



City Council Meeting Minutes
February 23, 2026
7:00 p.m.

- I. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Hattie Portis-Jones.
- II. Roll Call by City Clerk, Deannia Ray found the following members present:

The Honorable Anatavia M. Benson
The Honorable Fannie Mae Houser
The Honorable Samuel Perry

The Honorable Linda J. Davis
The Honorable Shanita Nichols
The Honorable Ulysses J. Smallwood

Also present were City Administrator Tony Phillips, Assistant City Administrator Jamila Criss, City Attorney Rory Starkey, City Attorney Valerie Ross, and City Clerk Deannia Ray.

- III. The invocation was provided by Pastor Lewis Eckert, First Baptist Church Fairburn
- IV. Pledge of Allegiance was in Unison.
- V. Presentations and Proclamations:

1. Proclamation Honoring the Creekside High School Seminoles

Mayor Portis-Jones presented a proclamation on behalf of the City of Fairburn to Coach Maurice Dixon and the Creekside High School Seminoles for completing an extraordinary and historic 2025 football season. Finishing undefeated with a 15-0 record and capturing the Georgia High School Association Class AAAA State Championship. Many members of the championship team began their athletic development in the Fairburn Flames football program at Duncan Park, reflecting the City of Fairburn's longstanding commitment to youth development, mentorship, and community-based recreation.

Coach Maurice Dixon accepted the proclamation and said he started playing in Fairburn when he was five years old and he graduated from Creekside High School. Having his son and the players who grew up with him attempt that feat and conquer it, made him proud. He thanked the city for its support and said it was a dream come true and they plan to do it again.

Mayor Portis-Jones said they will feature Mr. Dixon and the Creekside team in the next issue of the *In Focus* digital magazine.

VI. Adoption of the City Council Agenda:

Council Member Davis made a motion to approve the agenda. Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

VII. Public Comments: N/A

VIII. Approval of the Minutes:

2. Approval of the Council Meeting Minutes of February 9, 2026

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood made a motion to approve February 9, 2026, minutes as written. Council Member Perry provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

IX. Public Hearing:

3. Use Permit – Truck Terminal (7472 Graham Road)

Mayor Portis-Jones called the public hearing to order for the use permit request located at 7472 Graham Road. She stated that the matter was a land use issue requiring a quasi-judicial decision and the council's decision must be based on the standards contained in the City of Fairburn Zoning Ordinance, specifically Section 80-172 regarding use permit considerations and the applicable supplemental standards under Section 80-239 for truck terminals.

Council Member Perry made a motion to open the public hearing. Council Member Nichols provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Planning and Zoning Director Denise Brookins presented the staff analysis for the use permit request located at 7472 Graham Road. She stated the property totals approximately 9.5 acres and is currently zoned M-2 (Heavy Industrial). She explained the M-2 zoning district is intended to provide areas for major manufacturing and storage uses requiring substantial land and access to major streets and utilities. She said within the M-2 zoning district, any use permitted in the Light Industrial district is allowed and the code further lists truck terminals and truck stops as permitted uses within M-2 with an approved use permit. The applicant had provided all necessary documentation for review and hosted a public participation meeting, notifying property owners within 1,000 feet. No participants attended the meeting, mostly due to the property being surrounded by industrial uses.

Director Brookins outlined the supplemental regulations applicable to truck terminals and truck stops, including:

- The lot, including all structures and parking spaces, must be at least five acres.
- The use is not permitted within 5,000 feet in any direction of an existing similar use.
- On-site security must be provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- No long-term storage of trailers or trucks is permitted on the lot.
- No overnight or sleeping facilities are permitted on site.

Ms. Brookins stated the applicant is aware of these supplemental regulations and expressed no concerns. The use permit considerations include evaluation of parking, site size, protective screening, hours of operation, surrounding land uses, and consistency with the Comprehensive Plan. The proposed use is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and surrounding zoning classifications, which include M-1 and M-2 districts, as well as warehouse uses. The property was had previously used as overflow parking for a single company, but the proposed use would allow access to multiple companies. Staff recommended additional conditions to clarify compliance with supplemental regulations.

Those conditions include:

- Submission of an on-site security plan to the Fire and Police Departments.
- Prohibition of inoperable vehicles on site.
- Paving of any expanded parking areas.
- Prohibition of temporary restroom facilities.
- Submission of an adequate spill prevention and environmental protection plan.
- Enforcement provisions for non-compliance.

Director Brookins said staff recommends approval of the use permit subject to the stated conditions and supplemental regulations.

