



**Agenda
Public Workshop
of the Mary Esther City Council
August 27, 2025 - 2:30 PM**

100 Hollywood Blvd W – Mary Esther, FL 32569

- 1. CALL TO ORDER**
- 2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**
- 3. ROLL CALL**
- 4. SPECIAL PRESENTATION**
 - 4.1. Review of Governance Handbook and Discussion of Potential Updates**
 - 4.2. Presentation and Discussion of Draft Strategic Planning Framework**
- 5. CLOSING REMARKS**
- 6. OTHER COMMENTS**
- 7. ADJOURN**

******* PLEASE TURN OFF OR SILENCE ALL CELL PHONES *******

WATCHING AND PARTICIPATION

To watch the meetings virtually, citizens may log onto the city's website (www.cityofmaryesther.com), click the "Public Meetings" section, and select the meeting they would like to watch.

Any citizen who would like to comment on non-agenda items must submit a service request through the city's website, call customer service at (850) 243-3566, or fill out a form at city hall. A form must be completed by 12 pm one week before the day of the meeting. Filling out a form does not guarantee you will be added to the agenda. If a citizen opts to participate virtually, an email will be sent with the Zoom registration link.

NOTES:

- 1) *Adjournment with continuation on the following day at 6:00 PM may be called if the meeting proceeds past 10 PM.*
- 2) *The City does not keep verbatim minutes as a matter of record. If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Mary Esther City Council with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, he or she will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose, he or she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. See Florida Statute 286.0105*
- 3) *Any invocation that may be offered before the official start of the Council meeting shall be the voluntary offering of a private citizen, to and for the benefit of the Council. The views or beliefs expressed by the invocation speaker have not been previously reviewed or approved by the Council, and the Council is not allowed by law to endorse the religious beliefs or views of this or any other speaker.*



Governance Handbook

Fiscal Year 2023

City Manager

Jared Cobb

Mayor

Chris Stein

Interim City Clerk

Elizabeth Roy

City Council

Susan Coxwell, Mayor Pro Tem

Bernie Oder

City Attorney

Hayward Dykes

Aaron Bacchi

Larry Carter

April Sutton

This handbook reflects the governance team’s work on creation of a framework for effective governance. This involves ongoing discussions about the purpose, roles, commitment to norms and agreement on protocols that will enable the governance team to perform its responsibilities in a way that best benefits the community.

A. GOVERNANCE

1. **Effective governance is the process of reaching agreements that balance community values and priorities to enhance the well-being of the community. This includes the basic behaviors and characteristics that enable governance team members to maintain the required focus to establish a climate for excellence within a city government.**

B. PURPOSE

1. **Within the context of a governance team, purpose is a common focus, overarching goals, and the values and beliefs team members share about their community that help them transcend their individual differences to fulfill a greater purpose.**
2. **“Our shared purpose is to provide a high quality of life for our residents, supportive environment for our businesses, and financial sustainability for our organization.”**
 - 2.1. We want to build trust with the community and move the city forward.
 - 2.2. We want to become an effective team.
 - 2.3. We want to understand our collective responsibilities.
 - 2.4. We want to be a team with a common focus so that we are not a distraction to the community, but a catalyst for the focused efforts of employees.
 - 2.5. We want the community to be able to see evidence of this focused direction.
 - 2.6. We want to be partners with the staff in positive change.
 - 2.7. We want to oversee the development of first-rate programs, services, and facilities, ensuring that we continue to improve.
 - 2.8. We want to engage residents to develop long-range plans for our community.
 - 2.9. We want to perpetuate a legacy of positive culture as people come and go.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. **To be successful it is critical that each member of the governance team understands his or her role in the organization, takes ownership, and is accountable for results achieved. The following is a brief overview of the principal roles and responsibilities of each member of the governance team, as established by the City Charter and best practices for each position.**
 - 1.1. Mayor - The Mayor serves as the presiding officer for City Council meetings, head of government for all ceremonial and military purposes, and will:

- 1.1.1. Convene and facilitate City Council meetings.
- 1.1.2. Represent the City at official functions and events.
- 1.1.3. Execute contracts, agreements, deeds, and other official documents.
- 1.1.4. Consult Councilmembers to review potential changes to the Council meeting calendar.
- 1.1.5. Partner with the City Manager in anticipating issues and concerns of Councilmembers.
- 1.1.6. Involve the Mayor Pro Tem in matters as appropriate in a collaborative role.
- 1.1.7. Help facilitate the orientation of new Councilmembers.
- 1.1.8. Clearly communicate and announce City Council meeting protocols, procedures, and guidelines for speaking or testifying at Council meetings.
- 1.2. Mayor Pro Tem - In addition to serving as a Councilmember, the Mayor Pro Tem supports the Mayor and City Manager and will:
 - 1.2.1. Participate with the Mayor as necessary in representing the City at official functions.
 - 1.2.2. Help facilitate the orientation of new Councilmembers.
 - 1.2.3. Perform the functions, exercise powers, and execute duties of the Mayor in his/her absence.
- 1.3. City Clerk - The City Clerk supports the Mayor and City Council and will:
 - 1.3.1. Provide notice of City Council meetings to the Council and public.
 - 1.3.2. Draft minutes of all City Council meetings for review and approval.
 - 1.3.3. Archive and maintain responsibility of all public records.
 - 1.3.4. Perform other duties as directed by the City Council.
 - 1.3.5. Reports to the City Council.
- 1.4. City Attorney - The City Attorney supports the Mayor, City Council, City Clerk, City Manager and will:
 - 1.4.1. Review City Council agendas, meeting packets, and other materials.
 - 1.4.2. Attend City Council meetings and provide legal advice and services.
 - 1.4.3. Provide legal services to the Mayor, City Clerk, and City Manager in support of their roles.

- 1.4.4. Perform other legal services as directed by the City Council.
- 1.4.5. Reports to the City Council.
- 1.5. City Council - The role of the City Council is to ensure the provision of quality public services in accordance with community values and priorities. To accomplish this, the Council will work as a team to:
 - 1.5.1. Set the direction for the City by engaging residents, businesses, and other stakeholders.
 - 1.5.2. Establish an effective and efficient structure by employing the city manager, developing and adopting policies, establishing service expectations, establishing budget priorities and adopting the budget, and providing facilities to support the provision of public services.
 - 1.5.3. Provide support to the City Manager and staff by following standards of responsible governance, making decisions and providing resources that support City priorities and goals, upholding Council policies, and being effective spokespersons by being knowledgeable about City programs and goals.
 - 1.5.4. Ensure accountability through evaluation of the City Manager; monitoring and evaluating policies; serving as a judicial and appeals body; monitoring service benchmarks and program effectiveness; and approving, monitoring, and adjusting city budgets.
 - 1.5.5. Provide community leadership and advocacy on behalf of the city and local government.
- 1.6. City Manager - The City Manager is the chief administrative officer of the City and will:
 - 1.6.1. Oversee the daily operations of the City.
 - 1.6.2. Manage the personnel and financial resources of the City.
 - 1.6.3. Recommend policies, programs, and projects to support the goals of the Council.
 - 1.6.4. Lead the staff toward the accomplishment of the agreed upon goals.
 - 1.6.5. Submit a budget to the City Council that supports the goals set by Council.
 - 1.6.6. Perform other duties as directed by the Council.
 - 1.6.7. Reports to the City Council.

D. CULTURE

1. **Culture is the positive or negative atmosphere created by the way people in an organization treat each other. Teams have unwritten (implicit) or written (explicit) agreements about how they will behave with each other and others. These behavioral ground rules, often called norms, enable**

teams to build and maintain a positive culture or shift a negative one.

2. **Because the community elects City Council members to set and monitor the direction of the City, and the City Manager translates all efforts into action, it is vital that the City Council and City Manager have a respectful and productive working relationship based on trust and open communication.**
3. **The governance team commits to accomplishing these standards and roles through:**
 - 3.1. Focusing on stakeholders
 - 3.2. Adherence to the Sunshine Law
 - 3.3. Demonstrating respect
 - 3.4. Creating transparency
 - 3.5. Communicating openly
 - 3.6. Listening actively
 - 3.7. Keeping commitments
 - 3.8. Being collaborative
 - 3.9. Taking the time needed to govern effectively
 - 3.10. Encouraging everyone's ideas and point of view

E. PROTOCOLS

1. **Leadership and Roles**
 - 1.1. Councilmembers carry authority only as a Council, not as individuals. Individuals can request action by bringing up a new idea, explaining their interest in a course of action and working to get a Council majority to support moving in that direction.
 - 1.1.1. Council members will respect the special magistrate process and defer, as an individual, from any active participation in the magistrate process.
 - 1.2. When a majority of the Council, sitting in a formal meeting, requests action, that request should be made in the context of the intended results (what is to be accomplished), not the methods used to achieve those results.
 - 1.3. To be effective representatives of the City of Mary Esther, the Mayor and Councilmembers will:
 - 1.3.1. Always behave in a manner that reflects positively on the City.

