



# Ocala

## City Council

### Minutes

110 SE Watula Avenue  
Ocala, FL 34471

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**Tuesday, February 3, 2026**

**4:00 PM**

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**1. Call to Order**

**2. Roll Call**

**Present:** Mayor Ben Marciano  
Pro Tem Jay A. Musleh  
Council Member Kristen M. Dreyer  
Council Member James P. Hilty Sr  
Council Member Barry Mansfield  
Council President Ire J. Bethea Sr

- a. New Employees
  - John Reedy, Electric
  - Maryann Ward, Public Works

**3. Public Notice**

**Public Notice for the February 3, 2026 City Council Regular Meeting was posted on January 15, 2026**

**4. Proclamations and Awards**

**4a.** Presentation of the Black History Month Proclamation to Cynthia Wilson - Graham, Educator, Photographer, and Author

Mayor Marciano presented a proclamation for Black History Month. The City proclaims the month of February, as Black History Month.

**5. Presentations**

**5a.** Public Information Officer, Gregory Davis - Communications Update

Public Information Officer Greg Davis provided a communications update, noting strong earned media performance and continued growth on social media. The City of Ocala Government Facebook page reached 19,000 followers (up 2,000), Instagram nearly 8,000, and LinkedIn is now actively managed for employee highlights and job postings. Recent posts set engagement records, including the Chalk Walk event and a tribute to Mary Sue Rich. Since September, 29 press releases were issued, and new initiatives such as the “Downtown with Darling” series and a revamped pre-recorded Mayor’s Message have enhanced outreach. Holiday and employee engagement efforts were also highlighted.

**6. Consent Agenda**

Consent Agenda items are considered to be routine and will be enacted by one roll call vote. There will be no separate discussion of these items unless members of Council or the public request specific items to be removed for separate discussion and action.

**RESULT:** APPROVED THE CONSENT AGENDA

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**6a.** Release of an electric utility easement encumbering multiple parcels located in Ocala Preserve Phase 8 and Ashley Farms Golf & Country Club Phase 1-D

**Presentation By:** Stephanie Galarza

**6b.** Release of utility easements encumbering Parcel 28672-000-00

**Presentation By:** Stephanie Galarza

**6c.** One-year renewal under the agreement for city-wide fencing installation services with Charles White Fence, Inc., in the amount of \$75,000

**Presentation By:** Gary Crews

**6d.** One year renewal of the contract with Priority Dispatch Corporation in the amount of \$91,590

**Presentation By:** Joshua Sasso

**6e.** Puravida Conceptual Subdivision

**Presentation By:** Aubrey Hale

**6f.** Ocala 75 Logistics Park Developer's Agreement

**Presentation By:** Aubrey Hale

**6g.** Assignment of the ground lease with Worldwide Alliance, LLC, to PRP Hangars, LLC, and memorandum of lease and consent to mortgage for same

**Presentation By:** Matthew Grow

**6h.** City Council meeting minutes

**Presentation By:** Angel Jacobs

**7. Consent Agenda Items Held for Discussion**

Should any items be removed from the Consent Agenda for discussion, they will be discussed at this time.

**8. Introduction and First Readings of Ordinances****9. Public Hearings / Second and Final Readings / Adoption of Ordinances**

**9a.** Ordinance 2026-5 to amend the Code of Ordinances, City of Ocala, Florida, Section 122-1225 to authorize the use of above-ground air curtain burners as an ancillary use to a materials recovery facility as well as establishing conditions and limitations relating to

such ancillary use (COD25-0004); Postponed from January 6, 2026 City Council meeting

**Presentation By:** Jeff Shrum

**Introduced By:** James P. Hilty Sr

Council President Bethea opened the public hearing at 4:10 PM.

