

City of Auburndale Commission Minutes January 20, 2026

Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the City Commission of the City of Auburndale held January 20, 2026, at 7:00 p.m. in the Commission Room of City Hall, after having been properly advertised, with the following members present: Mayor Alex Cam, Vice Mayor Jordan Helms, Commissioners: Travis Avery, Sean Levy, and Crystal Tijerina. Also, present were: Interim City Manager Amy Palmer, City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr., City Clerk Brandon Henry, and Police Chief Terry Storie.

Mayor Alex Cam declared a quorum present, and the Meeting was opened with prayer by Pastor Forest Antemesaris, Orange Street Church of Christ, and a salute to the flag presented by the Auburndale High School Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps Color Guard.

Motion by Vice Mayor Helms, seconded by Commissioner Avery, to approve Minutes of the City Commission Meeting of January 5, 2026. Upon vote, all ayes.

Captain Doug Walker, Auburndale High School, introduced and summarized the Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps at Auburndale High School. He presented a schedule of upcoming events.

Interim City Manager Amy Palmer announced that the next Ridge League of Cities dinner will be in Lake Wales on February 12th.

Motion by Commissioner Levy, seconded by Commissioner Tijerina, to move Item 5 "Discuss City Manager Search and Distribute Applications" to Item 1. Upon vote, all ayes.

Mayor Cam asked if there was public comment on any item not on the agenda.

Elizabeth Gunter, 2149 28th Street NW, Winter Haven, thanked Mayor Cam and Interim City Manager Palmer for meeting with her. She said we had a great meeting and discussed a lot of things in regard to street naming for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Auburndale. She said she just wants it to be added to the record that we have decided that for January 29th to meet at the History Museum and discuss further the naming of a street for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and possibly setting a committee for that. She said she also looks forward to seeing Mayor Cam, his wife, and Interim City Manager Palmer at the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast at the Senior Center.

1. DISCUSS CITY MANAGER SEARCH AND DISTRIBUTE APPLICATIONS

Interim City Manager Palmer said on December 15, 2025, the City Commission approved the desired characteristics and criteria for the new city manager, and the position was advertised on December 16, 2025. The deadline for submitting resumes was Friday, January 16, 2026. She introduced Former City Manager Bobby Green for presentation.

Former City Manager Bobby Green summarized the timeline of the process. He summarized the applications received – with 13 applications received, 10 with graduate degrees and seven with Florida experience. He summarized applicants' experience. He said given the total number of applications; he does not see a need for an application review committee. He presented notable comments from applicants in their applications and further presented the timeline of the process. He presented the Code of Ordinances as it speaks to the hiring process.

Mr. Green distributed the applications to the Commission.

Mr. Green added that the Ridge League of Cities will be hosting at 10 a.m. Thursday a legislative update at the offices of the Florida League of Cities' office in Tallahassee.

City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr. said we have noted this is all subject to Sunshine Law. It has to be conducted in open and noticed meetings. He said he would encourage commissioners to review the information very thoroughly individually, and not have discussions, conversations, or communications with fellow commissioners

about these matters – we will have those discussions at the meetings, the next being February 2nd. As tempting as it is to talk about these matters while visiting Tallahassee, he would commend the commissioners that they do not, as they would for any other City business.

Mr. Green said he is looking forward to the meeting on February 2nd.

Mayor Cam asked for citizen comment. There was no citizen comment.

Mayor Cam closed the Regular Meeting and opened the Public Hearing.

2. TRANSMITTAL PUBLIC HEARING – COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TEXT AMENDMENT – AMENDING VARIOUS CHAPTERS

Interim City Manager Palmer said the City Commission will take public comment and consider a proposed Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment before transmitting to the State Department of Commerce for a compliance review.

Community Development Director Julie Womble said in October of 2024, the City contracted with Inspire Placemaking, LLC to evaluate the City's 2030 Comprehensive Plan, develop the City's 2050 Comprehensive Plan and update the City's Land Development Regulations. The consultants met with City staff and residents during several public workshops to gather public input. The City Commission transmitted the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan to the Department of Commerce (Florida Commerce) for a compliance review on July 21, 2025.

Upon review of the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendments, Florida Commerce determined that the proposed amendments were "null and void ab initio" pursuant to the recent adoption of Senate Bill (SB 180), which requirements were codified in Chapter 2025-190, Section 28, Laws of Florida (L.O.F.). In summary, SB 180 declared that each municipality listed in the Federal Disaster Declaration for Hurricanes Debby, Hurricane Helene, or Hurricane Milton, may not propose or adopt more restrictive or burdensome amendments to its comprehensive plan or land development regulations before October 1, 2027 and applied this law retroactively to August 1, 2024. The law declared that any such restrictive or burdensome comprehensive plan amendment(s) or land development regulation(s) shall be null and void ab initio retroactive to August 1, 2024. In the letter dated September 22, 2025, Florida Commerce stated that the proposed amendment was more restrictive and burdensome.