Council Member Nichols said the property is located in an industrial area and on January 12th, the city had their Inauguration event, which could have impacted public attendance at the community meeting. She suggested in the future, the city informs their partners and potential stakeholders of city events and scheduling conflicts. Council Member Nichols asked if this property had previously operated as a truck terminal and requested clarification on how the proposed use permit differs from before. Ms. Brookins said the previous site was used as overflow parking for a single company's trucks and explained the proposed use would allow access to multiple companies with tractor trailers, which constitutes a different use classification. As a result, the proposal triggers the truck terminal requirements including the need for a use permit, public meetings, and review by the Mayor and Council.

Council Member Benson asked what measures would be in place to ensure the trucking companies would remain compliant with the recommendations. Ms. Brookins said although the site would be open to the public, one management company would oversee operations. The managing entity would be responsible for compliance, and the property owner would be held accountable for any violations. Staff has consulted with Public Safety to determine whether there were any concerns regarding the proposed use. When there is a change in use and broader public access, it is important to ensure there is no history of security concerns, complaints, lighting issues, or related operational problems.

Council Member Perry asked if a traffic feasibility study had been conducted to determine how the proposed use might impact local traffic in the area. Ms. Brookins said the City's traffic engineers have reviewed the request and it did not trigger an additional traffic analysis. Council Member Perry asked for clarification. Ms. Brookins said the City of Fairburn follows industry standards including Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) guidelines. The additional traffic analysis is typically triggered when a proposed use is expected to generate traffic volumes above typical development thresholds, and in this instance, the anticipated traffic volume did not meet the threshold requiring additional transportation analysis. She said the traffic studies are required when development significantly intensifies surrounding land use. Council Member Perry asked if there had been any major safety concerns, environmental spills, or issues involving inoperable vehicles under prior ownership. Ms. Brookins said to the best of staff's knowledge, there has not been any major issues and said the recommended conditions were included to ensure compliance moving forward, as future circumstances cannot be predicted.

Council Member Davis addressed the concern raised by Council Member Nichols regarding public notification and said although the property is located in an industrial area, were there established time requirements for public participation meetings, noting that the meeting in this instance was held at 6:00 p.m. via zoom. She said the timing may not provide sufficient opportunity for citizens to leave work, return home, and attend a virtual meeting. She asked if there are specific guidelines to ensure adequate public access and if not, suggested the city consider implementing such standards.

Director Brookins said the public participation meeting process is currently recommended but not required and said if council wishes to formalize the requirement, the city could incorporate provisions ensuring those meetings are scheduled at times that allow greater public accessibility and indicated that it could be addressed in future revisions to the public participation process.

Mayor Portis-Jones said before proceeding she wanted to clearly outline the standards that Council must apply in evaluating the request. She referenced Section 80-172 of the Zoning Ordinance and stated council must evaluate consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, compatibility with surrounding zoning and uses, compliance with applicable laws, traffic impacts, parking, open space, screening, hours and manner of operation, lighting, and ingress and egress. She further requested the City Attorney explain the statement that the matter is a land use issue requiring a quasi-judicial decision.

City Attorney Valerie Ross said in regard to the use permit application, council is constrained to evaluating the request based solely on the objective criteria previously outlined by the mayor. Ms. Ross said that no matters outside of those standards should be considered, as council is acting in a quasi-judicial capacity.

Mayor Portis-Jones invited the applicant to present the application and requested that he state his name and address for the record.

Joseph Brickman, 312 Sycamore Street, Decatur, Georgia 30030, stated he was present on behalf of the property owner Graham Owner LLC., and acknowledged that council had reviewed the submitted documentation and indicated that Ms. Brookins had provided a thorough explanation of the proposal. Mr. Brickman said the property currently operates as a truck terminal and the request seeks to continue operations in the same manner, under the same management and security measures, with no proposed changes to the site.

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood inquired about the security measures referenced by the applicant and requested clarification regarding what security would entail. Mr. Brickman said security at the property consists of existing lighting, gated access, and perimeter screening fences designed to prevent unauthorized entry and secure vehicles on site. Personnel are present on site to monitor the property and ensure there are no breaches of the fencing or ingress and egress points. Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood asked how many security personnel are present and if security is maintained on a 24-hour basis. Mr. Brickman stated the code requires 24-hour security and it also includes a condition of staff's recommended approval. He was not certain of the exact number of personnel present at any given time, security is maintained 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mayor Portis-Jones asked when the conditions must be satisfied. Ms. Brookins said the conditions must be met prior to issuance of an occupational tax certificate (business license), and said staff would coordinate with the Utilities and Stormwater Management teams regarding review and approval of the spill prevention plan, and all remaining conditions would be required prior to issuance of a business license.