- 1.3.2. Refrain from obligating the City Council and/or administration by actual speech or implication, unless authorized to do so by the City Council.
- 1.3.3. Represent the City at various community events.
- 1.3.4. Refer any concerns, questions, or comments to the City Manager as specified in the protocol on responding to concerns.
- 1.3.5. Reinforce with the community the key messages agreed upon by the City Council.
- 1.4. In responding to concerns regarding the work of the City Council, the Mayor and Councilmembers will:
 - 1.4.1. Receive the information, remembering that only one side of the story is being presented (listening).
 - 1.4.2. Repeat the information – when appropriate, paraphrase to ensure understanding.
 - 1.4.3. Remind the individual that a Councilmember has no authority as an individual and share the appropriate line of command and process to follow to address their concern.
 - 1.4.4. Re-Direct – Thank them for sharing their thoughts and refer them to the appropriate staff member and, if necessary, encourage them to initiate the formal complaint process.
 - 1.4.5. Report – In a timely manner, inform the City Manager.
 - 1.4.6. When interacting with the public and their constituents, the Mayor and Councilmembers will hold to the highest level of professional and ethical conduct, including emphasizing the positive aspects of the City.

2. Mayor and City Council Relationship with Staff and the Community

- 2.1. When individually visiting departments, as a professional courtesy, the Mayor and Councilmembers are encouraged to notify the City Manager that they will be visiting a department, and may provide input to the City Manager on issues or concerns that may arise from such a visit.
- 2.2. At no time, while visiting a department shall the Mayor or Councilmember make promises, either overt or implied, interfere with administration, or involve himself or herself in personnel issues.
- 2.3. The Mayor and Councilmembers shall not request any information from staff beyond that which would be provided to any regular community member.
 - 2.3.1. Staff members are directed to relay requests from the Mayor or Councilmembers to their supervisor to ensure that appropriate information is provided to the Mayor and all Councilmembers.

2.3.2. Department heads are directed to relay requests from the Mayor or Councilmembers to the City Manager to ensure that appropriate information is provided to the Mayor and all Councilmembers.

2.3.3. This protocol does not imply a censoring of any private and informal conversations.

3. City Council Meetings and the Agenda

3.1. Meetings will be conducted in such a way as to allow the public to provide input in the time allotted to ensure that multiple voices of the community inform Council deliberations; however, when the Council deliberates, it will be a time for the Council to listen and learn from each other, taking public input into consideration without re-engaging the public.

Council meetings are held in public to provide the opportunity for the community to observe Council deliberation. Unless agendized, as such, they are not open-forum town hall meetings.

3.1.1. Since the Sunshine Law expressly prohibits discussion leading to action from being conducted unless agendized, Governance Team members are strongly encouraged to refrain from engaging members of the public in dialogue about issues not on the agenda.

3.1.2. In general, citizens and residents wishing to “dialogue” with members should be encouraged to contact individual members and discuss issues of importance with them or the City Manager as appropriate.

3.1.3. As a result of a comment under public communication, a member may ask the City Manager to briefly comment for clarity or correction. The member may also ask that a matter be investigated, with or without a follow-up report to the Council.

3.1.4. If a Governance Team member feels compelled to speak to the issue, the member must first be recognized by the Mayor. The comments must be brief and only clarifying or correcting. Any further discussion should be agendized.

3.2. The design of the Council agenda will follow the historical structure utilized by the Council. The design of the agenda may only be altered with the approval of the Council.

3.3. Whenever possible, the City Council Agenda will be distributed seven (7) days prior to the regularly scheduled meeting.

3.4. The City Clerk, with the support of the City Manager, will create each Council Agenda. In advance of the preparation of the Council Agenda, Councilmembers may request items to be placed on the agenda by notifying the City Clerk at least seven (7) days prior to the meeting. The agenda will be considered for approval at the start of each City Council meeting.

3.5. The Mayor and Council recognize that the City may, at times, provide Proclamations to the public regarding issues facing the community. As such, Proclamations shall be approved in following manner.

