



CITY OF
FORESTPARK

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

Monday, April 6, 2026 at 7:00 PM
Forest Park City Hall | Council Chambers
745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Gwen W. 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
Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk
Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

SUMMARY MINUTES

VIRTUAL MEETING NOTICE

Council Meetings will be live-streamed and available on [Forest Park's YouTube Channel](#)

- I. **CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME** – Mayor Ellison
- II. **INVOCATION/PLEDGE** – Elder Cook
- III. **ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK** – All members were present
- IV. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS**
Mayor Ellison requested the addition of a presentation in memory of Deacon Willie “Bill” Finch. Motion to approve the addition to the agenda was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
- V. **ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS**
Mayor Ellison referenced the City Council’s approval to move Item#3 from the Consent Agenda to New Business.
- VI. **PUBLIC COMMENTS (All Speakers are Allotted (3) Three Minutes)**
Ms. Michelle Copeland referenced comments made by Mayor Ellison regarding the Data Center Project, and requested a pause on the project to allow Mayor Ellison time to become more acclimated with the project before the city proceeds; noted she is no longer receiving the city’s newsletter, and asked the city resume mailing the newsletter as not all residents are computer savvy; referenced two recent fires in her neighborhood, one being a porta potty, and the second being a dumpster, and asked for additional patrolling in the area; noted as a 30+ year resident, she is very pleased with the positive events and activities by the city, and is happy that there has been no negative incidents, the events are well supervised, and gave big kudos to the City.

Ms. Sofia Aguilera requested an update regarding the city's follow up on animal control services, specifically as it relates to the dog(s) that killed her dog, noting it has been three weeks since she brought her complaint to the city.

Mayor Ellison assured Ms. Aguilera that someone from the city will respond and provide an update.

Mr. Carl Evans thanked the city for the memorial tribute in honor of beloved resident Willie Finch that was placed in the rear of the Council Chambers; commented on the need to budget funds to repair roads and infrastructure in the city, specifically for Hendrix Drive; and noted his displeasure in the way the matter regarding Police Chief Criss was handled, noting there should have been a conversation to discuss the matter rather than place the Chief on paid leave, which appears to be a double-standard, and stated Chief Criss needs to return to work.

VII. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Interim City Manager/Fire Chief Clemons reflected on seven months serving dual roles in the absence of a City Manager, noting there have been many accomplishments; and highlighted each of the following department Directors, noting their experience and expertise in their respective fields, and what each one brings to the City: Human Resources Director Shalonda Brown, Park & Recreation Director Tarik Maxwell, City Clerk Vanessa Holiday, IT Director Joshua Cox, Municipal Court Director Dorothy Roper Jackson, Public Works Director, Alton Matthews, Interim Planning & Community Development Director SaVaughn Irons-Kumassah, Economic Development Director Rochelle Dennis, Finance Director John Wiggins, Deputy Police Chief Andreas Smith, Public Information Officer Javon Lloyd, along with herself as the City's Fire Chief, noting that at the end of the day, there is One Forest Park, One Team, One Direction and One Standard of Excellence, moving Forest Park in the same direction, and is proud to stand with this team. Interim City Manager/Fire Chief Clemons also gave special recognition to members of the Fire Department, whose recent accomplishments are direct reflections of the department's six strategic goals and professional development: Fire Inspector James Ogelsby, for earning a Master's Degree in Fire Executive Leadership and Occupational Safety & Health; and Public Safety Educator Anthony Gallman, earning his Associate of Fire Sciences Degree from Columbia University, graduating Summa Cum Laude, and noted Educator Gallman initiated the first Junior Fire Marshal Program in September 2025, and will conclude its inaugural year in May 2026 with over 400 program participants soon to be designated as Junior Fire Marshalls, commending the program for its excellence in engagement in schools, and community outreach.

