



CITY OF FORESTPARK

**CITY OF FOREST PARK
CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL CALLED MEETING**

Monday, November 24, 2025, at 5:30 PM
Forest Park City Hall | Council Chambers
745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Angelyne Butler, MPA

The Honorable Kimberly James

The Honorable Hector Gutierrez

The Honorable Allan Mears

The Honorable Delores A. Gunn

The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells

Latasha Clemons, Interim City Manager

Randi Rainey, City Clerk

Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

DRAFT MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Mayor Butler called the meeting to order at 5:30 P.M.

II. ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK

<u>Present</u>	<u>Absent</u>
Mayor Butler	
Councilmember Kimberly James	
Councilmember Delores Gunn	
Councilmember Hector Gutierrez	
Councilmember Latresa Akins-Wells	
Councilmember Allan Mears	

Others in Attendance: Rodney Virgil, Level 2 Support Engineer; John Wiggins, Finance Director; Jeremi Patterson, Deputy Finance Director; Shalonda Brown, HR Director; Diane Lewis, HR Deputy Director; and Beverly Moultrie, Risk Analyst.

III. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS

It was moved to adopt the agenda as printed.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Gunn.
Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, and Councilmember Mears.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

1. Personnel Appeal Hearing- D. Walker – Attorney's Office

Mayor Butler opened the personnel hearing for Mr. Derry Walker, stating that the proceedings were being held as a result of Director Walker's appeal of the City Manager's decision to terminate his employment as Director of Code Compliance. She explained that under the City Code, when a City Manager issues a notice of termination, the director is immediately placed on suspension with pay, including all benefits, throughout the appeal period and continuing until the Mayor and Council issue a final decision. She noted that Director Walker exercised his right to appeal within the required ten-day appeal period, and the purpose of the hearing was to review the termination decision.

Mayor Butler stated that she and the City Council had received and reviewed the full record related to the matter, including the official termination notice, the investigative summary, and all documents submitted during the administrative process. She explained that this prior review ensures that each Councilmember enters the hearing with an understanding of the issues and the basis for the City Manager's decision.

Mayor Butler then outlined the structure and expectations of the appeal hearing:

- Each party will have 30 minutes to present.
- The City Manager or her designee will present first, providing the grounds for termination, explaining the investigative process, and offering any additional evidence or testimony not already included in the record.
- Director Walker or his representative will then have 30 minutes to present his case.
- During presentations, both parties may submit documents or evidence for the Council's consideration and may call witnesses to provide relevant testimony. All materials and testimony must relate directly to the basis for the termination.
- Following both presentations, the City Council will have the opportunity to ask questions regarding documents, testimony, or any matter relevant to the review.
- Director Walker will then be provided 10 minutes for a closing statement.
- After the closing statement, the evidentiary portion of the hearing will close, and the Council will move into Executive Session for deliberations.

Mayor Butler noted that the City Code does not require that a final decision be made immediately following the hearing.

Interim City Manager, Chief Clemons, provided comments regarding the personnel matter involving Director Derry Walker. She stated that it is her responsibility to ensure that all employees, especially those in leadership positions, uphold the highest standards of professionalism, follow established City policies and procedures, and comply with all applicable laws.

Chief Clemons explained that Human Resources initiated and completed a formal investigation following an employee complaint concerning Director Walker's conduct. On October 14, 2025, he

received a memorandum from Human Resources outlining allegations of intimidation and inappropriate conduct. The HR analysis identified multiple policy and legal concerns, including:

- Violations of the City of Forest Park Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual, Rule 10 and Rule 15, page 1, addressing disciplinary action and workplace conduct
- Harassment concerns related to EEOC guidelines and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Potential breaches of HR investigation integrity under Rule 11, page 2

Due to the seriousness of the allegations, Chief Clemons consulted with legal counsel and subsequently placed Director Walker on administrative leave with pay while the matter was further investigated. A face-to-face meeting with Director Walker and Human Resources was held on October 16, 2025, to formally execute the administrative leave.