- 3.5.1. Draft Proclamation submitted to staff (either the City Manager or, if necessary, to the City Attorney) for review and editing.
- 3.5.2. Draft Proclamation, after review and editing, shall be submitted to the Council for consideration and approval.
- 3.5.3. Once approved, the Proclamation shall be read in the meeting by the Mayor or delegated to the City Clerk to read.
- 3.5.4. City Clerk communicates the Proclamation to the media and to the community.
- 3.6. The Mayor and the City Manager will discuss the contents of the agenda and the process that will be followed at the meeting, in advance of the Council Meeting.
- 3.7. Councilmembers will make every effort to submit, prior to the meeting, questions they intend to ask so that the City Manager and staff can prepare and answer Councilmember questions at the Council Meeting.
 - 3.7.1. When an individual Councilmember requests information, that information will be provided to all Councilmembers.
 - 3.7.2. If unforeseen questions arrive during the meeting, members will acknowledge their question or comment as spontaneous and that they understand that staff may not have the information on hand to answer the question.
- 3.8. Individual Councilmembers are expected to self-monitor compliance to with the Sunshine Law, including limiting Executive Session to the legally appropriate agenda item(s).
- 3.9. Councilmembers need equal access to information, and to operate within the boundaries established within the Sunshine Law. The use of email and social communication is subject to the Sunshine Law. The City Manager shall forward questions and answers to all members. Members, when responding, may not “reply to all.”
- 3.10. The City Council wishes to maintain a culture of professionalism, stay focused, and respect the need of Councilmembers to be available to their families:
 - 3.10.1. Cell phones will be set for “silent” or vibrate.
 - 3.10.2. Councilmembers will be discreet in checking cell phones if necessary.
- 3.11. Councilmembers individually and collectively demonstrate confidentiality as appropriate and as outlined through the mandates of the Sunshine Law, and other compliance criteria established by law or legislation. Respecting the confidentiality of information maintains the Council’s judicial review role.
- 3.12. Councilmembers will review the information provided to them, actively solicit input and listen

to all perspectives, operate as representatives, and make decisions in the best interest of the whole City.

- 3.13. Councilmembers will participate in professional development activities at the local, state, and national levels whenever possible.
- 3.14. Each Councilmember respects the right of other members to vote in the minority position. If so doing, each member agrees, as a courtesy to the team, to explain the reason for their minority vote during deliberation or after casting the vote.
- 3.15. The Council believes that when no legal reason exists of a conflict of interest, its members have a duty to vote on issues before them. The conflict must be announced in public and the appropriate state form shall be filed with the City Clerk.
- 3.16. Councilmembers commit to support decisions of the majority, after honoring the right of individual members to express opposing viewpoints and vote their convictions.
 - 3.16.1. Under the concept of majority rule, each member is compelled to support the successful implementation of a policy decision, program, or procedure even when he or she does not agree with the decision.
 - 3.16.2. If a member of the Council cannot support the decision of the Council because it offends a moral/personal code, the member is expected, at a minimum, to refrain from undermining the decision or directive.
- 3.17. The City Council will strive for brevity in deliberations, keeping remarks brief and to the point so that all opinions can be expressed, and meetings can be efficient. Addressing each agenda item, the Council shall normally adhere to the following process:
 - 3.17.1. Staff Presentation/addressing questions from the Council
 - 3.17.2. Input from the Community
 - 3.17.3. Council Discussion and Deliberation (public comment will not be taken at this time)
- 3.18. During the portion of the meeting reserved for Councilmember Reports/Communications, Councilmembers shall only provide information (i.e., activities or professional development they have attended as a Councilmember). They may request items to be placed on future agendas, but due to the Sunshine Law, they shall not make statements having an effect on citizens, employees, or services provided by the City. It is important that this time in the agenda not be used to engage in discussion on items not on the agenda or for partisan political statements.
 - 3.18.1. Councilmembers may report "Ex-Parte communications (phone calls, emails, letters, meetings, conversations) received.
 - 3.18.2. Councilmembers may report on department visitations.

3.18.3. Councilmembers may report on City events.

3.18.4. Councilmembers may report on professional development attended.

3.18.5. Councilmembers may request items be placed on a future agenda.

3.19. Parliamentary procedures are to be utilized as a guide to ensure for the most effective and efficient Council meeting possible. Accordingly, the Council utilizes Robert's parliamentary procedures as its guide to managing the agenda of each Council meeting.

