



City of Fairburn Ethics Board Agenda

September 17, 2026
4:30 PM

Rodney Anderson, Chairperson

Vera Raglin
Danita Jones
Tony Smith

Michelle James
Maya Osun
Lee Walton

Mr. Rory Starkey
Ms. Deannia Ray

City Attorney
City Clerk

- I. Meeting Called to Order: Rodney Anderson, Chairperson
- II. Roll Call: City Clerk
- III. Adoption of the Ethics Board Agenda:
- IV. Approval of the Minutes:
 - 1. Approval of the Minutes: Council Meeting Minutes of August 20, 2026**
- V. Regular Agenda:
 - 2. Training**
 - 3. Mayor & Council Recommendation (Amendment to Preliminary Review Process)**
- VI. Adjournment:

When an Executive Session is required, one will be called for the following Issues:
Deliberations Only



Ethics Board Meeting Minutes August 20, 2026 6:00 PM

- I. Meeting Called to Order at 6:05 p.m. by Chairperson Rodney Anderson.
- II. Roll Call by City Clerk Deannia Ray found the following members present:

Rodney Anderson	Tony Smith (arrive at 6:28 p.m.)
Lee Walton (arrived at 6:09 p.m.)	Vera Raglin
Danita Jones	Maya Osun
City Attorney Rory Starkey	

Absent: Michelle James (arrived at 6:55 p.m.)

- III. Adoption of the Ethics Board Agenda:

Maya Osun made a motion to adopt the Ethics Board agenda with the deletion of Executive Session. Danita Jones provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

- IV. Approval of the Minutes:

1. **Approval of the Minutes: Ethics Board Meeting Minutes of May 21, 2026**

Maya Osun made a motion to approve the Ethics Board Meeting Minutes of May 21, 2026. Danita Jones provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

- V. Regular Agenda:

2. **2026 Meeting Schedule Calendar**

City Clerk Deannia Ray presented the proposed 2026 Ethics Board meeting calendar and recommended removing the December 17th meeting because of its closeness to the Christmas holidays. Ethics Board Attorney Rory Starkey said he had no objection to removing the December meeting. The Ethics Board discussed the remaining meeting dates of September 17th, October 15th, and November 19th and considered if another day of the week would better accommodate members' schedules. Mrs. Ray said Tuesdays presented a scheduling conflict because Board Members also serve on the Planning and Zoning Commission. Mondays could potentially be considered on the first or third Monday, because city council meetings are held on the second and fourth Mondays. Following discussion, the Ethics Board agreed to continue meeting on the third Thursday of each month but changed the regular meeting time from 6:00 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Mr. Starkey advised the Ethics Board to change the meeting time by majority vote.

Danita Jones made a motion to approve the 2026 Ethics Board Meeting Calendar, establishing the Ethics Board's regular meetings for the third Thursday of each month at 4:30 p.m. and removing the December 17, 2026, meeting. Maya Osun provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

3. Training

Ethics Board Attorney Rory Starkey said he had planned to provide training through a PowerPoint presentation but experienced technical issues with the presentation. He opened the training session for Board members to ask questions regarding previous hearings, future hearings, and the ethics process.

Mr. Starkey said there were no pending ethics matters before the Ethics Board and discussed the importance of members remaining familiar with the process, so they are prepared when future matters arise. He discussed how changes in elected leadership and election cycles can result in future ethics matters and emphasized the importance of elected officials understanding applicable procedures and standards of conduct. He discussed how professionalism, procedural rules, and proper meeting conduct play in preventing ethics-related concerns. He referenced the city's civility pledge and its use during meetings as a reminder of expectations for respectful and professional conduct.

Board Member Danita Jones commended Mr. Starkey for the training and guidance he provided to the Ethics Board during previous ethics proceedings. She recognized his efforts in ensuring the Ethics Board had the resources and legal support needed throughout the process. Ms. Jones said the experience provided an opportunity to evaluate the process and strengthen its foundation. Mr. Starkey agreed and discussed the importance of the various roles involved in the ethics process. He emphasized the importance of city clerk staff following established procedures and remaining consistent in carrying out their responsibilities. Mr. Starkey commended City Clerk Deannia Ray for her work during previous ethics proceedings and for remaining committed to the required process. He said he encouraged clerk staff to independently review the City Charter rather than rely solely on his interpretation or legal guidance to ensure they understood and were comfortable with the applicable provisions.

Chairperson Rodney Anderson asked if Mr. Starkey's additional review of the city's governing documents and past ethics cases identified any rules that should be changed. Mr. Starkey clarified the City Charter requires the Ethics Board, while the procedures governing the Ethics Board and ethics complaints are established through the city's Code of Ordinances.

Mr. Starkey discussed the Ethics Board's handling of previous ethics complaints and said concerns had initially been raised that political considerations could influence the process. The Ethics Board's handling of the previous matters

demonstrated otherwise, and he did not observe partisan considerations influencing the Ethics Board's review, deliberations, or determinations. Differences regarding appropriate discipline were reasonable and did not indicate a problem with The Ethics Board's process.