Growth Management Director Jeff Shrum presented Ordinance 2026-5, an applicant-initiated text amendment to Chapter 122 of the City Code to allow aboveground air curtain incinerators as an ancillary use by right at materials recovery facilities citywide. The amendment establishes criteria including a minimum 10-acre site, compliance with all federal, state, and local regulations, setbacks, hours of operation, an operations plan, residue removal, storage limits, and annual fire permits with daily burn approvals. Additional provisions address enforcement, annual compliance reviews, and authority for immediate cessation of operations for safety concerns. The ordinance applies to all qualifying facilities, with Friends Recycling currently meeting the acreage requirement. Two other properties

Mr. Shrum noted that the Planning Commission recommended approval on November 10, 2025, and the proposal was presented at the Governor's meeting on November 18 with no objections. Staff recommends approval, stating that mitigation measures were incorporated to address potential impacts. He reminded this is a legislative hearing, and options include approving, revising, or denying the ordinance, and requested if Council had revisions, that Growth and Legal staff be allowed time to review to avoid unintended consequences.

Council Member Mansfield asked for clarification on the usage of air curtain incinerators on construction sites. Mr. Shrum explained that this ordinance only applies to materials recovery facilities (MRFs); State law permits the usage of mobile air curtain incinerators on construction sites. He further explained the location of air curtain incinerators within a MRF would be determined on a site plan, and would not be allowed to be moved around the property. Additionally, it would only be allowed as an ancillary use to a MRF, which has a Chapter 163 Developer's Agreement requirement.

Fred Roberts, attorney for the applicant, 40 SE 11th Avenue, explained the purpose of the application to amend the code, noting that current ordinances are silent on air curtain incinerators, though open burning is permitted under Florida Forestry Service regulations. He stated the proposed use would allow vegetative debris from multiple sites to be processed at a single location, providing an environmentally sensitive, sustainable, and cleaner alternative to chipping and grinding. Mr. Roberts emphasized that air curtain incinerators reduce smoke and emissions by burning at high temperatures and

recirculating byproducts, and that the proposed ordinance includes extensive safeguards such as site plan and operational plan requirements, industrial performance standards, annual city review, setbacks, and daily ignition approvals. Oversight would involve the City of Ocala, FDEP air quality permitting, Florida Forestry Service, and EPA standards. He noted the equipment is highly regulated and the ordinance sets a high compliance bar, ensuring robust protections.

Austin Dailey, attorney for the applicant, 40 SE 11th Avenue, summarized research on air curtain incinerator (ACI) emissions, noting that these devices recirculate and reburn emissions, significantly reducing pollutants compared to open burning. Primary outputs are CO<sub>2</sub>, water vapor, and minimal particulate matter (PM2.5), with visible smoke controlled to about 10% opacity under EPA standards. Studies from Oregon, Arizona, and the USDA show ACIs reduce PM2.5 emissions by over 80% and carbon monoxide by over 90% compared to traditional burning methods, while meeting national air quality standards. Ash and char byproducts can be repurposed for uses such as fertilizer. Mr. Dailey emphasized that ACIs offer a cleaner, environmentally friendly alternative for vegetative debris disposal and pose minimal impact on air quality beyond the immediate site.

Council Member Dreyer asked Mr. Roberts about the required setbacks in relation to the current debris pile at the landfill. Mr. Roberts explained that the proposed ordinance measures setbacks from the property boundary of the materials recovery facility, which is separate from the landfill parcel. He noted that the landfill scenario differs and referenced a recent fire in Dunnellon as an example of risks associated with large debris piles and chipping/grinding methods. Mr. Roberts emphasized that air curtain incinerators provide a safer, more controlled alternative for managing vegetative debris and offered to address public concerns later in the discussion.

Tim Haines, Gray, Ackerman & Haines Law Firm, representing West Oak Developers, expressed opposition to the proposed ordinance, citing land use and safety concerns. He argued that air curtain incinerators are not appropriate adjacent to residential neighborhoods and that the ordinance lacks evidence of safety for urban settings. From a land use perspective, he stated that burning large amounts of material constitutes “materials destruction,” not recovery, and conflicts with existing code provisions requiring processing inside enclosed structures. He warned that allowing this as a use by right could enable placement on numerous industrial parcels citywide, rather than requiring site-specific review through a special use permit.

