MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
of THE MARY ESTHER CITY COUNCIL
March 3, 2025 - 6:00 PM
195 Christobal Road – North, Mary Esther, FL 32569

CITY COUNCIL PRESENT

Chris Stein, Mayor
Bernie Oder, Councilmember
Kenneth Woods, Councilmember
April Sutton, Mayor Pro Tem
Larry Carter, Councilmember
Richard Lawson, Councilmember

CITY STAFF PRESENT

Jared Cobb, City Manager
Hayward Dykes, City Attorney
Dillon Morris, City Clerk
Kelvin Cherry, Code Compliance Officer
Heather Day, Finance Director
Shawn Lindsey, Public Works Director

OTHERS PRESENT

Chad Rewis, OSCO Captain
Jeff Wagner, OCWFD Chief

1. **INVOCATION**
Jeff Wagner, Fire Chief, Ocen City-Wright Fire Control District, gave the invocation.

2. **CALL TO ORDER**
The meeting was called to order by Mayor Stein at 6:00 p.m.

3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
Mayor Stein led the pledge of allegiance.

4. **ROLL CALL**
The City Clerk called the roll as reflected above. Councilmember Carter joined remotely. Mayor Stein asked for a motion for Councilmember Carter to participate virtually. Councilmember Coxwell initiated the motion, which was seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Sutton. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (4-0)**
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
AYES:	Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

5. **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**
Mayor Stein asked if the council wished to make any changes to the agenda. City Manager Cobb that the Jacobs contract from a 5-year contract to a 30-day extension. Mayor Stein asked if there were any more changes. Hearing none, Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the agenda. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Coxwell. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

6. SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

6.1. Presentation of the FY24 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report

Joel Bradley, audit principal, Warren Averett, introduced the presentation for Mary Esther's financial year 2024 annual comprehensive financial report. He turned it over to Sloane Perkins, audit supervisor, Warren Averett, to discuss the audit results and the composition of ending fund balances. Joel Bradley continued the presentation, discussing the ten-year historical trend data, the assessed value of taxable property per capita, months of cash & investments, and governmental funds non-capital expenditures per capita. After the presentation, Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the audit. Councilmember Coxwell initiated the motion, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Sutton. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

The auditor's presentation is attached to this document.

See attachments for additional documents.

7. CONSENT AGENDA

Mayor Stein asked if the council wished to make any changes to the consent agenda. Hearing none, Mayor Stein asked for a motion. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Lawson. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Richard Lawson
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

7.1. Financial Report

7.2. Public Works Report

7.3. Library Report

7.4. Fire Department Report

7.5. Community Development Report

7.6. Jacobs Report

7.7. Law Enforcement Report

7.8. Minutes of the February 3rd, 2025, Regular Council Meeting

7.9. Minutes of the February 17th, 2025, Local Planning Agency Meeting

7.10. Minutes of the February 17th, 2025, Special Council Meeting

8. CITIZENS WHO HAVE REQUESTED TO BE PLACED ON THE AGENDA

None.

9. PUBLIC COMMENT (NON-AGENDA ITEMS)

None.

10. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

11. NEW BUSINESS

11.1. Potential First reading of Ordinance 2025-01, Lot Split and Lot Consolidation

Tyler Reed, Community Development Director, led the discussion of Ordinance 2025-01, which discussed the need for clear and structured regulations for lot splits. He stated that the city supports the ordinance. Mayor Stein asked if the city already had it, and Community Development Director Reed said it did not. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton expressed concern over lots losing their identities being split. Councilmember Carter asked if the new lots would require new tap fees, which they would. City Manager Cobb asked if there were any changes and if it would have to come back for another first reading, which it would. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton expressed concerns over how the lot splits would have the lots look with the current ordinance wording. The council had more discussion over the differences between requirements for public and private driveways. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2025-01 by title only. Councilmember Oder initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Lawson. The motion passed 4-1.

RESULT:	**PASSED (4-1)**
MOVER:	Councilmember Bernie Oder
SECOND:	Councilmember Richard Lawson
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	April Sutton

City Clerk Morris read the title of Ordinance 2025-01 into the public record.

11.2. Potential First Reading of Ordinance 2025-02, Public Camping or Sleeping in City facilities, grounds, right-of-way, and sidewalks

Tyler Reed, Community Development Director, led the discussion on Ordinance 2025-02, discussing the new Florida Statutes prohibiting public camping and sleeping. He stated the city recommends approval of the ordinance. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton asked if this would affect private property, which it would not. City Clerk Morris read the title of the ordinance into the public record. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the first reading of Ordinance 2025-02 by title only. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Coxwell. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

11.3. Potential First Reading of Ordinance 2025-03, Photo Speed Enforcement in School Zones

City Manager Cobb led the discussion on Ordinance 2025-03, discussing the speed studies received back from Highway 98. City Clerk Morris read the title of Ordinance 2025-03. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the first reading of ordinance 2025-03 by title only. Legal Attorney Comella added that the city might want to wait on a second reading since it will take time to approve the speed cameras. Councilmember Coxwell initiated the motion, seconded by

Mayor Pro Tem Sutton. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

11.4. Resolution 25-03, Supporting OCHIP Recommendation to Establish a Community Land Trust in Okaloosa County

Community Development Director, Tyler Reed, led the discussion on Resolution 25-03, supporting community land trusts. Robert Bage, Chief of Police for Fort Walton Beach, spoke about community land trusts and seeking support for the concept. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve Resolution 25-03, supporting OCHIP recommendation to establish a community land trust in Okaloosa County. Councilmember Coxwell initiated the motion, seconded by Mayor Pro Tem Sutton. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Councilmember Susan Coxwell
SECOND:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

City Clerk Morris read the title of Resolution 25-03 into the public record.