In Opposition: N/A

In Favor:

Josh Brickman

Council Member Benson made a motion to close the public hearing. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood made a motion to approve the Use Permit request subject to the conditions as follows:

- Submission of an on-site security plan to the Fire and Police Departments.
- Prohibition of inoperable vehicles on site.
- Paving of any expanded parking areas.
- Prohibition of temporary restroom facilities.
- Submission of an adequate spill prevention and environmental protection plan.
- Enforcement provisions for non-compliance.

Council Member Houser provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

X. Consent Agenda: N/A

XI. Regular Agenda:

4. Award ITB #25-026 for On-Call Tree Removal Services

Director of General Services Gale Higgs introduced herself and presented a request for approval to enter into contract agreements with three tree service vendors for on-call services. She stated the Invitation for Bid (IFB) No. 25-026 was released on November 30, 2025, and closed on December 18, 2025. The city received five completed proposals and upon evaluation, three most responsible and responsive vendors were identified as M. Mitchell Group, Executive Realty Solutions, and One Two Tree LLC. These vendors would provide on-call services in the event of multiple tree removals, storm-related damage, or when assistance is needed for tree climber services for trees exceeding 20 feet in height. She said the General Services Department does not remove trees over 20 feet without contracted assistance. Funding has been approved in the current budget in an amount not to exceed \$55,000.

Council Member Davis asked if the City had an existing agreement with a tree service company for maintenance of tree canopies. Ms. Higgs said they do not have a contract for tree canopy clearing. The Utilities Department maintains a separate

contract for tree removal related to power line clearance. Council Member Davis asked if they have an agreement in place for tree removal during storms or similar incidents. Ms. Higgs said they manage those situations internally when possible and explained tree removals typically occur following storms or when Planning and Zoning, in coordination with the city's arborist, identifies trees that require removal. Her department removes trees that fall within its operational capacity, specifically trees under 20 feet in height. There are currently several trees in Duncan Park exceeding 20 feet that require removal, which would necessitate contracted assistance.

Council Member Nichols thanked Ms. Higgs and expressed support for the proactive approach to tree management and said trees can have an impact on utilities and power infrastructure. She asked if the proposed contract would cover preventative tree removal in addition to emergency and scheduled services and if the \$55,000 budget allocation would include already identified trees. Ms. Higgs said the contract is inclusive of emergency, scheduled, and preventative services and confirmed the trees identified at Duncan Park would fall within the approved budget allocation. Council Member Nichols asked how the \$55,000 budget was determined and what would occur if expenditures exceeded that amount during the fiscal year. Ms. Higgs said the budget was based on expenditures and operational capacity from the prior fiscal year and they were able to complete more work in-house than anticipated last year and with increased staffing she expects to maintain similar efficiencies.

City Administrator Tony Philips said budget proposals are based on prior-year expenditures and due to the unpredictability of weather events, there is always the possibility that additional tree removals could be required. In such cases, staff would return to council to request additional funding authorization if necessary.

Council Member Perry commended staff for the thorough evaluation process and said there has been a large number of bid solicitations issued, which were narrowed down to five completed proposals and three recommended vendors. He said after reviewing the cost estimates he observed pricing structures varied with some proposals reflecting hourly rates and others structured per job. He asked whether those differences were taken into consideration during the evaluation process. Ms. Higgs said all pricing structures were taken into consideration during the evaluation and the cost comparisons factored in the type of equipment required for various services, noting that some vendors relied more heavily on equipment-based removals while others utilized climbers.

Council Member Davis made a motion to award ITB #25-026, on-call tree removal services for the City of Fairburn to M. Mitchell Group, Executive Realty Solutions, Inc., and One Two Tree, LLC. Council Member Perry provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

5. Benefits Renewal 2026

Human Resources Director Talisha Champagne presented this item for Mayor and Council to approve the city's 2026 benefits renewal. Ms. Champagne reported the renewal results as follows:

- Cigna Medical: 4% increase
- Dental: 5% increase
- Cigna Vision: no increase
- Unum (Life and Disability): no increase, noting a three-year rate guarantee
- Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) and Flexible Spending Account (FSA): no changes

Ms. Champagne invited Ms. Jamila Mathis with the Baldwin Team to present additional details regarding the 2026 renewal. Ms. Mathis reviewed the executive summary, renewal and contribution strategy, renewal plan designs, and an appendix. Ms. Mathis introduced Joe Harris, Client Manager and Cammy Hernandez, Client Executive. Ms. Mathis stated the overall medical renewal initially came back higher, and through negotiation the renewal was reduced to the final rate presented.

