

City of Auburndale Special City Commission Workshop Minutes July 20, 2026

Minutes of the Special Workshop of the City Commission of the City of Auburndale held July 20, 2026, at 5:30 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: City Manager Jeffrey Brown, City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr., City Clerk Brandon Henry, and Police Chief Terry Storie.

City Manager Jeff Brown said tonight we will hold a special workshop of the City Commission to discuss potential budget impacts to the City's budget as it relates to Amendment 3. He said he will talk about revenue forecasts and directions to staff on what is acceptable and not acceptable – should we need to proceed down this path.

He presented impacts to the City, that the City receives \$12 million in ad valorem property tax, of which 80% goes toward public safety – and that the Polk County Property Appraiser expects a \$2.1 million loss to the City on year one should Amendment 3 be passed.

City Manager Brown presented a table of future impacts of Amendment 3 to the City and others throughout Polk County, as projected by the Florida Department of Revenue.

He presented a table of anticipated future exemption rates.

Commissioner Avery asked if this is provided that the legislature does not come up with that phase-out plan that is supposed to be written in this amendment as well?

City Manager Brown answered yes, in addition to.

Commissioner Avery said so until they figure out how they are going to phase out, they built in the consumer price index?

City Manager Brown said correct.

City Manager Brown presented a slide describing challenges ahead regarding Amendment 3.

He presented a slide outlining potential sources of additional revenue, including fees, assessments, or increased millage.

Commissioner Avery asked is there not a parks assessment as well?

City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr. said he is not aware of a parks assessment that would be permissible like a fire assessment.

City Manager Brown said he is not aware of one either.

City Attorney Murphy said the fire assessment is a fire availability fee assessed on real property. So every parcel of land would likely be assessed based on a methodology that you would hire someone like a Raftelis Financial Consultants to come up with based on circumstances and data that is specific to the City.

Commissioner Avery asked if there is only a fire assessment, and not a police assessment?

City Attorney Murphy answered no. He further detailed prohibitions and allowances on certain fees, and the disadvantages of certain fees.

Commissioner Tijerina expressed concern about the City's ability to continue providing certain services and amenities if fees are not set at appropriate levels. She emphasized that while they do not want costs to increase for residents, maintaining Auburndale's character and quality of facilities requires adequate funding. As an example, she noted that the City spends significant amounts on fertilizer and maintenance at Lake Myrtle Sports Park while only recovering a small portion of that expense. She stated that this imbalance is unfair to residents

who do not use the facilities. She acknowledged that any changes to fees or service levels will be uncomfortable and may not satisfy everyone, but reiterated that the cost of maintaining facilities must be covered in some way. She expressed reluctance to reduce services but stated that fees at non-city-funded facilities are standard and typically accepted without question.

City Attorney Murphy explained that private facilities charge market-rate fees that many residents would likely be unable or unwilling to pay. He noted that the City could explore a fire assessment, which other nearby cities use, to recover a significant portion of fire service costs. A properly developed non-ad valorem fire assessment would apply to properties that currently pay little or no ad valorem tax, including exempt properties. This could free general-fund dollars for other needs. He added that, depending on the results of a formal study, the Commission could also consider a modest millage increase, though that would be a political decision.

Commissioner Avery said the reality is that if you increase the millage, and this amendment passes, that increase in millage only captures those non-homesteaded commercial properties.

City Attorney Murphy said increasing the millage rate would shift more of the financial burden onto non-homesteaded properties, including businesses, which may pass those costs on to renters or consumers. He suggested reviewing data to understand how much revenue a small millage increase—such as 0.25 mills—could generate. He also reminded the Commission that raising the millage above its current rate may require a unanimous vote, which could impact the feasibility of such a change. He emphasized that these discussions are proactive and important for long-term planning.

Commissioner Tijerina asked when we are talking about fire assessment, we are talking about not only when they are responding to a fire, but every time they are responding to a car accident, or no?

City Manager Brown explained how the fire assessment would work.

Commissioner Avery asked how many municipalities in Polk County have a fire assessment.

City Manager Brown listed the County and individual cities with a fire assessment.

Commissioner Tijerina asked how successful have we been with recovering such monies?

City Manager Brown asked for clarification.

Commissioner Tijerina provided clarification.

City Manager Brown explained how an assessment is assessed and collected.

Commissioner Tijerina said she was thinking assessments were collected differently.

City Attorney Murphy further explained how such assessments are billed.

City Manager Brown and City Attorney Murphy explained how assessments relate to the overall tax bill.

Commissioner Levy asked City Attorney Murphy how much the fire assessment is in Bartow?

City Attorney Murphy answered he does not know, but he provided an estimate. He explained the steps in implementing a fire assessment, but that conversation can come later.

City Manager Brown said one thing that has been asked is what does an increased millage look like and what would it potentially bring in? He said staff is working on that.

He asked if a fire assessment is something the Commission would like to look at?

There was consensus to look at a fire assessment.

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City Manager Brown asked the Commission about their thoughts and considerations on how to move forward.

Commissioner Tijerina requested information on funding sources and requirements tied to projects like those within the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and Lake Myrtle. She noted that timelines and state-directed funding need to be accurately understood before considering delays to construction plans. She emphasized the importance of explaining to residents that major projects are funded through designated state or CRA funds - not through large, self-generated city reserves, and highlighted the need to communicate expected revenue from active facilities such as Lake Myrtle.

