are structured similarly to City meetings.

Mr. Townsend stated that he would obtain a formal proposal and determine funding expectations.

**A motion was made to have the City Manager Negotiate the he Term Sheet with the Walton BCC by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed with Councilmember Heavilin voting nay.**

**A motion was made to see what funding the Walton BCC will providing for fire services by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Councilmember Bierbaum; the motion passed without objection.**

## **7. Information Requested for Process Related to CRA Map Alterations & Rate Changes**

Mr. Townsend presented the information requested regarding the process related to CRA map alterations and rate changes.

Mr. Adkinson stated that the Council voted on a reduction this year; therefore, those options are not available at this time. He further stated that the statute is clear that any change to the CRA plan must be initiated by the CRA.

Mrs. Heavilin asked whether this matter could be addressed during the budget process. Mr. Adkinson responded yes.

Mr. Cosson stated that the City is in a financial crisis. He expressed concern that allocating the full funding amount to the CRA could result in cuts to City services and reductions in staff. He noted that the City has infrastructure needs that must be addressed.

Mr. Cosson asked whether the Council would consider eliminating the CRA and whether the City could absorb nearly \$4 million. Mr. Adkinson responded that funds currently held in the CRA trust fund would have to remain there. He further stated that if the CRA were eliminated, it would have to be recreated from the beginning.

Mr. Harrison stated that he requested the information be brought back so the Council could review it. He noted that the CRA map discussion had only been briefly addressed previously and that the outcome may have been different if it had been discussed more thoroughly. He compared the CRA to the Fire Department, stating that while he wants the CRA to work, the City has a responsibility to its residents.

Mr. Harrison stated that the CRA is preparing to issue bonds, which limits the City's ability to make changes. He added that these issues have not been fully reviewed. He expressed concern regarding staffing challenges, employee raises, and discussions about constructing an amphitheater while the City faces financial uncertainty. He emphasized the need to resolve these issues, particularly given uncertainty at the State level.

Mr. Harrison stated that the conversation has shifted due to the need to fund multiple projects. While he supports the CRA, he does not want to eliminate it due to the current circumstances.

Mr. Cosson stated that he supports reducing the CRA map at this time. Mrs. Heavilin stated that this could be addressed during the next budget cycle. She added that in her two years on the Council, she understood that any reduction to the CRA map must be initiated by the CRA and expressed surprise that this clarification was just received.

Mr. Bierbaum stated that the Council previously directed staff to identify ways to reduce the \$2.5 million deficit. He noted that the CRA was established prior to his service on the Council and emphasized the importance of proceeding cautiously. He stated that approximately 74% of the General Fund is allocated to salaries.

Mr. Townsend stated that the City may have approximately \$200,000 available.

Mr. Bierbaum clarified that no one was criticizing the Fire Department or suggesting poor performance. He stated that the CRA funding adjustment represents a 5-6% change and that total ad valorem collections are approximately \$4 million. He noted that ad valorem revenue barely funds City operations.

Mr. Cosson referenced a prior briefing he and Mr. Daniels received that outlined the repercussions of allocating funding to the CRA.

Mrs. Heavilin asked how the City determines which departments receive funding reductions. She stated that she was not concerned about the percentage allocated to salaries, noting that approximately 75% is typical for cities throughout the State of Florida.

Mr. Bierbaum stated that a recommendation had been made to add 21 positions, while 10 positions remain unfilled. He added that retaining current employees would allow for improved resources and working conditions.

Mr. Harrison stated that his primary concern is growth. He stated that he is opposed to increasing CRA funding if it does not contribute to measurable improvements. He emphasized the City's responsibility to keep residents satisfied and stated that layoffs do not make sense at this time because people matter. He noted that business square footage in the City is expected to more than double.

Mr. Harrison reiterated the need to reduce the CRA map and stated that he does not understand why the CRA boundaries originally included the entire City.

Mr. Bierbaum recalled a time when Lake Yard events attracted tens of thousands of attendees and noted that the Chautauqua Festival previously drew more than 1,000 people.