- Medical renewal: Ms. Mathis reported the medical renewal initially came in at an 8% increase, and through negotiations it was reduced to a 4% increase. The projected impact of the initial increase was \$283,000 and after negotiations it was reduced in half, total savings \$150,000.
- Wellness funds: The city secured \$30,000 in wellness funds for the plan year, which she stated was an increase of \$7,500 from the prior year.
- Dental renewal: The dental renewal came back at an 8.5% increase and was negotiated down to a 5% increase. She stated the projected impact was approximately \$12,298 and the negotiated reduction resulted in savings of approximately \$5,319. She noted the City's final premium increase for dental, with the city absorbing the increase and not passing it to employees, totaling \$7,589.
- Vision renewal: Ms. Mathis reported the vision plan remained under a rate lock with no increase and no plan changes.
- Unum/ancillary benefits: There were no changes and no rate increases for Unum and ancillary benefits, including worksite benefits such as accident, critical illness, hospital, basic life, and voluntary life.

Ms. Mathis said the city has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that had no rate increases or changes to those services.

Council Member Davis asked if the proposed increases were driven by market conditions or by the city's claims experience. Ms. Mathis said the increase was influenced by the city's loss ratio of 101% and explained that a 101% loss ratio means

that for every \$1.00 in premium paid by the city, the carrier paid out approximately \$1.01 in claims.

Council Member Nichols asked how frequently the city evaluates alternative insurance providers outside of Cigna to compare pricing and leverage negotiations. She asked if the city conducts full market reviews and if internal employee surveys are used to assess staff satisfaction with current benefits and inform negotiation strategy. Ms. Mathis said the city conducted a full market review approximately two years ago when transitioning from United Healthcare to Cigna. She stated that full market evaluations are performed periodically based on renewal outcomes, market conditions, claims performance, and administrative responsiveness. Ms. Champagne said Human Resources gathers employee feedback throughout the year and meets regularly with the broker team to discuss employee concerns, claims processing, and overall satisfaction. She noted that enhancements to benefits, such as prior dental improvements, were implemented based on employee feedback.

Council Member Benson asked how proactive the city is in evaluating employee health and wellness trends and if the city utilizes claims data trends to inform wellness initiatives and whether there are wellness incentives in place to support improved employee health outcomes. Ms. Mathis said the city reviews claims data in aggregate form, without identifying personal information, to evaluate cost drivers and health trends. The city is proactive in implementing wellness initiatives and has partnered on various programs to support employee health and they have conducted on-site initiatives, including health and wellness events and screenings, and collaborates with its carrier to identify available wellness resources. Ms. Champagne said when she first began with the city, the city's wellness funding totaled approximately \$5,000 and was increased to \$21,500 last year and has now increased to \$30,000 for the current plan year.

Council Member Benson asked how frequently employees utilize the city's wellness initiatives and programs. Ms. Champagne said the city conducts wellness initiatives throughout the year on an ongoing basis and the city's partnership with Cigna includes access to wellness coaches and her team meets regularly with the broker team to review aggregate claims data (without identifying employee information) to identify health trends and cost drivers. This analysis helps target specific wellness initiatives, such as heart health awareness and blood pressure screenings. Mr. Phillips added that the city actively works to manage wellness initiatives and encourages employee participation in preventative programs, recognizing that such efforts can positively impact claims experience. Certain factors affecting renewals are beyond the City's control, including chronic illnesses, catastrophic claims, and high-cost medical events.

Mr. Phillips stated that historically renewal estimates often begin at higher projected increases before negotiations reduce them to more manageable levels and noted that in prior years the City has experienced renewal projections in the range of 11% to 15% before negotiations. He stated that the current renewal at 4% to 5% represents a comparatively favorable outcome.

Council Member Houser expressed appreciation for the negotiated 4% and 5% renewal increases. She acknowledged the rising cost of health insurance and thanked staff and the broker team for their efforts in managing the renewal.

Council Member Davis said many organizations pass insurance cost increases on to employees, and she expressed appreciation that the City of Fairburn absorbs those increases. Investing in employees is beneficial to both staff and the city, employee retention is more cost-effective than recruitment and training of new personnel. She emphasized that supporting employees through competitive benefits strengthens service delivery to the City's residents.