Commissioner Avery noted that many municipalities have seen rapid budget growth in recent years, leading residents to question how funds are being used and why service reductions are being discussed. He highlighted the need to clearly show where money is allocated and how the City is operating efficiently. He added that recent state-level messaging has negatively affected public perception, causing cities like Auburndale to be grouped with fiscally irresponsible examples seen in the media.

Commissioner Tijerina said that while the budget has grown, the City's population and service demands have grown as well, and those factors must be clearly communicated to residents. She emphasized Auburndale's long-standing fiscal responsibility and the importance of explaining how funds are allocated, including which expenses are essential to City operations and which services are provided because they reflect the City's character. She highlighted the need for transparent, easy-to-understand information showing what the City must fund to function and what additional services reflect community values. She said that voters should understand how future decisions may affect the City's identity and service levels.

City Attorney Murphy said he understands the sentiment. It is hard to translate that to a communication that does not run afoul of statutory restrictions.

Commissioner Tijerina said that many residents may not understand how much of the budget is committed to essential services such as police, fire, and maintenance, and how little remains afterward. She said that some programs, like summer activities for children, are not mandatory but are offered because they reflect the City's values. She added that clearer explanations of these discretionary costs would help residents better understand how the budget is structured.

City Manager Brown said that a lot of times, these programs serve other purposes – such as with summer activities which provide children with positive opportunities and outcomes instead of getting into trouble.

Commissioner Avery said ensuring that we deliver that message to constituents, for example – they may not have kids so do not care for programs relating to kids.

Commissioner Tijerina concurred that there is a demographic that feels that way.

Commissioner Avery asked how do we deliver that message when there are many that feel these programs do not affect them.

City Attorney Murphy and the Commission discussed how this would be communicated in compliance with Florida Statute.

Vice Mayor Helms said that recent budget increases are largely tied to planned utility and wastewater improvements, which require setting aside funds over multiple years. He said that residents may see the overall budget rising - from the mid-\$80 million range to about \$117 million over the last several years, and assume the City should easily absorb a small reduction, without understanding the long-term savings and project commitments involved. He suggested creating a clear baseline showing what it costs to operate the city without

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reserves or project set-asides, so residents can better understand the real impact of potential service cuts, fees, or millage changes.

City Manager Brown confirmed how this information would be presented.

Vice Mayor Helms confirmed.

Commissioner Avery concurred that the discussion should focus more on long-term data, noting that the current emphasis on short-term savings does not reflect the broader impact of proposed amendments. He said that the long-range plan could eliminate homesteaded properties altogether, which would significantly affect a community that relies heavily on residential tax revenue. He suggested presenting data showing the number of homesteaded homes, the financial impact if homesteading were removed, and how the City would need to shift toward attracting additional commercial development to compensate. He added that many residents may focus only on the immediate personal savings without recognizing the future costs to the community.

Commissioner Tijerina said that although it cannot be stated directly to residents, many would likely end up paying the same or more through indirect costs if certain tax changes occur. She said that Auburndale does not have excessive or unnecessary spending in its budget and contrasted this with other cities that may misuse funds. She added that because Auburndale is largely composed of homesteaded properties and renters, future cost shifts could make it more difficult for some residents to continue living in the City.

Mayor Cam said that Auburndale's millage rate of 4.2515 has not increased in approximately eight years and is currently the lowest in Polk County. He said that despite this low rate, the City continues to provide a high level of service, and the Commission does not wish to reduce service quality. He added that he would not want to be in a position where residents experience a decline in service for any reason.

City Manager Brown further detailed impacts of Amendment 3 on the City.

Commissioner Avery asked for further details on this analysis and implications of Amendment 3, and historical appraisal data.

City Attorney Murphy provided additional detail.

Vice Mayor Helms said he is not a fan of a millage increase. He would much rather look at something like a fire assessment.

City Manager Brown said that should the Commission consider additional revenue options, he would recommend fees and assessments, or fees and increased millage – not assessments and increased millage – as that would compound effects on those properties still affected.

Vice Mayor Helms concurred.

Commissioner Tijerina concurred. She would like to see what other municipalities are charging, and what are actual costs. She would not be opposed to a stair step.

Commissioner Avery said he still thinks it is important to get out to the constituents and informing them what this amendment has the potential to do, and then what our thought process is in trying to figure out how to make up that difference if Amendment 3 passes.

Mayor Cam asked if the consensus is to start with looking into a fire assessment fee and begin with that data?

City Manager Brown said correct.

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Commissioner Avery said as it relates to new fees, he said he would like to know what the services we would be looking at are.

City Manager Brown said we can do that.

Vice Mayor Helms said he is more comfortable with a fire assessment, but he would still want to see the data of our operating costs. He wants to see that before we start having conversations. He wants that data, and our residents want to see that data too.

City Manager Brown said we can do that.

Mayor Cam said it was a great opportunity to have this discussion. He thanked City Manager Brown and City Attorney Murphy.

The Meeting was adjourned at 6:26 p.m.

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



Brandon Henry, City Clerk