Mr. Haines also noted that the Friends Recycling property was previously designated for future revitalization under the city’s vision plan, and its proximity to a major residential redevelopment - including affordable housing - makes the proposed use incompatible. He

raised environmental concerns, citing city policy discouraging burning due to greenhouse gas emissions, and asserted that air curtain incinerators produce more CO<sub>2</sub> than traditional burning. He further questioned the adequacy of testing, noting studies were limited to forest material and did not address heavy metals, chemicals, or PM10 particulates. Finally, he criticized reliance on opacity tests for compliance, stating they provide minimal safeguards.

David Latham, Environmental Consultant (representing West Oak Developers), Geosyntec Consultants, Jacksonville, FL, opposed the ordinance, citing health and safety concerns. He noted that while air curtain incinerators reduce visible emissions, they still release PM2.5 particulates, which both EPA and FDEP recognize as harmful to human health. He emphasized that similar facilities typically operate on large, remote sites with substantial setbacks, unlike the proposed location near residential areas, some less than 600 feet away. Mr. Latham warned that incinerators can generate large volumes of ash, posing fire and respiratory hazards if mismanaged. He shared calculations estimating annual PM2.5 emissions equivalent to those from approximately 3,300 idling diesel trucks, highlighting long-term health risks such as reduced lung function and cardiovascular issues. He also stated that FDEP advised against locating such facilities in urban or suburban settings and concluded that the proposed use presents significant environmental and public health concerns.

Jon Harvey, Tillman Associates & Engineering, 1720 SE 16th Avenue, Building 100, Ocala, FL, recommended that air curtain incinerators be considered only through a special exception process rather than as a permitted use by right. He cautioned that allowing them outright in M2 or M3 zoning could enable placement near residential areas without public input. Mr. Harvey cited the city's comprehensive plan, which requires development to be compatible with neighboring uses, and noted that the proposed location is near homes, a hospital, and a church, making it inconsistent with the vision plan for the area as a gateway corridor. He also raised concerns about uncontrolled burning of landscaping materials that may contain pesticides or chemicals, stating the ordinance lacks safeguards to prevent harmful emissions.

Scott Siemen, West Oak Developers, 2201 NW 21st Street, Ocala, FL, announced that the Madison Oaks East senior affordable housing project (102 units) has been approved by Florida Housing and is expected to begin construction by April. He thanked the council and staff for their support but expressed strong opposition to the proposed ordinance, stating that allowing air curtain incinerators near this development contradicts the city's goals for revitalization and affordable housing. He emphasized that seniors are highly vulnerable to respiratory issues and cited data linking PM2.5 exposure to significant health risks, including thousands of deaths annually. Mr. Siemen noted prior objections to landfill expansions and stated this proposal undermines the spirit of

partnership between the city and West Oak Developers. He urged the council not to approve the ordinance or permit burn boxes within city limits.

David Tillman, Tillman Associates & Engineering, 1720 SE 16th Avenue, Building 100, Ocala, FL, expressed strong opposition to placing an air curtain incinerator adjacent to or on top of a C&D landfill, citing severe fire risks. He warned that landfill fires are extremely difficult to extinguish and can smolder for years, referencing past incidents such as the Baseline Road stump dump fire. He argued that introducing a burn source where none currently exists represents a 100% increase in fire risk and emissions, not a reduction, and noted that loading debris into the incinerator disrupts the air curtain, causing smoke plumes throughout the day. Mr. Tillman emphasized that FDEP does not recommend locating such facilities in urban areas and highlighted the potential for significant particulate emissions (estimated at 37,000 pounds annually) impacting nearby neighborhoods. He urged the council to consider these safety and environmental hazards before approving the ordinance.