VIII. CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Holiday referenced the Clerk's Office 2026 First Quarter Report, introducing the Deputy Clerk Ms. McCants, and Council Aides Ms. Dixon and Mr. Henry; gave an overview of the role of the Clerk's Office along with duties provided by the Constituent Aides within the department; noted the department prepared Agendas and Minutes for 13 Council meetings; noted 565 Open Records Requests were received, 424 Completed, 44 Pending Department/Legal Response, and 97 Cancellations for requests, noting some of the reasons for cancellations could be the request should have been submitted to the County, or the fee was too costly and the requestor cancelled, or the city made a request for additional information and the requestor failed to submit; noted her initial assessment appears to be difficulty in accessing and retrieving records, and has made a request for Records personnel assistance to be brought on board; noted

Council Aides have been very busy, assisting the governing body with 39 events in the first quarter with 6 events in January, 14 events in February, and 19 events in March; and thanked the resident who commended the events put on by the city, noting the staff works very hard.

IX. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. **Approval of the Work Session Meeting Minutes - March 16, 2026** **Approval of the Regular Session Meeting Minutes - March 16, 2026**

Motion to approve the March 16, 2026 Work Session and Regular Session Minutes was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

X. PRESENTATIONS

2. **The Park at Ft Gillem Update** – Presented by: Rochelle Dennis, Economic Development Director **Background/History:** Update on property management and ongoing remediation efforts by the Urban Redevelopment Agency at the Park at Fort Gillem. On May 9, 2006, as part of Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) 2005, the Department of the Army declared certain property at Fort Gillem, Georgia, surplus, including the Wherry Housing area, now known as the Park at Fort Gillem; In 2012, the City of Forest Park, through the Urban Redevelopment Agency (URA), purchased Fort Gillem. The acquisition included 125 units of former military (Wherry) housing, repurposed by the Army as naturally occurring affordable housing (NOAH), now known as The Park at Fort Gillem. The City agreed to honor the pre-existing third-party property management contract until its conclusion in October 2025; noted historically, Park at Fort Gillem, LLC managed the property under a 25-year ground lease and operated as if they were the owner, with minimal coordination or communication with the City regarding property conditions or operations, despite repeated efforts by City leadership and counsel to establish oversight and communication. The URA has completed repairs and remediation of the Lift Station and is actively addressing priority items, including structural and infrastructure repairs and microbial remediation identified in the property conditions assessment. These efforts aim to ensure the property is safe, code-compliant, and positioned for long-term redevelopment aligned with the broader vision for Forest Park and the Fort Gillem area.

Director Dennis noted the Partnership with Southern Equity and cited the objectives and activities which included: Ensuring transparency, equity, and inclusiveness in stakeholder engagement; and collecting qualitative and quantitative data to understand residents' experiences, perspectives, and needs; identifying opportunities to mitigate resident hardships that may arise through URA decisionmaking; and equipping the City and URA Board with robust data and insights to guide future decisions regarding The Park at Fort Gillem; and activities conducted included: background research and site observations, resident surveys, door-to-door canvassing, resident meetings and small group discussions, establishing a Resident Advisory Committee (RAC) and Case studies of residential BRAC redevelopment.

Director Dennis gave an overview as follows: Partnership with Southern Equity, Stabilization & New Property Management; Lift Station, Onsite Assessment, TI Assessment, Discovery and Assessment, URA Response, Unit Inspections, Additional Critical Repairs, and Abandoned Cars.

Councilmember Gunn thanked Director Dennis for the presentation, and noted the Council was presented with a complaint from a resident, Ms. Thomas, during a prior meeting, and asked if the issues raised in the complaint have been addressed.

Director Dennis noted Ms. Thomas' complaint involved issues from three weeks prior, and stated that following the complaint from Ms. Thomas, she and URA Chair/Councilmember James made a site visit the next day and no odor of human waste was detected, and the lift station and sewer lines were confirmed to be flowing properly; noted staff met with Ms. Thomas along with.

Director Dennis introduced TI Asset Management personnel, Ronald Olive, who reported that the roofing repairs are complete; noted there are ongoing repairs for microbial remediation which are expected to be completed next week, along with sidewalk repairs and pavement repairs scheduled to be completed by the end of May.

Councilmember Gunn asked for an explanation of microbial remediation and inquired about the rapport between TI Asset Management and the residents.