On October 23, 2025, Chief Clemons received the investigative findings and summary from Human Resources, which included interviews and information collected from multiple employees within the Code Compliance Department. HR documented several concerns, including:

- Inconsistent application of positive discipline procedures (Rule 11, page 9, Section 7)
- Inappropriate comments and conduct, including racially insensitive remarks, body-shaming, and overly familiar physical contact
- Threatening or intimidating behavior
- Ineffective departmental leadership
- Credibility issues
- Departmental policy violations

Chief Clemons stated that she conducted a thorough review of all investigative documents, including audio testimony, and consulted with the City's legal counsel and an external subject-matter expert to ensure fairness, accuracy, and integrity. Based on the totality of the evidence and the severity of the findings, Chief Clemons recommended termination of Director Walker, an action authorized under the City Charter, page 12, Section 3.14.

On November 11, 2025, she met in person with Director Walker to review the investigation results and inform him of the recommendation for termination. During the meeting, she explained the appeals process in accordance with City Charter Section 3.14, page 13, letter E, number 4, and provided copies of the termination documentation and the relevant charter provisions. She clarified that, because this is a personnel matter and out of respect for all involved, she would not disclose additional details in a public forum beyond what the Mayor and Council had already received as part of the record.

Chief Clemons emphasized that the recommendation was not made lightly. She noted that while she had worked well with Director Walker in the past, the seriousness of the findings required decisive action. She stated that department directors hold significant authority and are expected to model appropriate behavior and shape the culture of their departments. Conduct falling below these standards undermines organizational values, creates legal and operational risks, and erodes trust among employees and the public.

She stated that her recommendation for termination was based on three core factors:

- Documented findings from the HR investigation
- Clear and substantiated violations of City policy
- Conduct inconsistent with federal standards and the City's obligation to ensure a safe, lawful, and respectful workplace

Chief Clemons concluded by stating that the recommendation was not influenced by personal opinions, departmental politics, or external pressures. Instead, it was rooted in the City's responsibility to uphold standards, ensure accountability, and apply policies consistently. She thanked the Mayor and Council for their consideration.

Director Derry Walker addressed the Mayor and Council and stated that he had never been reprimanded, disciplined, or issued any written notice for behavior related to the allegations presented. He stated that no employee had ever filed a complaint with him during his employment with the City of Forest Park. He explained that he believed the complaint originated after he terminated an employee who was still within her probationary period. He stated that once the employee learned she had not passed probation, she arrived at City Hall at 8:00 a.m. the next morning to file a complaint. Director Walker said he had already contacted Director Brown the night before and met with her at 9:30 a.m. the following morning.

He stated that the initial complaint alleged he was "hovering" over the employee and "flexing his muscles," but he explained that video footage existed, which Interim City Manager Chief Clemons was aware of, and he believed the footage did not support the allegation. He stated that after the initial complaint, "it became a witch hunt," and additional accusations followed.

Director Walker asserted that he had never engaged in inappropriate behavior. He stated that he always encouraged motivation within his team, cared about his employees' well-being, and routinely encouraged them to attend dental and medical appointments. He said he did not understand where allegations of intimidation or a hostile environment originated, as he believed he consistently supported his staff. He described his accomplishments as Director, stating that he was hired to make a difference in community engagement and education. He noted that the City's code compliance rate had reached record levels, that significant progress had been made in demolishing vacant properties, and that he introduced the "Block Boys" program to improve community engagement.

Director Walker stated that he understood the high standards expected of a department head and remained committed to his team. He requested that the Mayor and Council give serious consideration to his appeal for termination and ensure that all HR complaints are reviewed with fairness. He added that he had submitted an open records request to obtain information about complaints and resolutions from other departments. He stated he received some documents electronically that morning but had not yet received hard copies. He concluded by saying that if he was guilty of anything, it was because of motivating his team.

Mayor Butler informed Director Walker that he now had ten minutes to provide his closing statement and invited him to proceed.

Director Walker stated that when he joined the City, he came with a clear vision and plan to help clean up the community and to motivate his employees. He reiterated his commitment to the department and expressed hope that the Mayor and Council would find it appropriate to reinstate

him. He thanked the governing body for its consideration.

V. EXECUTIVE SESSION

(When an Executive Session is required, one will be called for the following issues: Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate) OCGA is §50-14-1(A)(2).

It was moved to recess into Executive Session at 5:43 pm. for Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate.

The motion was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells and seconded by Councilmember James. Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

It was moved to reconvene in the regular session meeting at 5:59 pm.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Councilmember Akins-Wells requested the opportunity to ask questions of employees who were present. She explained that her questions were not directed at any specific individual but were intended to obtain the employee perspective, especially given that an investigation had been conducted, and it was stated that all employees had been interviewed. She asked whether the employees present had, in fact, been interviewed as part of the investigation and how they personally felt about the situation. She inquired whether they felt unsafe or had concerns about their working conditions.