Narvelia Haynes, 2916 NW 3rd Terrace, Ocala, FL, spoke in support of Friends Recycling and its owner, noting his longstanding commitment to transparency, community engagement, and charitable contributions, including youth programs and annual school supply drives. She emphasized that the owner has consistently sought to build positive relationships and uphold safety and beautification promises. While acknowledging she is not an expert on the technical aspects, Ms. Haynes stated that if the proposed burn box is limited to clean wood, produces no pollution, and poses no health risks, opposition seems unnecessary. She expressed trust in city staff to ensure community safety. Mr. Roberts shared a video demonstrating the difference between open burning and air curtain incineration, emphasizing the latter's ability to significantly reduce smoke and emissions. He addressed concerns raised during public comments, noting that air curtain incinerators have been permitted and operated in developed areas across Florida, including sites near residential properties, and provided examples with permit numbers. He argued that the proposed ordinance includes robust safeguards - such as setbacks, operational plans, and compliance with stringent state and federal standards - and asserted that the technology offers a cleaner, safer alternative to current disposal methods, which involve chipping and burying vegetative debris that generates methane, a more harmful greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Mr. Roberts stated that the proposed site is in a heavily industrialized area, with the nearest residential lot approximately 1,500 feet away, and that studies show negligible off-site impacts beyond 900 feet. He reiterated that approval would not grant automatic operation; the applicant would still need to meet all permitting and compliance requirements, and the council could require additional oversight through development agreements. He concluded that the ordinance provides a well-regulated, environmentally

responsible option for managing vegetative debris and aligns with best practices adopted in other jurisdictions.

Council Pro Tem Musleh asked for clarification on Mr. Robert's comments about "no mothballing". Mr. Roberts explained there is no intention for the incinerators to sit dormant on the site; the intention is likely to be used on a weekly basis, condition permitting. .

Council Member Mansfield asked for clarification on the proposed location of the incinerators. Mr. Roberts explained the location would be determined in the site plan, but that it would never be on top of the landfill. He further spoke to air quality concerns. The applicant must comply with FDEP standards; and the safety concern was addressed by the Fire Chief. The subject property will be required to have a fire suppression system.

Fire Chief Clint Welborn stated that the fire department's initial concerns regarding setbacks and safety in the original draft of the ordinance have been addressed. He confirmed that the proposed incinerator would not be located on a landfill and reiterated that landfill fires are extremely difficult to extinguish and can burn for extended periods. Based on the revised ordinance and current plans, the fire department has no remaining safety concerns.

Fire Marshall Clayton Anderson explained the daily burn permit regulations established by the Florida Forestry Service. He advised City Council that permit issuance is based on weather conditions. Furthermore, he confirmed an inspection is performed before a burn permit is issued.

Council Member Musleh expressed concern regarding changing weather conditions.

President Bethea thanked all parties for their input and emphasized the need to balance innovative solutions for debris management with community health and safety. He acknowledged the concerns raised by residents and experts and stressed that any approved approach must include strong safeguards, oversight, and compliance measures to protect nearby neighborhoods. Mr. Roberts noted that various types of incinerators, including air curtain units, are already used throughout Ocala under state permitting, which the city cannot preempt. He emphasized that the proposed ordinance introduces stricter standards and oversight compared to current practices. Roberts provided examples of permitted air curtain incinerators operating near residential areas, schools, churches, and even airports in Florida, asserting that the technology is well-established and widely accepted. He stated that larger incinerator boxes are more effective and safer than smaller, portable units due to better air curtain performance.

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Mr. Roberts argued that the ordinance brings transparency and robust regulation to a process that currently occurs with less oversight, ensuring clear rules and safeguards. He added that while cost savings are not the primary consideration, this method is significantly less expensive than current disposal practices and offers a practical, environmentally responsible alternative for managing vegetative debris as the city grows.

Council Member Hilty expressed concern that the ordinance appears tailored to accommodate a specific site, noting the ten-acre requirement and potential for other facilities, such as Waste Pro, to qualify with minimal expansion. He questioned whether this could lead to multiple incinerators in the same area, raising community concerns about emissions regardless of technical assurances. Hilty also highlighted inconsistencies regarding truck traffic, pointing out that previous objections to increased traffic near the landfill are now being reversed to justify the proposal. He suggested the ordinance may create economic advantages for the applicant but could introduce broader impacts on infrastructure and neighborhoods.

Mr. Roberts noted Friends Recycling currently disposes of vegetative material.