She presented a graphic depicting a timeline of the process.

Consequently, the City withdrew the proposed ordinance. For the last two months City staff worked with the consultant and City Attorney to go over each amendment proposed within the Comprehensive Plan update. Several items were removed to meet the requirements set forth in SB 180. City staff feel that the new proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment update is in compliance with State requirements.

Community Development Director Womble presented a summary of the proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. She presented an overview of the function of the Comprehensive Plan.

She presented the proposed numbering system per the amendment. She presented the different "elements" of the Comprehensive Plan.

She presented changes made since the last proposed amendment, in response to State comments, to meet the requirements of Chapter 2025-190 Section 28 Laws of Florida.

She presented that one change was to clarify the wastewater treatment policy language to better understand this was a former policy already adopted, by incorporating approved ordinance standards that we already adopted – and revised the amendment to not impose additional conditions.

City Attorney Murphy asked if this ordinance was adopted prior to August 1, 2024?

Community Development Director Womble answered it was not.

Community Development Director Womble presented anticipated next steps and upcoming dates.

Interim City Manager Palmer said the proposed Ordinance was prepared by the Community Development Department and reviewed by the Interim City Manager and City Attorney. The action before the City Commission is to take public comment, consider the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment, and authorize transmittal of the document to Florida Commerce for a State Coordinated Review. Upon receipt of the State Review, the City Commission will hold a second reading of Ordinance #1844 considering adoption of the proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment.

The Planning Commission recommended approval of amending the proposed Comprehensive Plan amending various Chapters (6-0, 01/06/2026). Staff recommends approval of Ordinance #1844 upon first reading and transmitting the Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment to the State for a compliance review.

Mayor Cam asked for citizen comment. There was no citizen comment.

Mayor Cam closed the Public Hearing and reopened the Regular Commission Meeting.

3. ORDINANCE # 1844 AMENDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN – VARIOUS CHAPTERS

City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr. read Ordinance No. 1844 entitled: **AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF AUBURNDALE AMENDING ORDINANCE NO. 752 THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF THE CITY OF AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA, BY AMENDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN TO ADDRESS CHANGES TO STATE STATUTES, EXTENDING THE HORIZON TO 2050, AND UPDATING THE HORIZON OF THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP SERIES AND AMENDING VARIOUS ELEMENT CHAPTERS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND THE FUTURE LAND USE MAP SERIES OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN; REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; PROVIDING FOR THE ADMINISTRATIVE CORRECTION OF SCRIVENER'S ERRORS PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE**, by title only.

Motion by Commissioner Tijerina, seconded by Commissioner Levy, to approve transmitting the Comprehensive Plan Text Amendment to the State for a compliance review.

City Attorney Murphy said he had a couple comments to put on the record and to give more context for where we find ourselves today. This is unprecedented that we have had a comprehensive plan transmitted that our community and we want, but yet it was returned – or the Department of Commerce made the legal conclusion that it was not compliant with Senate Bill 180, by finding that what we were proposing was more burdensome and more restrictive in the comprehensive plan context. It was determined at a staff level not to challenge that decision by Florida Commerce – and to simply to go through and evaluate and look at it again with the consultant and staff. But there is no guarantee that what we present tonight, if it moves forward – that it will meet muster by the Department of Commerce. He said that the Commission heard Ms. Womble say when the Department of Commerce looked at this document before, they stopped at the first thing they found that they felt was not in compliance with statute. We asked them if they could tell us if there is anything more – so that we do not waste their time or our time. They declined. We took it in good faith to evaluate these matters and present what we felt could pass appropriate legal review. We will see. This is very different; there is not a lot of precedent for this. We are in legislative session already, and so there may be tweaks and fixes to the Senate Bill 180 process. He

said he is not seeing anything that is specific about modifications to the SB 180 legislation at the moment. But the legislative session is still early, so we will see what comes out of it. He said he just wants to let the Commission know that this is something we are diligently and in good faith trying to move forward. He said although the State has found our Comprehensive Plan not in compliance at this time, it does not prohibit private property owners from moving forward with development and from seeking and the Commission considering appropriate land use and zoning matters. For those developers and folks with annexations tonight, he said he wants the record to be clear that we are still allowed to move forward with those types of actions. It is just City initiated things that we have our hands tied.