3.20. The use of social media by Council members will be limited to personal topics not related to the City, except in the case where the Council member is reposting informational items published by the City and about the City, including City approved organizations.

4. City Council Relationship with the City Manager

4.1. The Council will commit to work through and with the City Manager on issues regarding the running of the City. The City Manager will inform the Mayor and Council as soon as possible of:

4.1.1. Serious safety concerns.

4.1.2. Serious disciplinary action.

4.1.3. Serious/unexpected personnel changes or disciplinary issues.

4.1.4. Serious illness or death of a staff member.

4.1.5. Legal or liability concerns.

4.1.6. Notable achievements.

4.1.7. Media contacts.

4.2. In all matters, the Mayor, Council, and City Manager are expected to protect confidential information.

4.3. It is the City Manager's responsibility to organize the staff in the manner that best serves the needs of the City. As a professional courtesy, the City Manager shall provide appropriate notice to the Mayor and Council in advance of action being taken.

4.4. The Council recognizes that the City Manager has responsibility for supervision, personnel assignments, and evaluation of City personnel.

4.5. As the norm, the City Manager speaks on behalf of the City. The Mayor is authorized to speak on behalf of the Council, when necessary. The City Manager will inform the Mayor and Council when media contacts the City Manager.

- 4.6. The Council commits to complete an annual evaluation of the City Manager. In consultation with the City Manager, the evaluation process and associated documents will be developed and approved by the Council. The evaluation process and instrument shall be designed to bring about the collective view of the Council. Thus, the evaluation will reflect the majority view of the Council, as a whole.
- 4.7. Conflicts between individual Council members and/or the City Manager will be addressed privately between those who hold the conflict and will not involve the community, staff, and media.

5. Ongoing Implementation of Council Approved Protocols

- 5.1. An orientation by the Mayor, City Manager, and/or Department Heads will be provided to new members of the Council. Training may be provided by County and State organizations, consultants, or led by staff.
 - 5.1.1. The orientation is intended to be a conversation and overview of the things members need to know immediately. Questions will be answered and the Council meeting structure, City Manager contract, City Manager work plan, Council policies, overview of the services and programs, long range plan and budget relationship, and the major challenges being faced will be outlined and discussed. This should also include an overview of Sunshine Law and quasi-judicial rules.
 - 5.1.2. Each orientation may be slightly different depending upon the needs and interests of the incoming members and the major issues before the Council.
- 5.2. Within 90 days of the election/appointment of more than one (1) Councilmember, a Work Session of the whole Council will be held for the purpose of reviewing and updating the governance protocols of the Council.
 - 5.2.1. When only one individual is elected/appointed, with the approval of the Council, the Mayor and City Manager will facilitate the review of the Governance Protocols.
- 5.3. Upon the request of two or more Councilmembers, a special work session will be called for the purpose of reviewing and updating the governance protocols of the Council.

Strategic Plan Foundation Summary

As we prepare for our upcoming strategic planning workshop, this document provides a high-level summary of the foundational plans that will guide our discussion. These themes, drawn from the [Community Vision Plan \(click for the full document\)](#) and the [Comprehensive Plan \(click for full document\)](#), represent the long-term aspirations of our community and our legal framework for growth.

Key Themes from the Community Vision Plan:

- **A More Connected Community:** Residents desire a more walkable and bikeable city, with safe and accessible connections between neighborhoods, parks, the future town center, and the waterfront.
- **Vibrant Public Spaces:** There is a strong interest in enhancing our parks and creating a lively, identifiable town center that serves as a community gathering spot.
- **Economic Opportunity:** Support for attracting diverse, small-scale businesses that enhance the city's character and provide local employment.
- **Honoring Our Heritage:** A deep respect for Mary Esther's unique history, small-town feel, and military heritage is a consistent theme.

Key Themes from the Comprehensive Plan:

- **Managed & Sustainable Growth:** The plan calls for responsible growth management, ensuring that new development is sustainable and enhances the community's character.
- **Housing Variety:** Goals are in place to encourage a diverse range of housing types to meet the needs of all residents.
- **Infrastructure & Capital Improvements:** The plan outlines the legal and policy blueprint for providing dependable water, sewer, stormwater, and transportation infrastructure.
- **Coastal Management & Resiliency:** A key focus is on protecting our natural resources and ensuring the city is resilient to coastal challenges.

These themes will serve as the foundation for our discussion as we work together to draft the Strategic Plan and, specifically, the Priorities for the next five (5) year period.