Councilmember Akins-Wells stated that her focus is always on the employees and emphasized that when employees have issues, the City as a whole has issues. She reiterated that she strives to remain consistent in advocating for employees across all departments. She invited any employee who wished to speak to do so, and noted that participation was voluntary.

Mayor Butler allowed up to ten minutes for any employees or members of the public who wished to speak regarding the matter. She opened the floor for comments during this allotted time.

Ms. Jacobs, an employee with the code compliance department, stated that until October 7, 2025, she had felt comfortable working in the department, but after that date, she became afraid to come to work. She reported that she had personally heard Director Walker refer to female employees in derogatory terms, including comments about Supervisor Scott, claiming she “sits on her [expletive] and eats cheeseburgers all the time.” Ms. Jacobs stated that she also heard Director Walker make rude remarks about Hispanic individuals as well as negative comments about white people. She expressed that, based on these experiences, she did not believe the department was a safe environment under his leadership. She questioned how a director could effectively lead when he criticized “any and everybody” who walked through the door.

Councilmember Akins-Wells asked Ms. Jacobs whether she had ever considered that the final complaint she submitted might have been mistaken or incorrect. Ms. Jacobs stated that she had been focused on completing her probationary period and initially tried to overlook issues in the workplace, noting that she had “come from worse” environments. However, she explained that an incident in which Director Walker “ran up in her face” became the breaking point, and she felt she could no longer tolerate the situation. She confirmed that she was still within her probationary period at the time of the incident.

Mr. Jacques Wells spoke on behalf of his team, explaining that he had only recently returned to work around the time of the incident. He stated that when the situation occurred, he was outside in the parking lot and not inside the building. When later asked about the incident, he made it clear that he was not present in the building at the time.

Mr. Wells stated that Ms. Jacobs had called him crying about what happened, and he advised her to report the matter to Human Resources. He explained that he always encourages employees to speak up and take concerns directly to HR if they feel harassed or mistreated. He noted that Ms. Jacobs followed that advice the next morning, which he believed was the appropriate step for her to take. He added that shortly after she reported the matter, he was informed that Ms. Jacobs had been terminated. Mr. Wells concluded by stating that there were additional allegations, but he was uncertain whether they should be discussed publicly.

Councilmember Akins-Wells asked Mr. Wells whether this was the first time employees had come to him with concerns and whether this incident was the first issue raised by staff. Mr. Wells clarified that he had only just returned to work on the day the incident occurred. When employees approached him about the situation, he advised them to report the matter to Human Resources. He confirmed that this was the first time employees had come to him with such concerns.

Mr. Jacques Wells added that he had been out of work for nearly four months before this incident. He explained that the employee involved had only been working in the department for approximately three months before he returned, and that others in the department were already aware of ongoing conduct concerns. He stated that Director Walker’s behavior had been unprofessional, claiming that he frequently spread lies and rumors and that information circulated quickly throughout the City of Forest Park. Mr. Wells expressed his view that Director Walker was not a good fit for the City, either as an employee or as a resident, based on what he had observed and heard.

Nia Rodriguez stated that, in her personal opinion, Director Walker was not the best fit to oversee a department with so many employees. She noted that staff spend the majority of their time in the workplace before going home to their families, and therefore, the work environment must be safe, professional, and respectful.

Ms. Rodriguez shared that she had heard multiple comments within the department involving racial slurs and remarks about reporting individuals to immigration authorities. She said this made her uncomfortable, particularly because she is half Hispanic and works alongside Hispanic colleagues. She explained that she did not previously report these issues because she feared losing her job. She described a confrontation she experienced with Director Walker in her office the day before the incident involving Officer Jacobs. Ms. Rodriguez stated that Director Walker exhibited intimidating behavior toward female employees, including hovering, making

unnecessary physical contact, and being overbearing, which created discomfort among staff.

Ms. Rodriguez stated that she was present in the office during the confrontation between Officer Jacobs and Director Walker. Although she was in the adjacent room, she could tell what occurred because the interaction resembled the confrontation she experienced the previous day. She concluded by stating that, based on her experiences and observations, she did not believe Director Walker was an appropriate fit to serve as a director responsible for supervising numerous employees who also have personal responsibilities and deserve a safe and respectful workplace.