Commissioner Levy said that was going to be his question. Does this prevent us from conducting business, until this is approved?

City Attorney Murphy answered it does not prevent us as a City from reacting and providing responses and moving forward private property owner requests – which is the bulk of what we do generally. From time to time, the City does initiate staff-initiated matters, and we do not have the opportunity to do much of that at the present time.

Community Development Director Womble said basically we have received several applications that will go to the Planning Commission in February, March, April – as long as the City is not the applicant, those can go forward. It would be like if the City wanted to do a text amendment to our Comprehensive Plan, or add a map or new policy – those things cannot happen currently until we are in compliance with our Comprehensive Plan. So business as usual, we would just hold off on any City initiated things until we are in compliance. She said we have asked the consultant to hold off on our current adoption path with the Land Development Regulations. We were supposed to do it in Spring of 2027, but we asked to extend that date to October of 2027, so that we can continue forward with just gathering information and data from the public, working on policies – but not proposing anything until after that deadline date so that we could adopt Land Development Regulations that the City Commission felt comfortable with.

City Attorney Murphy said that is assuming we do not have a hurricane in the 2026 hurricane season. We were fortunate in 2025 that we did not have any such weather events.

Commissioner Avery asked if we are currently operating under the old Comprehensive Plan, not what was revised?

Community Development Director Womble answered that is correct, we are using those policies. The Comprehensive Plan amendment does update the old plan. It updates the maps, exhibits, and makes it easier to read. We are taking out policies that are old and we are changing anything that was required by the State and Florida Statutes in the last seven years. Basically, it is some of these policies that we are proposing to update how we look at development or putting different standards on that has to be removed from this amendment or else it could be considered more burdensome.

Commissioner Avery asked if there is a deadline?

City Attorney Murphy answered yes.

Community Development Director Womble answered October 1st, 2027, is when Senate Bill 180 technically becomes null and void or completed.

City Attorney Murphy said October 1st, 2027, is the date when the retroactive prohibition adopting more restrictive or burdensome land development regulations or comprehensive plan amendments or development orders expires. Assuming again that we do not have a hurricane that further extends it out. It could be perpetual. Which is a problem, as we have discovered. He said if he can leave anything with the Commission, it is that it is

our intention tonight and goal to move forward with what we feel are appropriate Comprehensive Plan amendments.

Commissioner Avery asked is it because we or you do not foresee anything going on the floor in this legislative session to try and fix some of this?

Community Development Director Womble answered there is proposed text, but she does not know how much it will change it.

City Attorney Murphy said we will see, when we present this. He said he thinks that our idea is that we do not want to let this sit. We had fully expected to have this back to the Commission for adoption, prior to the current Commission with new commissioners taking their seats. We did not want to wait too long. We felt like this was the next appropriate step to take, to at least present it to the Department of Commerce. To answer the question – it remains to be seen what, if anything, will come out of this legislative session that actually gets passed and if it even addresses it.

Commissioner Avery asked what if it does? What if something comes up that changes it, to where we do not have to be this restricted?

Community Development Director Womble answered if the Commission would like, we would take the policies that we are removing tonight and bring it back to the Planning Commission and City Commission as a text amendment to the Comprehensive Plan – without having to do the entire Comprehensive Plan.

City Attorney Murphy concurred. He said we would not do an Evaluation and Appraisal Review of the Comprehensive Plan, we would just make amendments to our Comprehensive Plan as we originally intended and bring them forward as Ms. Womble noted.

Community Development Director Womble said you can technically do that in one ordinance.

Commissioner Avery asked if it would not have to go back to the State?

Community Development Director Womble and City Attorney Murphy answered it would still have to go to the State.

Commissioner Avery asked why would we just wait until we find out what happens in legislative session, if there is a bill moving forward?

Community Development Director Womble answered because anything the City may want to initiate or change between now and whenever that happens – we could not do so.

Commissioner Tijerina said it is her understanding that we are required to update the Comprehensive Plan after so many years. Are there any penalties or repercussions of the fact that we are not able to be successful in that?

City Attorney Murphy answered other than the fact we are considered out of compliance, he does not know what other penalties would be applicable related to same. There is a deadline or timeline when you have to notify the Department of Commerce, and then there is a certain number of days that you have to then submit. We were running up on that issue as well last time in September 2025. His understanding is that staff and the consultant's recommendation, which he has no issue with, is to move forward with this now – see what we can get presented to the Department of Commerce, and continue to keep the Commission informed.