Mr. Cosson asked whether the CRA could reduce its boundaries.

Mr. Hamilton stated that obtaining the necessary information was not worth the effort at this time. He noted that he has been speaking with individuals interested in contributing to various City projects. He stated that eliminating the CRA would be shortsighted and would remove many benefits. He added that once areas are removed from the CRA map, they cannot be re-added.

Mr. Hamilton stated that maintaining the current CRA boundaries allows the City to serve more residents but suggested that areas south of Highway 10 may no longer require CRA assistance. He stated that a public workshop has been scheduled and that progress is finally being made on long-standing projects, including alleyway improvements. He encouraged open discussion on these matters.

Mr. Cosson stated that art is a luxury and that the City must prioritize needs over wants, clarifying that he is not opposed to art.

Ms. Henderson stated that she reviewed a study indicating that CRA funding can generate millions of dollars in economic impact.

Mrs. Donna stated that the CRA should not be eliminated entirely and that the City should work collaboratively to return funding to the City while maintaining CRA benefits.

Bruce Naylor, citizen of DeFuniak Springs, addressed the Council and spoke in favor of holding public workshops to further discuss CRA funding and City priorities.

Mr. Hamilton reiterated the importance of public workshops.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he agreed with earlier comments made by Mr. Harold and expressed concerns regarding alleyway projects. He stated that Mr. Hamilton is taking the appropriate approach.

Mrs. Wennerberg stated that she would have preferred these issues to be workshopped prior to the meeting. She asked how other City initiatives are being funded and requested that the Council consider her perspective regarding growth management and financial planning.

Mrs. Bierbaum stated that the \$1 million obligation continues to grow.

Mr. Sconiers stated that the Council needs to consider the overall financial picture.

Mr. Harrison stated that the City will not know until July what actions the Legislature will take.

#### **4. PUBLIC HEARING/ORDINANCES**

##### **A. Community Development Director C. Wallace**

**1. 2nd Reading - 2026-SSA-01, Nolan Baker, on behalf of Elijah Smith, is requesting a Small-Scale Amendment to amend the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) from Agriculture to MDR, Medium Density Residential.**

**A motion was made to approve 2nd Reading - 2026-SSA-01, Nolan Baker, on behalf of Elijah Smith, is requesting a Small Scale Amendment to amend the Future Land Use Map (FLUM) from Agriculture to MDR, Medium Density Residential by Councilmember Bierbaum and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.**

**2. 2nd Reading - 2026-RZ-01, Nolan Baker, on behalf of Elijah Smith, is requesting a rezoning from Agriculture to R-2, Multi-Family Residential.**

**A motion was made to approve 2nd Reading - 2026-RZ-01, Nolan Baker, on behalf of Elijah Smith, is requesting a rezoning from Agriculture to R-2, Multi-Family Residential by Councilmember Bierbaum and seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.**

**3. 2nd Reading - 2026-LDC-01, A text amendment as it relates to the platting procedures.**

A motion was made to approve 3. 2nd Reading - 2026-LDC-01, a text amendment regarding plating procedures, by Councilmember Bierbaum, seconded by Councilmember Sconiers; the motion passed without objection.

**5. REQUEST TO BE ON THE AGENDA**

**6. CITIZEN COMMENTS**

**7. CITY ATTORNEY**

**8. LEGISLATIVE REQUESTS**

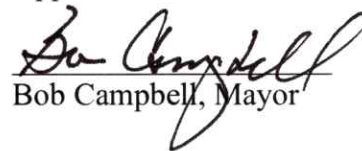
**9. EXECUTIVE COMMENTS**

**10. COUNCIL COMMENTS**

**11. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting Adjourned 8:55 PM.

Approved:

  
Bob Campbell, Mayor

ATTEST:



Minutes taken by ~~Rafael Ali~~  
City Clerk

Proper notice having been duly given

*Sumie Gabbard*  
Deputy City Clerk

