



CITY OF
FOREST PARK

**CITY OF FOREST PARK
CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION MEETING**

Monday, January 5, 2026, at 7:00 PM
Forest Park City Hall | Council Chambers
745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Gwen Ellison
The Honorable Kimberly James The Honorable Delores A. Gunn
The Honorable Hector Gutierrez The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells
The Honorable Allan Mears
Latosha Clemons, Interim City Manager
Randi Rainey, City Clerk
Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

DRAFT MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Mayor Ellison called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. INVOCATION/PLEDGE

Reverend Clinscales provided the Invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK

Present

Mayor Ellison
Councilmember Kimberly James
Councilmember Delores Gunn
Councilmember Hector Gutierrez
Councilmember Latresa Akins-Wells
Councilmember Allan Mears

Absent

Others in attendance: Pauline Warrior, Chief of Staff; Josh Cox, IT Director; Rodney Virgil, Level 2 Support Engineer; Javon Lloyd, PIO; John Wiggins, Finance Director; Jeremi Patterson, Deputy Finance Director; Shalonda Brown, HR Director; Diane Lewis, HR Deputy Director; Rochelle Dennis, Economic Development Director; Dorthy Roper-Jackson, Municipal Court Director; Tarik Maxwell, Director of Rec and Leisure; Alton Matthews, Public Works Director; Brandon Criss, Police Chief; Geoff May, Deputy Fire Chief; David Halcome, Deputy Fire Chief and Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney.

IV. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS

It was moved to approve the agenda as printed.

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

V. ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS

There were no consent agenda items.

VI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**1. Council Approval of Work Session and Regular Meeting Minutes from December 15, 2025- Executive Office**

It was moved to approve the minutes with the changes provided by Councilmember James.

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

VII. PUBLIC COMMENTS

(All Speakers will have 3 Minutes)

There were four (4) Public Comment Speakers to sign up, but only three (3) speakers spoke.

Christine Ellington, a resident of the City of Forest Park, stated that she has lived in Forest Park for 30 years and congratulated Mayor Ellison on her election. Ms. Ellington expressed her appreciation for the Mayor's commitment to the community and shared her optimism regarding the positive changes anticipated during the Mayor's term. She concluded by offering her best wishes for a successful term.

Michael Cotten addressed the Mayor and City Council and stated that he was presenting a letter prepared by employees of the Public Works Department. He explained that the letter was addressed to the City Manager, the Mayor, and members of the City Council and expressed a vote of no confidence in the Public Works Director. Mr. Cotten indicated that the letter was signed by employees of the Public Works Department of the City of Forest Park.

Attorney Matricardi advised the Mayor and City Council that public comments must relate to matters that are either on the agenda or within the jurisdiction of the governing body. She explained that personnel matters are generally not within the governing body's jurisdiction, except in circumstances involving an appeal from a disciplinary hearing. Attorney Matricardi stated that, under the City's ordinances and rules of procedure, such matters are not necessarily permitted for public comment. She further noted that the determination of what is permissible rests within the discretion of the Mayor as the presiding officer.

Mayor Ellison stated that, at that time, the matter would be tabled and that the individual would be addressed at a later time.

Felicia Davis addressed the Mayor and City Council and extended congratulations to Mayor Ellison on her election. She referenced her long-standing involvement with the City and expressed her support for the Mayor and Council.

Ms. Davis requested permission to read a letter addressed to Mayor Ellison from the City of

Forest Park's sister city, Yen, Senegal. With the Mayor's acknowledgment, Ms. Davis read a letter from the Mayor of Yen, Senegal, congratulating Mayor Ellison on her election and recognizing her leadership and commitment to the community. The letter expressed a desire to continue the established partnership between the two municipalities, emphasized opportunities for joint projects benefiting both communities, and extended an invitation for Mayor Ellison to visit Yen, Senegal, to strengthen international relations, exchange ideas on local governance, and explore future collaborations.

VIII. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Interim City Manager Chief Clemons addressed the Mayor and City Council and provided a four-month update on key accomplishments, stabilization efforts, and momentum achieved during her tenure as Interim City Manager. She stated that the past several months have focused on continuity, accountability, and establishing a strong foundation for the City's next chapter.

Chief Clemons reported that municipal services continued without interruption while internal operational needs were addressed. She noted that departments functioned effectively with an emphasis on reinforcing expectations, improving coordination, ensuring compliance with City policies, procedures, and the City Charter, and restoring organizational structure and communication during a period of transition. She highlighted efforts related to governance alignment, legal compliance, and risk mitigation, including reinforcing proper communication channels, supporting departmental leadership in personnel and operational matters, coordinating with legal counsel and human resources, and ensuring decisions were made in accordance with established policies and applicable law. She emphasized that these efforts were essential to maintaining the integrity of City operations and public trust.

Chief Clemons stated that fiscal responsibility remained a priority and described collaboration with the Finance Director and staff to ensure oversight of expenditures, vendor obligations, grant coordination, and budget awareness. She noted that strengthening internal controls and reinforcing financial accountability would continue into the new fiscal year. She also provided an update on capital planning, facility needs, and infrastructure coordination, noting progress on project planning, realistic timelines, interdepartmental collaboration, and transparency, with several initiatives still in development.

Chief Clemons emphasized that the City's workforce is its greatest asset and stated that recent efforts focused on reinforcing professionalism, clarifying roles and expectations, supporting leadership development, and fostering a culture of respect, accountability, and service. She noted that continued collaboration with Human Resources would remain critical.

She concluded by welcoming and congratulating Mayor Gwen Ellison on her election, stating that she looked forward to supporting the Mayor's vision and priorities.