Commissioner Tijerina asked if the noncompliance would have any bearing on the requests we are making of the State?

City Attorney Murphy answered he does not know how to answer that question. It is hard for him to assess; he does not know if he is the right person to answer that.

Community Development Director Womble said we are not a part of it, but there are other cities and counties that are part of the legal lawsuit against the State regarding SB 180.

Upon vote, four ayes, with Commissioner Avery voting nay.

4. ORDINANCE #1845 ANNEXING PROPERTY INTO CITY LIMITS – BERKLEY CROSSING

Community Development Director Julie Womble said the City received a petition from Logan Opsahl, Esq., Lowndes., 215 Eola Dr., Orlando, FL 32801 on behalf of Harold Botts, Catherine Botts, and Perrin Cliftan to annex three parcels totaling 17.62+/- acres into the City limits. The property is located on Berkley Road north of Pace Road. The property is adjacent to City limits to the west. The annexation does not create an enclave. The proposed annexation is as a result of the owner's request for city utilities and city services.

Establishing a Future Land Use and Zoning classification on the property will be considered at Public Hearings before the Planning Commission and City Commission at later dates. The action currently before the City Commission is only on the annexation of the property into the City.

Staff recommends approval of Ordinance #1845 annexing the Berkley Crossing properties into the City limits. She presented a graphic depicting the proposal.

Interim City Manager Palmer said the proposed Ordinance was prepared by the Community Development Department and reviewed by the City Manager and City Attorney. If approved on first reading, the proposed Ordinance will be presented for second and final reading on February 2, 2026. Staff recommends approval.

City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr. read Ordinance No. 1845 entitled: **AN ORDINANCE EXTENDING THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF THE CITY OF AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA, SO AS TO INCLUDE THEREIN ADDITIONAL TERRITORY LYING CONTIGUOUS AND ADJACENT TO THE PRESENT BOUNDARIES OF THE CITY; DESCRIBING SAID ADDITIONAL TERRITORY; REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HERewith AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE (General Location: Berkley Road and Pace Road),** by title only.

Mayor Cam asked for citizen comment. There was no citizen comment.

Motion by Commissioner Avery, seconded by Vice Mayor Helms, to approve Ordinance #1845 annexing the Berkley Crossing properties into the City limits. Upon vote, all ayes.

5. ORDINANCE #1846 ANNEXING PROPERTY INTO CITY LIMITS – FDOT SUNTRAX

Community Development Director Womble said the City received a petition from the State of Florida Department of Transportation, 605 Suwannee St., Tallahassee, FL to annex two parcels totaling 67.47+/- acres into the City limits. The property is located east of the Polk Parkway and south of Pace Road. The property is adjacent to City limits to the south and east. The annexation does not create an enclave. The proposed annexation is as a result of the owner's request for city utilities and city services.

Establishing a Future Land Use and Zoning classification on the property will be considered at Public Hearings before the Planning Commission and City Commission at later dates. The action currently before the City Commission is only on the annexation of the property into the City. She presented a graphic depicting the proposal.

Staff recommends approval of Ordinance #1846 annexing the FDOT SunTrax properties into the City limits.

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Interim City Manager Palmer said the proposed Ordinance was prepared by the Community Development Department and reviewed by the City Manager and City Attorney. If approved on first reading, the proposed Ordinance will be presented for second and final reading on February 2, 2026. Staff recommends approval.

City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr. read Ordinance No. 1846 entitled: **AN ORDINANCE EXTENDING THE CORPORATE LIMITS OF THE CITY OF AUBURNDALE, FLORIDA SO AS TO INCLUDE THEREIN ADDITIONAL TERRITORY LYING CONTIGUOUS AND ADJACENT TO THE PRESENT BOUNDARIES OF THE CITY; DESCRIBING SAID ADDITIONAL TERRITORY; REPEALING ALL ORDINANCES IN CONFLICT HEREWITH; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE (General Location: Pace Road and Polk County Parkway)**, by title only.

Mayor Cam asked for citizen comment. There was no citizen comment.

Motion by Vice Mayor Helms, seconded by Commissioner Avery, to approve Ordinance #1846 annexing the FDOT SunTrax properties into the City limits.

City Attorney Murphy said the last two ordinances are exempt from the requirement of filing a business impact estimate because we are doing these in accordance with Section 171.044 of Florida Statutes.

Upon vote, all ayes.

The Meeting was adjourned at 7:59:01 p.m.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing Minutes are true and correct.



Brandon Henry, City Clerk