The Ethics Board clarified its concern was not with the Ethics Board's consideration of a complaint or the ultimate disposition of a matter, but with the initial process used to determine if a complaint presented a legitimate ethics matter. Members discussed concerns with the ordinance requiring the complaint to proceed through the mayor and council during the preliminary review process and discussed if a neutral party should instead make that determination.

Mr. Starkey agreed an alternative process could be considered and discussed the possibility of establishing a rotating panel of three attorneys to conduct the preliminary review of ethics complaints and determine if a complaint should proceed through the ethics process. City Clerk Deannia Ray clarified the preliminary determination would establish if the complaint proceeded to an investigative committee. Mr. Starkey said such a process would involve additional legal costs, although legal expenses are incurred under the existing process as well.

Mr. Starkey communicated that the Ethics Board would have to approve a motion directing him, in his capacity as Ethics Board counsel, to draft a proposed amendment addressing the use of a three-attorney panel for the preliminary review process. Once drafted, the proposed amendment must be returned to the Ethics Board for its review and approval. If the Board approves the proposed amendment, it may then vote to recommend the amendment to Mayor and Council and designate one of its members to present the recommendation. Mr. Starkey may attend and respond to any legal questions concerning the proposed amendment, but the recommendation is the Ethics Board's item, not his. Final consideration and approval of any amendment would rest with Mayor and Council.

The Ethics Board questioned if an attorney was necessary to conduct the initial screening or if certain complaints could be rejected administratively when they clearly fall outside the Ethics Board's authority. Mr. Starkey said the initial review involves legal considerations, including due process, authority, timeliness, and if the individual named in the complaint is subject to the Code of Ethics. He provided examples of complaints involving city employees or contractors that would not fall within the Ethics Board's authority and said other complaints could involve more nuanced legal issues. He said using independent counsel for the initial review would provide a neutral process and prevent the Ethics Board Attorney from becoming involved in a manner that could later create a conflict.

City Clerk Deannia Ray read from the Code of Ethics regarding the requirements for filing an ethics complaint. She said a complaint must be a written statement, sworn to by the complainant before a notary public and delivered to the City Clerk,

containing specific factual allegations that, if established through the procedures provided in the ordinance, would demonstrate that a city official violated one or more provisions of the Code of Ethics. Mrs. Ray reviewed the filing requirements, which provide that complaints must be filed within 90 days of the alleged violation or no later than 30 days after the complainant knew or should have known of the alleged violation.

Mrs. Ray read the ordinance's definition of a "city official." Mr. Starkey said the term includes members of the city's governing authority, including the mayor, as well as people appointed by the governing authority to serve on a city board, authority, or commission. Discussion clarified by appointed board members, including Ethics Board members, fall within the definition, while city employees are addressed through other administrative processes. Mr. Starkey said Ethics Board members themselves are subject to the Code of Ethics and could potentially be the subject of a complaint for conduct related to their service on The Ethics Board. He discussed prohibited conduct involving ex-parte communications regarding pending matters and the improper disclosure or use of information obtained through Ethics Board proceedings for personal benefit or an advantage not otherwise available to the public. He emphasized that information related to pending ethics matters should not be discussed outside the appropriate proceedings or used for personal gain.

The Ethics Board reviewed the ordinance provision requiring the City Clerk to forward a filed complaint to the City Attorney and the city official against whom the complaint was submitted. Mr. Starkey said the City Clerk would continue to have a role in the process as the custodian of the official record, even if the ordinance were amended to remove mayor and council from the preliminary review. Under the proposed structure, the complaint would instead be forwarded for preliminary legal review by an attorney selected from the rotating panel.

Chairperson Anderson asked if the Ethics Board could direct the proposed change or only recommend it. Mr. Starkey clarified the Ethics Board could direct him, as Ethics Board Attorney, to prepare and present a recommendation to mayor and council, but the Ethics Board could not require mayor and council to amend the ordinance. He said an ordinance amendment would require action by mayor and council.

The Ethics Board continued discussing how the proposed three-attorney rotating panel would operate, including how attorneys would be selected and assigned and the qualifications necessary to conduct the reviews. Mr. Starkey said details regarding the establishment of the panel, including procurement and compensation, would need to be coordinated with city administration. Discussion also addressed his role as Ethics Board Attorney and the importance of separating the attorney to conduct the preliminary review from the attorney advising the Ethics Board if a complaint proceeds. Mr. Starkey said the proposed structure would preserve his ability to provide legal counsel to the Ethics Board while

allowing an independently assigned attorney to address preliminary legal issues.

Discussion continued regarding the probable cause process and the point at which a complaint should be presented to the Ethics Board. Board members asked if the independent attorney would determine if a complaint should proceed or if the Ethics Board would retain that responsibility. Mr. Starkey discussed the need for any proposed ordinance amendment to clearly distinguish the preliminary legal review from the Ethics Board's responsibilities and establish a consistent process for determining if a complaint advances to further proceedings.