Chief Clemons expressed appreciation for the opportunity to serve during the transition and reaffirmed her commitment to operational excellence, ethical governance, and responsive service delivery. She then noted that a staff introduction by Director Wiggins would follow.

Director Wiggins addressed the Mayor and City Council and introduced a new senior staff

member within the accounting division. He stated that the new staff member would help strengthen accountability and oversight of the City's general ledger, support upcoming budget preparation, and provide oversight related to audit reports. He further noted that the position would enhance overall financial operations and assist departments as needed with finance-related matters.

IX. **CONSENT AGENDA**

There were no consent agenda items.

X. **NEW BUSINESS**

2. **Council Approval of the Appointment of Mayor Pro Tempore** – Executive Offices

It was moved to approve a Resolution to appoint Delores A. Gunn as Mayor Pro Tempore for the 2026 calendar year.

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

Voting Nay: Councilmember Akins-Wells

XI. **CLOSING COMMENTS BY GOVERNING BODY**

Councilmember James extended New Year's greetings to those in attendance and advised that the December ward meeting was available on the City's website, including updates on activities from 2025 and her oath of office, which took place at that meeting. She encouraged the public to review the information online.

Councilmember James announced that she hosts a ward meeting on the third Thursday of each month at 5:00 p.m. at the Hartsfield Community Center, noting that dinner is provided, and community members are encouraged to attend. She further announced that on Saturday, January 17, she would host a business breakfast for local businesses to connect with the Forest Park school cluster, which includes elementary, middle, and high schools within the City and surrounding areas. The event is scheduled for 9:00 a.m. at Forest Park High School, and registration is required via a QR code to ensure adequate accommodations.

Councilmember James announced that during the second City Council meeting in February, the City would honor the Teachers of the Year from the ten schools within the cluster. She invited the community to participate in recognizing the honorees and noted that a dinner would be provided in their honor.

Councilmember Gunn expressed appreciation for the strong turnout and shared her gratitude for the transition into the new year under the leadership of Mayor Gwen Ellison.

Councilmember Gunn offered condolences and requested prayers for the family of Ms. Lula Barnes, a long-term resident and community pioneer, noting that services would be held at Gus

Thornhill Funeral Home. She reflected on Ms. Barnes' legacy and her significance as one of the City's oldest residents. She announced that a Ward Two town hall meeting would be held later in the month and encouraged residents to monitor the City's website for the official date and additional information. She also encouraged residents to utilize the City's online tools, including the "one-click" reporting system, to remain engaged, share concerns, and take an active role in supporting City operations.

Councilmember Gunn expressed enthusiasm for the year ahead, acknowledged the Forest Park Ministers Association, and thanked City departments for their continued dedication and service. She concluded by encouraging staff and residents to remain focused and committed to moving the City forward.

Councilmember Gutierrez congratulated Mayor Ellison on her election, welcomed her to the dais, and expressed his enthusiasm for working collaboratively with her. He also extended New Year's greetings to the community.

Councilmember Gutierrez shared upcoming community programming, announcing plans to introduce Pilates classes in Forest Park to provide additional fitness options and to offer monthly knitting classes at the Senior Center. He further acknowledged comments raised earlier by Mr. Cotton, and requested that the City Manager provide any written materials submitted so that they could be reviewed and acknowledged. He stated that he believes it is important to recognize individuals who take the time to address the governing body, even when matters may not be appropriate for discussion from the dais.

Councilmember Gutierrez concluded by expressing his support for the Mayor and City Council, noting his availability to assist as needed and wishing everyone well.

Councilmember Akins-Wells welcomed Mayor Ellison and expressed her enthusiasm about working alongside her. She stated that Mayor Ellison brings a fresh perspective to the dais and conveyed her confidence in the Mayor's leadership, commitment to the community, and open-door approach. She noted that, although it was the Mayor's first meeting, she performed well and emphasized that the Council is present to support her during the transition.

Councilmember Akins-Wells also acknowledged earlier comments regarding Mr. Cotten and stated that she believes in listening to employees and residents. She expressed interest in understanding the concerns that were intended to be shared, reinforcing the importance of hearing from members of the community. She further addressed her approach to voting, stating that while unity and collaboration are important, Councilmembers may not always agree on every issue.

Councilmember Akins-Wells emphasized that her votes are based on careful consideration and research and are never personal, but rather reflect what she believes to be in the best interest of the residents she represents. She concluded by extending New Year's wishes to those present and thanking everyone for attending the meeting.

Councilmember Mears thanked everyone for being present. He expressed enthusiasm and support for Mayor Ellison and stated that the Council looks forward to standing behind her leadership. Councilmember Mears shared New Year's well wishes and emphasized that the

Mayor and City Council are available to serve the community and assist residents as needed.

Councilmember Akins-Wells expressed condolences to the families of Ms. Rose of West Street, who recently passed away at the age of 100, and Mr. Billy, also a resident of West Street. She extended her sympathies to the affected Ward Four families.

Councilmember Gutierrez offered a brief personal acknowledgment, extending birthday wishes to Ms. Tenisha Dixon and expressing appreciation for her support and contributions.

Mayor Ellison thanked those in attendance and stated that she looked forward to the year ahead. She expressed her commitment to pursuing positive initiatives for the City of Forest Park and emphasized the importance of listening to residents and local business owners. Mayor Ellison noted that opportunities would be provided for public input, including forums and engagement opportunities, to ensure open communication and community involvement.

XII. 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 7:31 p.m. for Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate.

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

It was moved to reconvene in the regular session meeting at 8:08 p.m.

The motion was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells and seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells, Councilmember Mears.

XIII. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Ellison adjourned the meeting at 8:09 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.

City Clerk Signature

Mayor's Signature