Ms. Hernandez said her firm has served as the city's broker since 2009 and referenced the renewal history, which reflects negotiated reductions to proposed renewal increases dating back to 2018. The broker team has consistently worked to reduce renewal proposals and generate cost savings for the city and its taxpayers. She expressed appreciation for the city's longstanding partnership and indicated her desire to continue that working relationship moving forward.

Mayor Portis-Jones said having previously served on council for twelve years, she has observed the broker's consistent efforts to negotiate renewal increases to reasonable levels. She noted that as a smaller employer group, the city can be significantly impacted by catastrophic or high-cost claims, reinforcing the importance of wellness initiatives and preventative care.

Mayor Portis-Jones commended Human Resources and the broker team for increasing wellness funding from prior levels to the current \$30,000 allocation. She further emphasized that employee benefits are a key component of total compensation, not solely base salary. She stated that comprehensive benefits allow employees to utilize their take-home pay and stressed the importance of educating employees about the full value of the benefits offered.

Council Member Benson made a motion to approve the recommended renewal offerings and implementation of the 2026 employee benefits plan. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

6. Award ITB # 25-023 for Benefits Broker & Consultant Services

Human Resources Director Talisha Champagne presented this item and said the city's current benefits broker has served the city since approximately 2006. In keeping with the city's commitment to transparency, staff worked with the purchasing department to issue a formal solicitation to evaluate additional brokerage and consulting service providers. An Invitation to Bid (ITB) was issued on October 30, 2025, in accordance with the city's purchasing guidelines. The solicitation was posted for three weeks. A total of 471 vendors were notified, including the city's current broker. Forty-nine vendors downloaded the solicitation, and eleven vendors submitted responses. Upon evaluation, NFP, an Aon company, was determined to be the most responsive and responsible vendor and received the highest technical evaluation score.

Bart Shaw, representing NFP, an Aon company, provided an overview of the firm's background and scope of services. Mr. Shaw stated that the company was founded in 1963 and has more than 60 years of experience in employee benefits consulting with approximately 30 years focused specifically on public entities. He emphasized the importance of total compensation in recruiting and retaining employees. He stated that employees often focus solely on base salary when evaluating employment opportunities. When benefits such as health insurance, retirement contributions, and other employer-paid benefits are considered, the total value of compensation is significantly higher. He stated that an employee earning approximately \$45,000 annually may have a total compensation value closer to \$65,000–\$67,000 when employer-provided benefits are included. With respect to scope of services, Mr. Shaw stated that NFP would:

- Work closely with the Human Resources Department,
- Assist with renewal strategy, negotiations, and market analysis,
- Provide ongoing employee education and engagement,
- Serve as an advocate for the city in dealings with carriers,
- Support wellness initiatives through dedicated consulting resources.

Mr. Shaw stated that the firm places strong emphasis on preventative care and employee engagement to help mitigate high-cost claims and support long-term health outcomes.

Council Member Benson asked about the firm's approach to promoting employee wellness and preventative health and what specific actions NFP takes to encourage employees to actively manage their health. She asked if the firm sponsors health fairs, provides recommendations, or distributes educational materials such as newsletters. Mr. Bart Shaw said the firm supports employee wellness through comprehensive communication, engagement, and strategic planning initiatives. He stated that NFP works closely with local and regional healthcare providers to coordinate wellness

programming and leverages both large healthcare systems and local community resources to support employee outreach. He further stated services may include facilitating health fairs, lunch-and-learn sessions, on-site screenings (such as mobile mammography and dental services), vision screenings, farmers markets, and other wellness-related events. Bringing services on-site helps minimize disruption to employee work schedules and encourages greater participation.

Council Member Nichols asked if the city would be replacing The Baldwin Group, who just presented, with NFP as the new broker of record. The question was restated for the record, and it was clarified that the recommendation before Council was to move forward with NFP as the new brokerage firm, replacing The Baldwin Group.

Mr. Phillips said while The Baldwin Group had provided quality service to the city, maintaining a vendor relationship for two decades without competitive solicitation is not considered best practice. He emphasized the city's obligation to taxpayers to periodically evaluate professional service providers through a formal procurement process. Although The Baldwin Group performed well, it was appropriate and responsible to issue a competitive solicitation to assess available options in the marketplace. The procurement process resulted in NFP receiving the highest technical evaluation score and being deemed the most responsive and responsible bidder. He acknowledged that the timing of the presentations may have felt awkward but reiterated that the decision was based on the competitive evaluation process and the city's commitment to transparency and sound governance practices.

