



CITY OF WINTER GARDEN

City Commission REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

March 27, 2025

REGULAR MEETING of the Winter Garden City Commission was called to order by Mayor Rees at 6:30 p.m. at City Hall, 300 West Plant Street, Winter Garden, Florida. An Opening Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance were given.

Present:

Mayor John Rees

Commissioner District 1 - Lisa L. Bennett

Commissioner District 2 - Iliana R. Jones

Commissioner District 3 - Chloe Johnson

Commissioner District 4 - Colin Sharman

Also Present:

City Manager Jon C. Williams

City Attorney A. Kurt Ardaman

Assistant City Clerk Ronisha Martin

1. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Motion by Commissioner Jones to approve regular meeting minutes of March 13, 2025, as submitted. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried unanimously 4-0.

2. **REGULAR BUSINESS**

A. **Recommendation to approve Amended and Restated Professional Services Agreement with Fishback Dominick, LLP with an effective date of April 1, 2025**

City Manager Jon C. Williams stated that this request is to amend and restate the professional services agreement with Fishback and Dominick LLP, which has provided legal services to the city since 2006. He stated that the proposed change includes an increase in the monthly retainer and adjustments to hourly rates for various legal services. Staff recommended approval. Discussion ensued on how rates compared to other cities.

City Attorney A. Kurt Ardaman expressed appreciation for the continued City partnership.

Motion by Commissioner Bennett to approve Amended and Restated Professional Services Agreement with Fishback Dominick, LLP with an effective date of April 1, 2025. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried unanimously 4-0.

Commissioner Sharman arrived at this point in the meeting at 6:36 p.m.

B. **Recommendation to approve letter of Intent to continue conversations and negotiations with Federal Finance about potential development for properties located at 1500 and 1700 East Plant Street**

Planning Director Kelly Carson stated that the City was recently approached by Federal Finance regarding a potential development opportunity and partnership involving the Strates property. She provided background information on the 70-acre site, including its zoning, future land use designation, and past development proposals.

Ms. Carson outlined that, although the property is currently used for grazing animals, its zoning allows for significant development, including commercial, residential, and mixed-use projects. Several past proposals had been submitted over the years, including plans for retail, office space, multi-family housing, townhomes, and even a private resort. However, these previous plans lacked direct public benefits for the community.

Ms. Carson emphasized that, given the property's entitlements and inclusion in the East Plant Street Overlay, any new proposal that offers tangible public benefits should be considered. She recognized Economic Development Director Marc Hutchinson, to provide additional details on the current Federal Finance proposal.

Mr. Hutchinson noted that he would give an overview of the proposed Federal Finance development, shared potential benefits, gave history of the developer, noted some of the future projects, as well as those projects that have been completed. He shared that this would involve an estimated investment of over \$300 million on approximately 70 acres. He spoke of the proposed plan including a mix of commercial and residential spaces, with retail along Plant Street, live-work units, a 160-key hotel with convention space. He further noted a residential element including townhomes, multi-family residences, senior housing, and the possibility of an educational facility.

Furthermore, Mr. Hutchinson highlighted key public amenities, such as an open-air 5,000-seat soccer stadium, public recreational fields, a dog park, a park with trails, and picnic areas. He spoke of potential city-owned and managed sports courts and accessible public areas. Additional proposed items included a waterfront plaza, expanded bike trails, increased stormwater management capacity for the historic East Winter Garden community, opportunity for new senior affordable housing, educational facility, increased employment opportunities for local residents. He gave an overview of the developer, Federal Finance and their subsidiaries and functions. He spoke of their projects, projects in process, noted some next steps, and advised of an address change. Furthermore, Mr. Hutchinson emphasized the opportunities, potential benefits for both the community and the economy. Staff recommended approval.

Commissioner Bennett sought and received clarification that there were 5,000 seats for the soccer stadium and a 160-key hotel.

Mayor Rees spoke of the project and acknowledged that the conversation was still in the early stages, suggested a special referendum for increasing recreational fees to fund additional ball fields, and emphasized the need for further discussions.

Commissioner Johnson agreed with Mayor Rees, noted that this is just conversation.

Commissioner Bennett inquired if there would be public comments for this item.

Mayor Rees opened a public hearing.

There was clarification on the address and location of the project.

Heather Fraga, 1466 Spring Ridge Circle, Winter Garden, Florida, a fourth-generation resident, voiced concerns about the development's impact on infrastructure, particularly traffic congestion on major roads. She also raised noise concerns, referencing local events that already affect the area. While acknowledging the inevitability of growth, she urged the City to consider what public amenities it would own before committing to any agreement.

Gretchen Tope, 512 North Lakeview Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, expressed concern that the development may not include affordable housing for the Historic East Winter Garden, emphasizing the City's responsibility to support all communities.

Allison Painter, 393 North Lakeview Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, stated that she would support a referendum to fund development responsible but opposed the current proposal, believing it's excessive. She suggested relocating the stadium elsewhere.

Jeanine Wilson, 114 North Highland Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, questioned the experience of the developer of the concept plan, the project's impact on neighborhoods and traffic.

Doug Laman, Owner of GIL Inc., expressed support for the City's planning efforts and advocated for discussing a letter of intent for the development, encouraged conversation, highlighting the importance of thoughtful growth and traffic considerations.

Jonathan Green, 303 West Bay Street, Winter Garden, Florida, raised concerns about the roads, flooding, community impact and the long-term sustainability of the development.

Lauren Flemister, 124 North Highland Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, suggested finding a balance between development and community needs, expressing concerns about the 5,000-seat stadium, increased traffic, and the impact on residents and merchants.