Council Member Dreyer stated she would vote “no” on the ordinance as written, citing quality-of-life concerns for nearby residents. She suggested that if the council supports the concept, changes should include limiting the use to C&D landfills rather than materials recovery facilities and requiring approval through a special exception permit rather than as a use by right. Ms. Dreyer emphasized that the proposed location does not make sense given its proximity to residential development and raised equity concerns, noting that historically undesirable uses have been placed in minority neighborhoods. She concluded that the ordinance introduces too many unknowns regarding pollution, smoke, and truck traffic and does not align with community values.

There being no further discussion the motion to adopt the ordinance failed by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** DENIED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Barry Mansfield

**NAY:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**9b.** Public Hearing to consider a Concurrency Development Agreement pursuant to Chapter 163, Florida Statutes (West Oak) for approximately 198.80 acres located south of NW 35th Street, east of NW 27th Avenue, north of NW 21st Street, and west of the Florida Northern Railroad Right-of-Way (CDA25-0001); this is the second of two public hearings; the first was held on January 20, 2026, before the City Council

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**Presentation By: Jeff Shrum**

Council President Bethea opened the public hearing at 6:03 PM.

Growth Management Director Jeff Shrum discussed a Concurrency Development Agreement for West Oak. He provided a brief overview of the proposed agreement. Furthermore, he advised City Council that staff recommends approval.

No public comment.

There being no further discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**9c.** West Oak Townhouses Conceptual Subdivision

**Presentation By: Jeff Shrum**

Council President Bethea opened the public hearing at 6:05 PM.

Growth Management Director Jeff Shrum discussed the West Oak Townhouses Conceptual Subdivision Plan. He provided a brief overview of the proposed plan. Furthermore, he advised City Council that the Planning & Zoning Commission and staff recommend approval.

No public comment.

There being no further discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** Jay A. Musleh

**SECONDER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**9d.** West Oak PH 4 Residential Developer's Agreement

**Presentation By: Jeff Shrum**

Council President Bethea opened the public hearing at 6:06 PM.

Growth Management Director Jeff Shrum discussed the West Oak PH 4 Residential Developer's Agreement. He provided a brief overview of the proposed agreement. Furthermore, he advised City Council that staff recommends approval.

No public comment.

There being no further discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

## 10. General Business

**10a.** Contracts for the purchase and stock of single and three-phase pad and pole-mount transformers to Stuart C. Irby Company, LLC, and Gresco Supply, Inc., with an aggregate expenditure not to exceed \$13,000,000

**Presentation By:** Doug Peebles

Electric Utility Director Doug Peebles confirmed that lead-times/stock availability have returned to normal since the past COVID pandemic with Council Member Hilty.

There being no further discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**SECONDER:** Barry Mansfield

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**10b.** Additional expenditures under the Florida Department of Management Services contract for the purchase of tires, tubes, and services in the amount of \$185,000 for an increased aggregate expenditure of \$460,000

**Presentation By:** John King

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**10c.** Two-year renewal of the cooperative purchasing agreement with Pavement Technology, Inc., for pavement rejuvenation services with an expenditure not to exceed \$1,000,000

**Presentation By:** Sean Lanier

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**SECONDER:** Jay A. Musleh

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

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**10d.** Contract for fire hydrant and valve installation, repair, and maintenance services with R & M Service Solutions LLC., with an estimated expenditure not to exceed \$974,464

**Presentation By:** Sean Lanier

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Barry Mansfield

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**10e.** Additional expenditures under the agreements with Marion Tree Trimming and Stump Removal, LLC, and Flyway Access, LLC, for citywide tree trimming and removal services in the amount of \$513,000 for an updated aggregate expenditure amount not to exceed \$1,854,980

**Presentation By:** Tom Casey

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** Barry Mansfield

**SECONDER:** Jay A. Musleh

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**10f.** One-year contract renewal with Extreme Enterprises of Marion County, Inc., for grounds maintenance services for the City's south section rights-of-way, medians, and city-owned lots with an expenditure of \$170,888

**Presentation By:** Tom Casey

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** APPROVED

**MOVER:** James P. Hilty Sr

**SECONDER:** Kristen M. Dreyer

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**10g.** Resolution 2026-13 concerning a new solid waste rate schedule pursuant to Article IV - Rates and Charges Section 54-121

**Presentation By:** Dwayne Drake

Council Pro Tem Musleh stated Council has seen the proposed rate schedule presentation multiple times at previous Council meetings, and there is no need for another presentation.