Mayor Portis-Jones requested clarification for the record regarding the transition timeline between The Baldwin Group and NFP, specifically asking when Baldwin's services would conclude and when NFP's services would begin. Ms. Champagne said the agreement with NFP would go into effect as soon as it is approved by Council.

Mayor Portis-Jones asked for clarification regarding what had previously been approved. Mr. Phillips said Council approved the 2026 benefits renewal with Cigna for medical, dental, and vision coverage. They did not approve The Baldwin Group specifically. The Baldwin Group assisted in facilitating the renewal process and NFP would assume that role going forward, they approved the benefit renewals, not the brokerage firm.

Council Member Davis stated she and Council Member Nichols shared similar concerns regarding the matter. She acknowledged the transparency of the procurement process and stated she understood the importance of not remaining with the same provider indefinitely and asked what factors led them to recommend the change in brokerage services after many years of working with The Baldwin Group. Ms. Champagne said, based on her experience working in benefits, several services currently provided under her tenure had not previously been implemented within the

city. She noted that the city enhanced internal customer service support by hiring a Human Resources Specialist, who is now available on-site to assist employees with benefit-related questions and issues. This will allow employees to receive direct assistance locally rather than relying solely on phone contact with external providers. She said she valued the partnership with The Baldwin Group, it was important to prioritize transparency and fulfill the city's responsibility to evaluate available market options. NFP offers expanded resources, including a broader team structure and a dedicated wellness consultant to support and enhance the city's wellness initiatives.

Council Member Nichols requested clarification for the statement that "no additional cost will be incurred," and she asked for an explanation of the cost structure associated with the brokerage services and what financial impact the change in broker would have on the city. Ms. Champagne explained that the broker's commission is embedded within the insurance carrier's premium rates. The city does not pay NFP directly for brokerage services, nor did it pay The Baldwin Group directly.

Mayor Portis-Jones said she has been in discussions with city administration to increase employee engagement and understanding of the city's benefit offerings. She noted that some employees are not fully maximizing the benefits available to them, and many employees do not fully understand how the benefits work, how to access them, or the overall value of the total compensation package. The city has seen an increase in younger and single employees who may not yet recognize the importance of preventive care and wellness services in the same way as more senior employees.

Council Member Benson made a motion to award ITB #25-023 for Benefits Broker & Consultant Services to NFP, an Aon Company. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

7. Appointments to the Ethics Board

City Clerk Deannia Ray said this is a recommendation for Mayor and Council to appoint or reappoint members to the Ethics Board. Pursuant to Section 2.35(l)(1)(a) the composition of the Ethics Board is seven residents who must have been residents of the city for at least one year immediately preceding the date of appointment and must remain resident of the city. No person may serve on the board if he or she has had, within the preceding one-year period, any interest in any contract, transaction, or official action of the City.

Mayor Portis-Jones requested each council member state their appointment to the Ethics Board.

- Council Member Perry appointed Lee Walton.
- Council Member Benson appointed Michelle James.
- Council Member Houser appointed Rodney Anderson.

- Mayor Portis-Jones reappointed Tony Smith.
- Council Member Davis stated that she previously appointed Vera Raglin and she will remain within her current term, which expires in 2027.
- Council Member Nichols appointed Maya Olsen.
- Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood reappointed Apostle Danita Jones.

Mayor Portis-Jones clarified for the record that the appointments were required because the ordinance provides that Ethics Board appointments are tied to the term of the elected official who made the appointment. She stated that her previous term ended in December 2025, and as a result, she was required to make a new appointment, which in this case was a reappointment. She further noted that Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood, Council Member Nichols, Council Member Houser, Council Member Benson, and Council Member Perry were also beginning new terms, thereby requiring new appointments or reappointments in accordance with the ordinance.

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood made a motion to approve the Ethics Boards appointments as provided by the governing body. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

XII. Reports:

8. Finance Director Monthly Report

Finance Director Kenneth Abidde presented this item and said revenues exceeded expenditures by \$7.4 million. Year to date the General Fund revenues received \$16.1 million and expenditures totaled \$8.6 million. As of January 2026, the city collected 43.8% of its budgeted revenues and expensed 22.63% of the total budgeted expenditures.

The City of Fairburn Enterprise funds for January 2026, year to date revenues exceeded expenditures by \$2.3 million. The Enterprise Funds revenues received total \$9.3 million and expenditures disbursed \$7 million. The city collected 34% of budgeted revenues and disbursed 25% of budgeted expenditures.