Mr. Ronald Olive responded that microbial remediations involves anything seen and/or recorded and welcomed any feedback.

Councilmember Akins-Wells stated the residents are the main priority, noting they all need to be made aware of what is happening on the property.

Mayor Ellison stated that she visited the site, and observed the same things as Director Dennis, noting the residents were commending TI Management staff; and noted the property has been in disrepair for more than twenty-five years, and appreciates the current efforts to make repairs.

Ms. Dominique Clotter stated she is the current resident leasing agent on site and has been there for (5) five years and has developed personal relationships with the residents where it feels like family.

Director Dennis noted that she is copied on all communication.

Councilmember Gutierrez stated that as owners of the property, the city must now answer and accept responsibility and is thankful the issues have been, and are being addressed, noting the property is located in Ward 3, his area, and noted that he has inquired with Director Maxwell regarding the feasibility of transporting the senior residents to and from the city's Senior Center to participate in activities; and noted that it is not normal that a city would own and operate a residential facility, as it was included in the purchase of the property.

Deacon Willie Finch Memoriam Ceremony – Presented by Mayor Ellison

Mayor Ellison graciously presented the Finch family with a Letter of Memoriam for Deacon Willie David "Bill" Finch, honoring Mr. Finch for his long-time dedication, commitment and service to the City of Forest Park and its residents.

XI. **CONSENT AGENDA REMOVED – ITEM TO BE HEARD AS A NEW BUSINSS ITEM**

3. **Council Consideration for approval of the Trade-In Administrative Vehicle to purchase (2) two aging Public Works Vehicles (2003 Ford F250 and 2006 Ford Ranger).** Presented by: Alton Matthews, Public Works Director **Background/History:** As part of the City's aging vehicle replacement initiative, the Public Works Department, in collaboration with the Procurement Division is requesting approval to Trade-in 2025 Chevrolet Tahoe Vin# 1GNS6UED6SR291734, Value of approximately \$43,000.00. This vehicle will facilitate the replacement of 2 vehicles in our Fleet.
Details of the Replacement Vehicles: 2003 Ford F250 and 2006 Ford Ranger
Total Cost to cover the acquisition: \$80,000.00.
Funding: Capital Vehicles: 301-51-1540-54-2503
Director Matthews stated the request is to replace two aging vehicles in the Public Works aging fleet; and noted the Chevrolet Tahoe is currently not being driven by anyone.

Councilmember Gutierrez asked staff to be conscious of the types of vehicles that are being purchased, noting large SUVs are not necessary.

Director Matthews stated the F150 vehicle will be assigned to the Public Works Deputy Director, and the Ranger will be assigned to Public Works staff, noting both vehicles will be 4-wheel drive w/towing capacity, and the F150 will accommodate a minimum of 4 people.

Motion to approve was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gunn. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XII. **OLD BUSINESS**

4. **Council Approval of Special Facility Usage Request - Kiwanis Stadium - Recreation and Leisure.** **Background/History:** The Georgia Mass Band has rented the football stadium every Thursday and Friday from 5:30p-8:30p between the months of May and July since 2024. The Georgia Mass Band was founded in 2016.
Director Maxwell referenced the survey results that were submitted, noted all responses were in favor and recommended approval with supervision to cease playing and leave the stadium as agreed upon.

Councilmember Gunn thanked everyone for executing the survey, noting the community has spoken, and appreciating that the community was afforded the opportunity to have their voices heard.

Motion to approve was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XIII. **NEW BUSINESS**

5. **PUBLIC HEARING**
Motion to convene the Public Hearing was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Public Hearing - Council Consideration to approve Text Amendment Case #TA-2026-01. - Planning and Community Development. Presented by: Interim Planning and Community Development Director, SaVaughn Irons-Kumassah who presented the case: Background/History: The purpose of this Amendment is to revise the membership composition of the Public Arts Review Board while maintaining the intent and function of the Board as previously established. The Public Arts Review Board was created to oversee and promote the integration of art into public spaces, support local artists, encourage community engagement, and ensure that public art reflects and enhances the identity and values of the City of Forest Park.