There being no discussion the motion carried by roll call vote.

**RESULT:** ADOPTED

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**MOVER:** Barry Mansfield

**SECONDER:** Jay A. Musleh

**AYE:** Musleh, Dreyer, Hilty Sr, Mansfield, and Bethea Sr

**11. Internal Auditor's Report**

**12. City Manager's Report**

- **Chief Financial Officer, Janice Mitchell discussed the impacts of recent extreme cold weather events**

Ms. Mitchell reported on the recent extreme cold event that impacted electric utilities nationwide, including the Florida Municipal Power Pool (FMPP). Early Sunday morning, three generation units were lost due to freezing temperatures, triggering an Energy Emergency Alert Level 3—the most severe alert level—indicating critically low reserves and potential rolling outages. Emergency power purchases from other utilities prevented customer outages but came at a high cost, with prices rising from \$2-\$3 per megawatt to over \$1,800 per megawatt, totaling approximately \$2.3 million.

She noted that coordinated generation recovery, customer-owned generation, and conservation efforts maintained system reliability without service interruptions. Ocala Electric customers will not see rate increases due to the city's rate stabilization reserve, though individual bills may be higher from increased usage during cold weather. Ms. Mitchell expressed appreciation to customers and partners, including Ocala Water Resources, Cardinal Glass, and city departments, for efforts that reduced over four megawatts of demand during the event.

Council President Bethea requested staff perform community outreach regarding the City's efforts during the recent extreme cold weather events.

Council Member Musleh requested the City perform outreach regarding the Rate Stabilization Fund.

- **Chief Financial Officer Janice Mitchell updated Council on the future of Ocala Fiber Network**

Ms. Mitchell reported that OFN is moving forward with fiber expansion. Over the past year, efforts focused on updating and documenting existing systems to prepare for growth. OFN added 850 new customers in the past year, bringing total connections to over 4,200. An RFP was issued for a new operating system to streamline service orders and customer interactions, and negotiations are underway. Plans include hiring additional customer service staff to provide enhanced support and implementing a dedicated OFN website within two weeks for improved customer engagement.

A marketing strategy is being developed in coordination with the city's communications team, focusing on targeted outreach to areas where service is available to avoid overpromising. Approximately 25 priority locations have been identified, and design work for fiber expansion to 4,000 homes is in progress. Ms. Mitchell emphasized a

methodical approach to expansion and marketing to ensure reliable service delivery and invited council members to reach out for further details.

Council Pro Tem Musleh addressed the recent unsolicited offer to purchase Ocala Fiber Network (OFN), noting that the letter of intent lacked specificity and did not bind the parties to any terms. He emphasized the need for transparency with citizens and stated that any future consideration of a sale must include a clear valuation process, detailed cost analysis for separating OFN from the city's data network, and an understanding of expenses that could reduce net proceeds. Musleh cautioned against assumptions about the offer amount, stressing that the city currently has no accurate valuation of OFN and that staff should return with a plan for determining its true worth before any decisions are made.

Council Member Dreyer stated that the recent offer to purchase Ocala Fiber Network (OFN) is premature and should not distract from the city's current plans. She emphasized that OFN continues to provide financial benefits, including over \$1 million annually to the general fund, and cautioned against creating uncertainty for employees. Ms. Dreyer noted that while \$35 million sounds significant, the city lacks clarity on the cost of a full buildout and the long-term value of OFN.

Council Member Musleh agreed, adding that the city should proactively determine OFN's current and future valuation to respond effectively to any future offers. He stressed that selling would involve additional costs, such as paying for internet services currently provided internally, and that any decision must consider both present and future worth. Mr. Musleh concluded that the council needs detailed financial analysis and "ammunition" to make informed decisions, even if the intent is to decline offers.

Council Member Mansfield noted that the recent offer to purchase OFN was unsolicited and not typical of formal acquisition processes. He stated that the City already has a scope of services from Uptown for a valuation and feasibility analysis, which is under review. Mr. Mansfield emphasized the importance of understanding the financial implications of decoupling OFN from other city systems, including electric and IT, and reiterated that OFN holds approximately \$22 million in assets. He supported moving forward with a thorough evaluation process to determine both current and future value before considering any offers.