Council Member Houser asked Mr. Abidde to explain the significance of the 34% revenue collection compared to the 25% expenditure rate and how that relates to the General Fund. Mr. Abidde said the percentages represent year-to-date activity compared to the total fiscal year budget for the Enterprise Fund. He stated the total budgeted Enterprise Fund revenue is approximately \$27.96 million. As of January 31, 2026, the city collected approximately \$9.37 million in Enterprise Fund revenue, which represents 34% of the total budgeted revenue for the fiscal year. He said the total budgeted Enterprise Fund expenditures for the fiscal year are also approximately \$27.96 million. As of January 31, 2026, approximately \$6.98 million had been expended, representing 25% of the total budgeted expenditures for the fiscal year.

He said these percentages indicate the city is collecting revenue and expending funds in alignment with annual budget projections.

Mr. Phillips said the city expects expenditures to remain lower than revenues collected during the fiscal year and explained while there may be periodic fluctuations requiring explanation, the city collected 34% of projected revenues while expending 25%, which reflects appropriate fiscal alignment at this stage of the year.

Council Member Benson asked if the financial report was based on the city's fiscal year rather than the calendar year. Assistant City Administrator Ms. Criss said the report is based on the city's fiscal year, which began on October 1, 2025. January figures often reflect higher expenditures because December utility invoices are typically paid for in January and colder weather conditions and increased utility usage during the holiday season can result in temporary spikes in power and water costs during that reporting period.

Council Member Perry referenced the second page of the presentation and asked about the reported positive balance of approximately \$22,000. He asked what factors contributed to that amount and how it related to the fund balance. Mr. Abidde said fund balance is a governmental accounting term representing the cumulative difference between total assets and total liabilities and explained the reported figure indicates that revenues and assets exceed liabilities.

9. City Administrator's Monthly Report

City Administrator Tony Phillips provided an administrative report and highlighted the following updates:

- Continued city facility improvements and technology upgrades, including installation of new servers to support IT infrastructure.
- Ongoing installation of a generator at 102 Howell Street to ensure continuity of core services during power outages.
- Public Safety Complex is currently in the permitting phase and nearing construction, additional updates forthcoming.
- Execution of two Intergovernmental Agreements with the Development Authority of Fairburn.
- Acquisition of the historic downtown bank building within the last 30 days.
- Establishment of the Special Services District ordinance to support downtown activation.
- Advancement of bond financing efforts to support redevelopment initiatives.
- Successful coordination and execution of the January Inauguration ceremony.

- Continued proactive training and regional collaboration by Police and Fire Departments.
- Ongoing community outreach and community policing initiatives.
- Annual new hire breakfast held in January to welcome new employees.
- Ongoing administration of recently adopted impact fees.
- Continued emphasis on code enforcement to maintain quality of life standards.
- Ongoing with youth programming.
- Planned gym floor installation at the Youth Center.
- Continued community partnerships to support youth athletics and recreational services.

Black History Month Celebration

- Voices of Legacy program scheduled for Saturday, February 28, 2026, from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.
- Location: Frankie May Arnold Stage and Courtyard, 15 Southwest Broad Street.
- Featured performances include Orchestra Noir and Spirit and Truth Choir.
- Communications Department highlighted Black History Month initiatives across city departments.
- Residents are encouraged to attend.

Council Member Davis asked about the city's current staffing status. She referenced earlier discussion regarding employee benefits and retention and asked whether staffing levels are stable. Specifically, she requested information regarding employee retention, new hires, and overall workforce stability. Mr. Phillips said while he did not have specific figures before him, overall employee retention has been strong and retention within the Police Department is currently among the highest it has been in recent years. He acknowledged that vacancies and turnover occur but stated that staffing levels remain stable and manageable. He attributed the city's retention success in part to its competitive benefits package, including the city absorbing healthcare cost increases and offering a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA). He stated that the HRA benefit is not commonly offered by neighboring municipalities and provides significant financial value to employees. The city will begin its annual benefits renewal process in early March, which will include mandatory meetings with all employees. During those sessions, benefits will be reviewed in detail, including costs and utilization guidance, and employees will have opportunities for one-on-one consultations.

XIII. Council Comments:

Council Member Perry congratulated the Creekside High School football team for completing an undefeated season and setting a scoring record in GHSA history. He

commended the coaches, student athletes, parents, and school administration for their achievements. He recognized the Creekside Lady Seminoles for winning the AAAA Region Championship for the second consecutive year and said they are the defending state champions. He expressed pride in their continued success, and he commended the *Fairburn in Focus* publication and recognized it as a significant communications initiative. He praised the Communications Department for its efforts in keeping residents informed and said he anticipates continued growth and impact from the publication. Council Member Perry reminded residents of Amnesty Week for Fairburn Utilities and encouraged residents to contact the Utilities Department to discuss payment arrangements if needed. He urged residents to seek clarification on their utility bills and to take advantage of assistance programs available.