11.5. Review and Consideration of Christobal Waterfront Park Design and Proposed Phasing Plan

Sharon Gold, Projects Coordinator for the Tourism Development Department of Okaloosa County, introduced the plan for Christobal Waterfront Park. Councilmember Oder asked about security of the park, with Sharon Gold discussing monitored cameras and automatic closing gates.Councilmember Oder asked how much the maintenance will be with Sharon Gold stating that information will come at a later date. City Manager Cobb discussed the trail and materials that is going on the property. Katie Velasquez, MRD Associates, discussed the trail and some issues with the trail planning and being at the limit of pervious and nonpervious pavement. Trey Goodwin, Okaloosa County Commissioner, discussed further about the park and thanked the city for the partnership on the project. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the proposed plans. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Carter. Ian Blaze, 101 W Mircale Strip Parkway, inquired about the purpose of the gate, and suggested a wake zone, as well as asked if there will be a crosswalk at the property. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Larry Carter
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell

NAYS:	None

11.6. Consideration of an Amendment to the CDBG-CV Grant Agreement

Public Works Director, Shawn Lindsey, led the discussion on considering the amendment. He discussed that this was brought before the council but that this was the final approval and that work would be commencing soon. Mayor Stein asked for a motion to approve the attached amendment to the CDBG-CV grant agreement. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Lawson. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Richard Lawson
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

11.7. Consideration of Operations, Maintenance, and Management (O&M) Contract with Jacobs

Public Works Director Shawn Lindsey discussed the negotation of the O&M contract is underway and needs a 30-day extension. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton asked what happens if the council does not have a contract at the end of the 30 days. City Manager Cobb discussed the council could move on to the next highest-ranked proposal. Mayor Stein asked for am option to approve the 30-day extension with Jacobs. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton initiated the motion, seconded by Councilmember Lawson. The motion passed unanimously.

RESULT:	**PASSED (5-0)**
MOVER:	Mayor Pro Tem April Sutton
SECOND:	Councilmember Richard Lawson
AYES:	Larry Carter, Bernie Oder, April Sutton, Richard Lawson, Susan Coxwell
NAYS:	None

11.8. Elliott Park Discussion

Mayor Pro Tem Sutton led the discussion with Elliot Park. She discussed many issues that have already been addressed, but some citizens are using the park as a dog park and bringing baby gates to fence it in. She discussed wanting to make an area in the park a dedicated dog park for the safety of residents. City Manager Cobb discussed that the city is still developing the parks master plan timeline and if they would like to handle this now or wait until the plan is done to get feedback from citizens. Public Works Director Lindsey discussed some of the maintenance that goes into dog parks. Councilmember Oder asked if it is legal to put cameras in the parks to protect citizens. City Attorney Comela said they would have to look into it. City Manager Cobb discussed that a policy would be brought to the council before cameras would be put in place.

See attachments for pictures.

11.9. Law Enforcement Discussion

Mayor Pro Tem Sutton discussed ongoing issues with the mall and roads around the mall with racing and vehicle gatherings. She also discussed the increased crime presence in the city and wants help from law enforcement. Chad Rewis, Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, discussed the increased crime presence at the mall property, lack of security in the building, urban exploration, homelessness, complications with private property, car clubs meeting more often, and issues with enforcement of certain lawbreaking on private property. He discussed things in the city that could be worthwhile with the mall to alleviate the problems, such as proper signage, barriers, and current ordinances. Councilmember Coxwell asked if the owner had been there at the property in person. City Manager Cobb discussed that the managing partner is in New York City, and the local manager has had discussions numerous times. Councilmember Carter expressed interest in the city manager and law enforcement listing every possible approach of what to do and engage with the mall for the best course of action. Mayor Pro Tem Sutton thanked Captain Rewis for his insight.

See attachments for picture.

12. COUNCILS' STANDING COMMITTEE STATUS REPORTS

Mayor Pro Tem Sutton discussed the TPO Board meetings, being elected the ECRC Vice Chair TPO Board.

Councilmember Coxwell thanked Chief Baige for coming in and sharing info about OCHIP.

Councilmember Lawson discussed the libraries soup luncehon.

Mayor Stein had no additional comments.

Councilmember Oder thanked Finance Director Day for her hard work on the audit, discussed the FLC Monday morning calls, upcoming changes in Tallahassee, property tax possibly going away, changes in zoning restrictions, changes in voting elections, and the upcoming library cooperative meeting.

Councilmember Carter thanked mayor and council for the support of his daughter.

13. OTHER COMMENTS

City Attorney Comella had no additionals comments.

City Clerk Morris reminded mayor and council to check their mailbox, and to take and send him the certificates for the ethics training and cybersecurity training.

City Manager Cobb discussed the maintenance of the ground storage tanks and thanked Finance Director Day for her hard work.

14. ADJOURN

The council meeting adjourned at 8:17 p.m.