Mayor Butler thanked the employee who had just spoken and stated that it was only fair to provide Director Walker an opportunity to respond. She informed Director Walker that he would be given ten minutes to do so.

Director Walker reiterated that he had never received any write-ups or disciplinary actions during his employment. He stated that the situation being discussed stemmed from a single incident on the day in question. He noted that, as mentioned earlier, the employee reported the matter to Officer Wells, and shortly afterward, he was called in regarding a complaint.

Director Walker stated that he had always tried to create a positive work environment. He noted that he had recommended summer camp for an employee's son and made efforts to support his team. He stated that he had never touched anyone in an unprofessional manner and that each morning he greeted employees in a friendly and motivational way. He said he believed the complaints were part of a "witch hunt." He emphasized that no complaints had ever been made against him previously, yet several appeared only after this incident.

Director Walker also referenced a past situation involving Officer Wells, stating that he had written him up after Officer Wells reported feeling unsafe and had been parking his assigned vehicle at Public Works. Director Walker said he emailed Officer Wells, instructing him to park the truck with the other assigned vehicles. He stated that Human Resources later told him the matter was an error, noting that camera footage showed the truck being returned at 7:30 p.m., even though officers clock out at 5 p.m. He concluded by stating that he believed he was being targeted and reiterated his characterization of the situation as a "witch hunt." He thanked the Mayor and Council for their time.

It was moved to uphold the termination of Director Derry Walker as recommended by the Interim City Manager.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Gunn.
Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

Comments/Discussion from Governing Body:

Councilmember James stated that she appreciated the work Director Walker had done since joining the City of Forest Park and acknowledged the positive contributions he made. She noted that the position he held had been recreated a few years ago and expressed gratitude for his efforts during his tenure.

Councilmember James added that she believed some of the issues presented during the hearing were not recoverable.

Councilmember Gutierrez stated that, like his colleagues, he appreciated the work Director Walker had done for the City of Forest Park. He acknowledged the positive contributions Director Walker had made in the community and noted that he had personally seen him volunteer and support residents, including in school settings.

Councilmember Gutierrez emphasized that the Human Resources Department had conducted a thorough investigation and interviewed the entire staff. He explained that, after reviewing all interviews and documentation, it was clear that multiple employees had serious concerns about the work environment under Director Walker's leadership. He expressed that while he sympathized with Director Walker and understood his perspective, the number and consistency of staff concerns could not be ignored. He stated that he felt for Director Walker and found it unfortunate that he seemed unaware that employees felt this way. However, based on the findings, he believed certain behaviors were unprofessional and inappropriate for the workplace.

Councilmember Gutierrez added that while he liked Director Walker as an individual, he did not believe the director role was the right fit given the conduct described in the investigation. He concluded by wishing Director Walker the best moving forward.

Councilmember Akins-Wells stated that she shared the same sentiments expressed by Councilmember Gutierrez. She explained that when she first arrived, she did not know why the employees were present, but once the governing body was informed that they could ask questions, she felt it was important to hear directly from the staff.

Councilmember Akins-Wells emphasized that she is committed to fairness and has always advocated for employees in every department to feel safe, supported, and properly treated. She noted that she strives to remain unbiased and believes all employees deserve equal and respectful consideration. She added that it seemed unusual that concerns were consistently raised about certain individuals and not others, though she chose not to elaborate further. After listening to employees describe their experiences and the conditions they endured, Councilmember Akins-Wells stated that she agreed with the decision before the governing body.

Councilmember Mears stated that he believed Director Walker had done a good job in many respects. However, in light of the concerns and resistance expressed by multiple employees, he explained that it was difficult to reach an unbiased conclusion given the circumstances.

Councilmember Mears added that despite the situation, he wished Director Walker well. He noted that, based on what he had personally observed, Director Walker had performed capably aside from the issues raised during the hearing. He concluded by thanking him.

It was moved to recess into Executive Session at 6:13 pm. for Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Gunn. Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

Councilmember Akins-Wells left the meeting at 6:18 p.m., stating that she did not feel safe remaining in the closed Executive Session without an officer present.

It was moved to reconvene in the regular session meeting at 8:19 pm.

The motion was made by Councilmember James and seconded by Councilmember Mears.
Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez,
Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

VI. **ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Butler adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, those requiring accommodation for Council meetings should notify the City Clerk's Office at least 24 hours before the meeting at 404-366-4720.