Mayor Rees, after hearing and seeing no additional requests for public comment, closed the public hearing.

Commissioner Jones highlighted the importance of open communication to reach a compromise, agreeing that while the idea of development may not be perfect, discussing it through the letter of intent allows for further dialogue and potential adjustments until a mutually agreeable solution is found.

Commissioner Sharman shared his experience regarding the Winter Garden Village development project of 2006. He noted that, initially, there were concerns from citizens;

but over time, as discussions continued, compromises were reached, and the project evolved.

Motion by Commissioner Sharman to continue discussions, have staff investigate the cost of purchasing the land, and then conduct a referendum, if necessary. Seconded by Commissioner Johnson and carried 4-1; Commissioner Bennett opposed.

- C. Recommendation to approve Purchase Order with Mead and Hunt for Temporary On-Call Construction Engineering and Inspection Services for Crest Avenue (WWTP) in an amount not to exceed of \$325,000
Mayor Rees noted that this item was withdrawn.

- D. Recommendation to approve Purchase Order with Middlesex Paving, LLC for resurfacing services in the amount of \$997,537.75
City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that the request is to approve purchase order with Middlesex Paving for the annual street resurfacing project for fiscal year 2025. He listed the locations for the work. Furthermore, he noted that the work is a piggyback agreement from Orange County Contract Y23-119D, Amendment 1. Staff recommended approval.

Mayor Rees inquired if the cost for the road resurfacing project was included in the budget and asked if these were the roads most in need of repaving. Mr. Monohan responded, yes.

Motion by Commissioner Jones to approve Purchase Order with Middlesex Paving, LLC for resurfacing services in the amount of \$997,537.75. Seconded by Commissioner Sharman and carried unanimously 5-0.

- E. Recommendation to approve Deductive Change Order to Wharton Smith, Inc. for GMP-2 in the amount of \$3,747,170 for a total project cost of \$128,890,600, which includes \$5,107,615 approved for GMP-1 in February 2024
City Engineer Jim Monahan stated that Wharton-Smith team re-evaluated bids to calculate final savings, tabulations were included in the agenda packet. Staff recommended approval.

City Manager Jon C. Williams noted that the deduction would be set aside for CEI services, which would be addressed at a later date.

Motion by Commissioner Sharman to approve Deductive Change Order to Wharton Smith, Inc. for GMP-2 in the amount of \$3,747,170 for a total project cost of \$128,890,600, which includes \$5,107,615 approved for GMP-1 in February 2024. Seconded by Commissioner Jones and carried unanimously 5-0.

3. MATTERS FROM PUBLIC

Allison Painter, 393 North Lakeview Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, voiced concerns regarding ineffective speed bumps on Lakeview Avenue and a need for their reevaluation.

Ms. Painter also requested that the split between Crest Avenue and Lakeview Avenue be made a one-way road leading towards the lake, insisting that it be done for safety reasons, as she has witnessed near accidents. Furthermore, Ms. Painter indicated that she would continually bring this issue back to the City Commission until action is taken.

Barbie Pugh, 42 South Park Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, spoke of concerns on Fifth Street, highlighting that it is unsafe for pedestrians to cross the street, and hopes the issue would be addressed.

Ken Brown, 432 Newhearth Circle, Winter Garden, Florida, shared his experience serving on the Crystal River City Council and shared a related story. He encouraged smart growth policies, and supports use of a referendum for community support.

Mr. Brown asked why the City discontinued recycling. Mayor responded by noting the high costs associated with it, million dollars spent annually only to recycle 1-5 percent of the materials, only to have most recyclables ultimately end up in landfills anyways. Mayor Rees assured that staff is still looking into alternative solutions.

Mr. Brown mentioned concerns about speeding in his neighborhood due to cut-through traffic from a nearby development and suggested that higher speed bumps be installed.

Gretchen Tope, 512 North Lakeview Avenue, Winter Garden, Florida, shared concerns about the potential noise and traffic impacts from a development project, noting that the eagles in the area have been there for a long time and should be prioritized.

4. MATTERS FROM CITY ATTORNEY – There were no items.

5. MATTERS FROM CITY MANAGER

Jon C. Williams stated that the City was asked to enter a 287(g) Agreement with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), designating task force officers (TFOs) to assist ICE, when requested. He spoke of officers remaining on their regular duties, receiving specific ICE training, and authorization to the Police Chief to proceed with executing the agreement.

City Manager Williams announce that Water Quality Grant informed that the City would receive two grants: \$6,640,000 for the Teacup Springs septic to sewer conversion project, and \$15 million for the Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) expansion project, totaling \$21.64 million. He praised staff for their hard work and mentioned that the grant cycle would open again in June.

Mr. Williams gave an update on the Tucker Ranch noting the near completion of the sitework, footers being poured, and despite the challenging drought, there has been progress.

6. MATTERS FROM MAYOR AND COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Johnson acknowledged the City for doing a good job and encouraged staff to keep up the good work.

Commissioner Jones thanked staff for their hard work and expressed excitement for the upcoming Spring Fever.

Commissioner Bennett stated that she echoes Commissioner Jones' statement.

Mayor Rees mentioned the upcoming Evening at the Pops event, recognized the Public Works Department for their efforts, particularly during and after the hurricane season and expressed that the City and all its resident's appreciate their hard work.

The meeting adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

APPROVED:

_____/S/_____
Mayor John Rees

ATTEST:

_____/S/_____
Assistant City Clerk Ronisha Martin