Ms. Mitchell stated the City is reviewing the scope to perform an analysis.

- **City staff recognition**

Mr. Lee thanked City departments for their efforts during the recent extreme cold weather event, noting significant work by Ocala Electric Utility, Ocala Water Resources, Public Works, Parks, and the PIO office. He highlighted issues with frozen backflow preventers, many on private property, and noted a current shortage of replacement parts that staff is working to resolve.

- **Delegation meeting update**

Mr. Lee reported on a recent trip to Tallahassee with Council President Bethea, Strategic and Legislative Affairs Officer Jeannine Robbins, and Director of Engineering Sean Lanier to meet the legislative delegation. Discussions focused on potential tax legislation related to homesteaded properties and possible relief measures, though outcomes remain uncertain. Mental health concerns were also raised, with plans to engage federal lobbyists for support.

- **Strategic initiatives update**

City Manager Pete Lee provided Council with a binder containing the January 31 update on strategic initiatives and the executive summary from the recent strategic planning session. Key priorities include the 2050 Plan, affordable housing, homelessness prevention, public safety, workforce engagement, technology improvements, and process efficiencies. The next strategic update is scheduled for April 30.

- **Brick City Music Festival, Saturday, February 7, 2026, location Citizen Circle, from 1 PM to 7 PM**

### **13. Ocala Police Department Report**

- **Overview of Crime and Traffic Stops**

Police Chief Mike Balken reported on crime data for the period, January 12, 2026 to January 25, 2026: 7,981 total incidents, 5,660 proactive calls, 2,321 dispatched calls, quadrant breakdown (dispatched versus proactive), 268 crimes, 184 arrests, 1,270 traffic stops, and 139 crashes.

- **Department Highlights**

Police Chief Mike Balken reported the department successfully arrested an armed robbery suspect and a convicted felon in possession of a firearm.

- **Project Safe Neighborhood**

Police Chief Mike Balken reported the department is participating in Project Safe Neighborhood to present cases to the FBI and US Attorney's Office.

### **14. Ocala Fire Rescue Department Report**

- **Unit Responses**

Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Pat Feagle reported on unit responses for a two-week period, January 20, 2026 to February 2, 2026. The two busiest units: Fire Rescue One (165-unit responses) and Fire Engine Four (126-unit responses).

- **Service calls update**

Mr. Feagle reported on call type spotlights for a three-week period, January 20, 2026 to February 2, 2026: motor vehicle accidents 78, structure fires 4, and community

paramedicine/core 45, and calls for service 1,066 (2,233 calls-to-date).

- **Department Highlights**

Mr. Feagle reported an email was sent to City Council and the Mayor, to enroll in a mandatory course to comply (Senate Bill 180) with the State Government.

**15. City Attorney's Report**

**16. Public Comments**

**17. Informational Items and Calendaring Items**

- Tuesday, February 10, 2026 - Vision 2050 workshop - 12:00pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, February 17, 2026 - CRA Board meeting - 3:45pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, February 17, 2026 - City Council meeting - 4:00pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, March 3, 2026 - City Council meeting - 4:00pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, March 17, 2026 - CRA Board meeting - 3:45pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, March 17, 2026 - City Council meeting - 4:00pm - Council Chambers
- Tuesday, March 24, 2026 - TPO meeting - 3:00pm - Marion County Board of County Commissioners Auditorium

**17a.** Power Cost Adjustment Report - December 2025

**17b.** Fully Executed Contracts Under \$50,000

**17c.** Monthly budget-to-actual report and Capital Improvement Project status report as of December 31, 2025

**18. Comments by Mayor**

**19. Comments by City Council Members**

- **Council President Bethea recognized City staff for their community support efforts during the extreme cold weather events**

**20. Adjournment**

**Adjourned at 6:45 pm**

**Minutes**

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Ire J. Bethea Sr.  
Council President

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Angel B. Jacobs  
City Clerk