As originally drafted, the composition of the Board included one representative from the Downtown Development Authority. Staff is proposing this Amendment to remove that requirement and replace it with one additional Forest Park resident. This change is intended to broaden community representation on the Board, while preserving the overall structure and purpose of the Public Arts Review Board.

The proposed Amendment is limited solely to the membership composition provision under Section 8-8-169(1), Composition of Board, and does not alter the duties, authority, review, procedures, or overall purpose of the Public Arts Review Board.

The Text Amendment was reviewed by the Planning Commission on **March 19, 2026**, and is now before the Mayor and Council for final consideration and action.

Mayor Ellison opened the Public Hearing
Speakers in Favor: Ms. Ann Keith
Speakers Opposed: None
The Public Hearing was closed.

Motion to approve TX-2026-01 was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

6. **Council Consideration and Approval on an Agreement Between COFP and Clayton County Public Schools for a Summer Food Service Program** – Presented by: Tarik Maxwell, Director of Recreation and Leisure. **Background/History:** Clayton County Public Schools have provided free breakfast and lunch meals from June through July annually to children (18 years of age and under) at the Forest Park Community Recreation Center since 2021.

The renewal of this Agreement will allow children in the community who heavily depended on school breakfast and lunch to eat during the school year, the opportunity to receive meals throughout the summer break months.

Motion to approve the Agreement renewal was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XIV. CLOSING COMMENTS BY GOVERNING BODY

Ward 1- Councilmember James responded to Public Comments, asking the Clerk if the city is being responsive to Open Records Requests, and the process.

Clerk Holiday's response was yes, the city is being responsive, noting the requests come in and are forwarded to various departments to issue responses, and noted that during the first week after coming on board, she reached out to each requestor, identified herself and acknowledge their request, and advised that information was being researched to provide a response accordingly.

Councilmember James stated that she reached out and contacted Ms. Felder regarding the blasting at The Park at Ft. Gillem, noting she was advised by the purchasing company, who researched the area, and noted the blasting should not have affected her home; and noted the information received was provided to members of the Governing Body; stated that she hopes that someone from the city will reach out to Ms. Aguilera with an update regarding the dogs in her neighborhood; stated that she agrees with the citizen regarding the city's newsletter, and thanked the resident for bringing the fires to the city's attention; stated and noted she consciously replies to public comments during Council Comments, and does not want it to appear that she is not responsive when they are making their comments; stated there is funding in the city's budget for infrastructure repairs and will look into the matter, and referenced the One-Click training for everyone to use; commented that she hoped everyone had a nice Resurrection Day and stated God is smiling on the City of Forest Park.

Ward 2 – Councilmember Gunn thanked everyone for coming out and tuning in to the meeting; highlighted the upcoming Re-Entry Program, expressing her excitement of the opportunity for individuals who have been stigmatized with past issues with law enforcement to be able to change their lives and become productive citizens, referencing the partnerships, and sister cities, commended the efforts from the Council Aides who have worked hard on this event over the last few months; and asked that everyone blast the information out to reach those who will benefit, noting the number of vendors and partners have increased; thanked Gateway for their assistance with the Food Pantry, noting it was a huge success, with a special thanks to Mayor Ellison for her support, increasing the attendance of the event; stated that she noticed lights down, and specifically a surveillance light out in her area, and commended Director Cox, Director Matthews and Interim City Manager Clemons for their quick response to resolve, and asked that Ward 2 residents and businesses let her know if they see that lights are out; commended Interim City Manager Clemons for acknowledging the Directors; and gave a special thank you to the Council Aides for distributing the surveys, and thanked the residents for challenging the governing body and holding each one accountable; thanked Ms. Ann Keith and Mr. Cliff Pellegrine for their support; and stated iron sharpens iron.