The Ethics Board discussed the financial impact of using outside attorneys for complaint review. Mr. Starkey said the city would incur legal expenses when an independent attorney is assigned, and the frequency and total cost would depend on the number and complexity of complaints received. Discussion included the need to establish a process providing appropriate independent legal review while remaining practical and financially responsible.

Maya Osun made a motion directing Ethics Board Attorney Rory Starkey to draft a proposed amendment to the Ethics Ordinance revising the intake and preliminary review process for ethics complaints, including removal of Mayor and Council from the preliminary review process and consideration of review by a rotating panel of three outside attorneys. The proposed amendment is to be returned to the Ethics Board for its review and approval before any recommendation is submitted to Mayor and Council. Danita Jones provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

The Ethics Board discussed the status of previously filed ethics complaints and questioned if a future amendment to the Ethics Ordinance would affect complaints submitted under the existing process or matters that remained within the administrative or legal review process. Mr. Starkey said previously filed complaints must be evaluated based on their procedural status and handled in accordance with the ordinance and procedures applicable to those matters. Any revised process adopted by mayor and council would apply prospectively and would not automatically alter the procedures governing matters already in progress.

Ethics Board members discussed the status of complaints previously presented to the Ethics Board and if any additional action remained outstanding. Mr. Starkey distinguished between matters already resolved by the Ethics Board and complaints that may remain within the administrative or legal review process. Each complaint must be evaluated based on its procedural status and the requirements of the existing ordinance rather than applying a future process retroactively.

The discussion addressed the confidentiality of ethics matters during the complaint process. Mr. Starkey cautioned Ethics Board members regarding communications about pending matters and said members should avoid

discussing the substance of a complaint outside the established proceedings. He reiterated Ethics Board members are subject to the Code of Ethics and should remain mindful of their responsibilities regarding confidential information and communications involving matters that may come before the Ethics Board.

Board Member Compensation/Stipend Discussion

The Ethics Board discussed whether members should receive compensation for their service. Members discussed the time commitment associated with attending meetings, participating in training, reviewing materials, and fulfilling the responsibilities of the Ethics Board. Discussion included if a stipend could be provided to Ethics Board members similar to compensation provided to members of other city boards and commissions.

During the discussion, members considered a stipend of \$50.00 and discussed whether the amount should be paid monthly or based on meeting attendance. Members discussed the purpose of the stipend as recognition of the time and responsibilities associated with serving on the Ethics Board rather than compensation comparable to employment. The Ethics Board discussed how a stipend would apply during months when The Ethics Board did not meet and if payment should be tied to attendance or participation in a scheduled meeting.

Mr. Starkey said the Ethics Board does not have the authority to establish compensation for its members. Any stipend or other compensation would require action by mayor and council and would need to be addressed through the appropriate city process. The Ethics Board discussed whether it could make a recommendation to mayor and council requesting consideration of compensation for Ethics Board members.

City Clerk Deannia Ray provided information regarding compensation for other city boards and discussed the need to determine how any proposed Ethics Board stipend would be established and administered. Discussion included if compensation should be provided per meeting attended or as a monthly stipend and the importance of establishing clear requirements regarding eligibility and attendance if mayor and council approved compensation. The Ethics Board agreed the issue could be forwarded to mayor and council for consideration rather than determined by the Ethics Board.

Tony Smith made a motion to request Ethics Board members receive a \$50.00 stipend for every Ethics Board meeting attended. Maya Osun provided the second. **The motion carried, with Lee Walton voting in opposition.**

Status of Ethics Complaints

The Ethics Board requested an update regarding the status of previously filed ethics complaints and discussed if any matters remained pending. Mr. Starkey addressed the procedural status of the complaints and explained that matters filed under the existing Ethics Ordinance must continue to be overseen in

accordance with the process currently established by the ordinance. Any future amendments to the complaint review process would not alter the procedures applicable to complaints already filed. The Ethics Board discussed the importance of maintaining a clear record of complaints received, their disposition, and any remaining action required. City Clerk Deannia Ray discussed the Clerk's Office's responsibility for maintaining the official records associated with Ethics Board proceedings and coordinating documentation related to complaints and Ethics Board actions.

Future Training and Board Procedures

The Ethics Board discussed continuing training to ensure members understand their responsibilities under the Code of Ethics and the procedures governing ethics complaints. Mr. Starkey encouraged members to become familiar with the applicable provisions of the Code and discussed the importance of maintaining consistency, impartiality, confidentiality, and due process when matters come before the Ethics Board. Members discussed continuing to review the Ethics Ordinance and identifying provisions that may require clarification or amendment as the Ethics Board gains additional experience handling complaints. Any proposed ordinance changes developed through that review would be presented to mayor and council for consideration.

VI. Adjournment:

Maya Osun made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 p.m. Danita Jones provided the second. **The motion carried unanimously.**

Deannia Ray, City Clerk

Rodney Anderson, Chairperson