Council Member Benson greeted those in attendance and emphasized the importance of unity as the city moves forward. She along with Council Member Houser and Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood attended St. John AME Church Lay Witness Day on Sunday, where Mayor Portis-Jones served as the guest speaker and delivered the keynote address. Council Member Benson encouraged residents to view the mayor's remarks online, noting that the message reflected leadership grounded in honesty, humility, compassion, and vision for the city's future. She also shared that she recently spoke at Langston Hughes High School during a sophomore awards ceremony and her message focused on the theme, "Because it matters to you, it matters to me," encouraging students to express their goals and leadership aspirations. She emphasized the importance of listening to youth voices and recognizing their commitment and potential. She concluded by encouraging residents to listen to one another, partners, friends, and children, and to continue moving forward together in unity.

Council Member Houser greeted those in attendance and expressed appreciation to Mayor Portis-Jones for her keynote address at the annual Lay Witness Day service. She also extended birthday wishes to the mayor. She thanked Chief Robinson for organizing a CPR training class for seniors through the Parks and Recreation Department and expressed her appreciation to the City Administrator and Assistant City Administrator for their leadership and budget management efforts. Council Member Houser thanked the Police and Fire Departments for their responsiveness and dedication to public safety. She recognized Ms. Jacqueline Howell for her work in emergency preparedness and public information alerts, as well as follow-up communications and she thanked Ms. Denise Brookins for resolving forty-eight code enforcement violations and commended the Planning and Zoning Department for their efforts. She concluded by thanking her fellow council members for their service.

Council Member Davis extended belated birthday wishes to Mayor Portis-Jones and noted that the mayor's birthday was February 22. She stated that although she was unable to attend the Lay Witness Day event, she intends to view the mayor's remarks

online. She congratulated Creekside High School on its recent accomplishments and echoed previous comments recognizing the inaugural edition of *Fairburn in Focus*. She described the publication as outstanding and commended the Communications Department for its work. She also referenced the featured staff spotlight article and expressed appreciation for the highlighted employee's positive contributions. She said she recently received an email from a military veteran who had been experiencing homelessness and had been living in his vehicle for several months. She stated that upon receiving the message, she forwarded the matter to administration for assistance and thanked Ms. Criss for responding to the situation and assisting the individual in securing temporary support and for her compassion in addressing the matter.

Council Member Nichols thanked everyone for their participation in the meeting. She reiterated the upcoming Black History Month event scheduled for Saturday from 3:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., as well as Amnesty Week. She also announced that Utilities will host a Customer Service Day at City Hall on Thursday from 2:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., providing residents an opportunity to meet directly with representatives to ask questions regarding their accounts. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve on the council and stated she looks forward to the upcoming training in Athens, Georgia, where Councilmembers will participate in educational sessions focused on strengthening governance and leadership. She thanked the community for their support and reaffirmed her commitment to serving as a strong voice for residents.

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood thanked his colleagues and staff and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve. He said he attended the Lay Witness Day event where Mayor Portis-Jones delivered remarks and described the message as impactful and encouraging. He invited residents to view the speech online. He thanked the City Administrator for responsive follow-up on a constituent concern and commended public safety personnel for their continued vigilance and service to the community. He noted the region's ongoing growth and expressed confidence in the City's preparedness and commitment to safety.

Mayor Portis-Jones thanked those who attended the Lay Witness Day event. She echoed appreciation for staff efforts in assisting a local veteran in need, emphasizing the importance of creativity, customer service, and thinking outside the box in municipal service. She congratulated Creekside High School on its accomplishments and highlighted that many of the student-athletes participated in youth programming at Duncan Park. She stated her intention to continue maximizing the use and impact of city recreational facilities. She encouraged residents to participate in the upcoming Black History Month celebration, Utilities Customer Service Day, and Amnesty Week activities.

Mayor Portis-Jones asked for a motion to go into executive session to discuss litigation.

Council Member Perry made a motion to go into executive session to discuss litigation. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Council Member Benson made a motion to return to the regular scheduled council meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood provided the second at 9:40 p.m. **The motion carried unanimously.**

XIV: Adjournment:

Mayor Pro Tem Smallwood made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:41 p.m. Council Member Davis provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**


Deannia Ray, City Clerk


Hattie Portis-Jones, Mayor