Ward 3 - Councilmember Gutierrez stated this was a very productive meeting; noted the Pilates classes are continuing; noted he met with the city's Communication team to update and promote the beautification of the city with the Adopt-A-Road program with a new rebranding opportunity to reach a target audience to enhance the city; offered condolences to the Finch family, noting his presence was always peaceful and respectful, and that Mr. Finch has left a great legacy, and will always be a part of Forest Park history with his constant advocacy; thanked Councilmember James for addressing the public comments, stating he appreciates that the public comes and asks questions, noting the city works for the residents and has nothing to hide, and encouraged more participation; congratulated members from the Fire Department for their accomplishments, noting Mr. Gallman work in the schools has been amazing; thanked Interim City Manager Clemons for recognizing the Directors, and gave a special thank you to the Council Aides for carrying out 39 events for the Governing Body in the first quarter.

Ward 4 - Councilmember Akins-Wells stated that she understands and agrees with the public comments from Ms. Copeland and Mr. Evans, and is disappointed and asked that the city do better for its residents; referenced the recognition of the Directors by Interim City Manager Clemons, noting the absence of a recognition of Police Chief Criss; thanked the Council Aides for all that they do; referenced the Community Closet, noting the community has been so generous with support of items that no additional items are needed at this time; stated the last Wellness with Wells was held last Tuesday, and gave a special thank you to Mayor Ellison for coming out and participating, noting the citizens are happy and excited to see the Mayor at these events; thanked Rick White for his donations and allowing there to be (3) three winners of \$50/each; Councilmember Akins-Wells read an email from the mural artist Sarah Neuburger who thanked her for the vision of mural project, noting it has been completed and that she will miss members of the community who have engaged with her during the painting of the mural, and thanked members of the city's procurement team for their assistance; Councilmember Akins-Wells thanked Ms. Neuburger for the mural at the Community Garden and on Pineridge as well, and asked that everyone go out to see this artwork; commended Mayor Ellison on the Community Town Hall, noting it was amazing; and asked staff to please follow up on the animal control issue regarding the dogs; and referenced a statement from an email stating if you see something that is not fair, or not right, you should speak up, otherwise you are a part of the problem.

Ward 5 – Councilmember Mears offered condolences to the Finch family, stating Mr. Finch was a good man and a good friend, and asked for prayers for their family; invited everyone to participate in the Ward 5 Police/Code Compliance Forum noting the professionals are in attendance to answer any questions that may arise; and wished that everyone had a happy Easter.

Interim City Manager Clemons noted Councilmember Akins-Wells was correct and apologized for the oversight in missing the recognition of Chief Criss, as it was not to negate any of his accomplishments, apologizing again if it appeared that was; noting that it was a last minute request that was sent to the Directors for the City Manager's Report, and the information that was cited was based off the submissions that were received from the Directors, noting she has not been in touch with Chief Criss, and is why a submission was not received; stated that on April 3rd Animal Control and PD made contact with Ms. Aguilera who gave authorization to set up a trap, and phone numbers were provided, noting the resident reached out to a member of the governing body instead of the police department, and stated that she is confident that all is being done to protect city of Forest Park residents.

Mayor Ellison congratulated the Parks and Recreation team, with a special thank you to Director Maxwell for a very successful weekend of events for the city; noted the Police and Fire departments were on site for safety, and there were no issues; stated that she has someone for the next Adopt-A-Road project; thanked everyone for their participation and attendance of the Community Town Hall, and food giveaway, including Gateway and Cold Storage, with a special thank you for all of the volunteers; and asked that everyone keep the Finch family in prayer.

XV. EXECUTIVE SESSION - Personnel, Litigation, Real Estate, Cyber Security. OCGA §50-14-1

Motion to convene Executive Session at 8:45 p.m. for Personnel, Litigation, Real Estate and Cyber Security was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells; seconded by Councilmember Mears. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to adjourn Executive Session at 9:45 p.m. with No Action and sign an Affidavit was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells at 9:45 p.m.; seconded by Councilmember Gunn. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XVI. **ADJOURNMENT** – With no further business, Mayor Ellison adjourned the meeting at 9:46 p.m.

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

Respectfully submitted by:

Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk CMC

Gwendolyn Ellison, Mayor