

**DeFuniak Springs Special
City Council
Meeting Minutes
Council Chambers
February 2, 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. DISCUSSION/DIRECTION ON THE FIRE DEPARTMENT

Mayor Campbell stated that the City Manager is scheduled to meet with the Board of County Commissioners (BCC) on the 10th.

Mayor Campbell stated that it is not fair to make a decision before the requested information is received and that both sides of the issue need to be heard.

Mr. Cosson stated that he understands the Council does not yet have all the information and noted that he has been requesting the information for several months.

Mr. Cosson stated that the previous meeting was not fair to the Fire Department.

A motion was made to keep the Fire Department under the City of DeFuniak Springs control by councilmember Heavilin and seconded by Councilmember Cosson; the motion passed without objection.

Mr. Adkinson stated for the record that this action rescinds all prior motions related to negotiating with the Walton County Sheriff's Office to assume control of the Fire Department, but does not rescind any requests for funding from the Walton County Board of County Commissioners.

Mr. Sconiers presented on substitute motion.

A motion was made to table this item till the City Manager collects the information being requested by the council by Councilmember Sconiers and seconded by Mr. Bierbaum; the motion failed with Councilmember Heavilin, Cosson, and Harrison voting nay.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that legal counsel cannot represent all parties, including the County and the CRA.

Mr. Adkinson stated that there is no legal conflict and clarified that he has not represented the Sheriff's Office.

Mr. Adkinson stated that the City Council directed the CRA to be represented by the City Attorney and that the situation was being taken out of context.

Mayor Campbell stated that City firefighters would receive at least a 15% raise and reiterated the City's appreciation for its firefighters.

Mayor Campbell stated that while the City is growing, it currently does not have sufficient funding.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that the General Fund shows Public Works accounted for 31% and the City Budget and the Police Department 30%.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that the City Manager requested revisions to the draft information he received.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that the Sheriff's Office initially refused to provide additional information.

Mr. Townsend stated that the Sheriff's Office would provide all information requested and that staff is currently drafting the materials.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that if the City is going to retain the Fire Department, the Council needs complete information.

Mayor Campbell stated that there is no harm in waiting for the information.

Mr. Harrison stated that the discussion has focused primarily on the Police Department and noted the City's low ISO rating and strong working relationship with Walton County Fire Rescue.

Mayor Campbell stated that documentation would outline how an agreement with the County would look.

Mr. Adkinson stated that the Council cannot voluntarily agree to transfer the Fire Department during this meeting.

Mr. Harrison stated that this discussion began in 2024 and that no formal motion has been made to transfer fire services.

Mr. Harrison stated that this matter is not personal and that significant effort has been made to determine how to retain the Fire Department.

Mr. Harrison stated that only three Council members have seen the proposal being discussed and expressed concern about time being wasted.

Mr. Harrison stated that the issue needs to be resolved one way or another.

Mr. Cosson stated that Fire Chief Sheffield has experience with a large fire department and has requested time to determine whether the Fire Department can be saved.

Mr. Cosson stated that there has been discussion suggesting the Fire Department could operate on \$1 million and expressed concern that the City may later be assessed by the County.

Mr. Cosson stated that the Sheriff did not initiate this matter and does not want to take over fire services.

Mr. Cosson stated that the City has prioritized projects such as the amphitheater and art studio over infrastructure needs.

Mr. Sconiers stated that the Council did not place CRA priorities ahead of City needs and that the Fire Department was fully funded this fiscal year.

Mr. Sconiers stated that previous Councils funded fire services through water and sewer revenues and that the City is attempting to minimize transfers.

Mr. Sconiers stated that the delay is due to bureaucratic processes and emphasized the importance of reviewing the entire system.

Mr. Sconiers asked why the Council could not wait two additional weeks and noted that the issue has been amplified on social media.

Mr. Harrison stated that the City cannot have a productive discussion without full information and that alternatives must be considered.

Mr. Harrison stated that DeFuniak Springs is one of the few cities without a fire assessment.

Mrs. Heavilin stated that information was promised in December and reiterated that she does not support deactivating or transferring management of the Fire Department.

Mayor Campbell stated that he has reviewed the Freeport fire agreement and noted that it was considered successful by that City.

Mr. Harrison stated that Freeport saved \$0 on fire protection.

Mr. Adkinson clarified that Walton County contracts fire and rescue services through the Sheriff's Office under an interlocal agreement.

Mr. Adkinson stated that there has never been an attempt to deactivate fire services and that the discussion centers on contracting services.

Mayor Campbell stated that the City currently has eight fire employees and volunteers and operates a small department.

Mr. Sconiers stated that discussions regarding fire assessments are not new and explained the initial proposal.

Mr. Sconiers stated that he still wants the requested information returned before further action.

Mrs. Lightner explained the percentage of City funding allocated to fire services and stated that ISO savings are minimal.

Mrs. Lightner stated that firefighters prefer remaining under City control and emphasized the importance of confirming ISO ratings.

Mrs. Kitch stated that public safety should be the City's top priority and that CRA dollars should be used appropriately.

Mrs. Kitch stated that funding is the most critical issue and requested additional information from the County.

Mrs. Donna stated that contracting management could still retain the City's Fire Department and encouraged exploring additional options.

Mr. Harrison asked Mr. Townsend to clarify to the public and council why setting a deadline is necessary.

Mr. Townsend stated that the deadline is March 1 and that February 25 through March 30 is the publication window, with the current date being the last day to submit notice to the newspaper.

Mayor Campbell asked whether a public hearing is required.

Mr. Townsend stated that The Breeze is the only qualifying publication.

Mr. Cosson stated that the BCC previously provided South Walton with over \$1 million for fire services and suggested discussing potential funding options with the County.

3. Discussion/Direction on Public Hearing for Resolution of Intent for Non-Ad Valorem Assessment for Fire Services

A motion was made to hold the first fire assessment public hearing by Mr. Harrison and seconded by Mrs. Heavilin; the motion passed without objection.

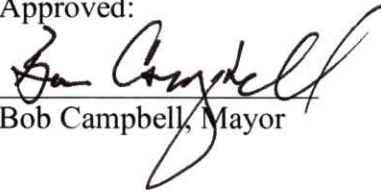
Mrs. Kitch stated that the Council needs to better understand what can and cannot be said during public hearings and reiterated her desire to pursue available County funding.

Mrs. Lightner stated that she cares deeply about the City and is willing to support necessary steps moving forward.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting Adjourned 7:21 PM.

Approved:


Bob Campbell, Mayor

ATTEST:



Minutes taken by Rafael Ali
City Clerk

Proper notice having been duly given

Sumie Gabbard
Deputy

