



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

Monday, April 20, 2026, at 7:00 PM
Forest Park City Hall | Council Chambers
745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Gwendolyn W. Ellison
The Honorable Kimberly James
The Honorable Hector Gutierrez
The Honorable Allan Mears
The Honorable Delores A. Gunn
The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells
Latosha Clemons, Interim City Manager
Shalonda Brown, HR Director (in the absence of 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 called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
- II. **INVOCATION/PLEDGE** – Dr. Kenneth Paden
- III. **ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK** – All members were present.
- IV. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS** – Motion to adopt the Agenda as presented was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells; seconded by Councilmember James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
- V. **CEREMONIAL** – Proclamations issued for Autism Awareness Month, Administrative Professionals Day, and GA811 Safe Digging Month
- VI. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 1. **Council Approval of the Special Called Meeting Minutes from January 28, 2026**
Council Approval of Amended Meeting Minutes for February 2, 2026
Council Approval of Work Session Meeting Minutes for April 6, 2026
Council Approval of Regular Session Meeting Minutes for April 6, 2026
Motion to approve the Minutes as presented was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

VII. **PUBLIC COMMENTS - (All Speakers will have 3 Minutes)**

Public Comments Meeting Rules of Decorum read by Clerk Holiday.

Ms. Janet Robinson, a veteran, stated her residency is in the Crown River neighborhood and stated that her home has been damaged by the effects of what has transpired at Ft. Gillem, leaving the interior of her home with cracks and separation of the walls, and the outside with a large sinkhole; and requested help and assistance as she is unable to make repairs.

Ms. Melisa Cooper stated she lives in the same neighborhood as Ms. Robinson, and that her home has also been damaged because of the blasting, where the structure has separated; noted she has pictures and referenced elderly neighbors who are unable to attend the meeting and have similar issues.

Mr. Clifford Pellegrine referenced the call before you dig 811 proclamation, stating there should have been a call before blast number for the residents, noted the blasting took place 2-3 times per day, 3-4 times per week over a six-week time frame, and stated that blasting is not normal wear and tear on a home, and neither are cracks in the walls, buckles in the concrete, or in the sidewalks; and stated that the similar issues have brought the neighbors together.

Mrs. Ann Pellegrine referenced the city's Facebook page photography and beautiful pictures; noted the URA's 2nd Town Hall information was difficult to locate, and the language should be rephrased, and should not state that the town hall is to dispel rumors; stated the need for a Data Center Fact Page; referenced an Open Records Request response stating there were thousands of emails with a request for directions on proceeding with the request.

Ms. Pamela Felder referenced a denial letter she received from the property owner regarding damages to her home, and was told she needed to retain an attorney and take the complaint to the next level; stated that out of the 56 homes on the property, 12 have known damages; thanked Councilmember Gutierrez for coming to the property and visiting her home.

Dr. Kenneth Paden invited everyone to come out for the first community cleanup day, in partnership with the City of Forest Park, on Saturday, April 25th from 9am – 1pm.

Mr. Carl Evans stated that several of the items from citizens pre-date Mayor Ellison; stated the city of Forest Park has a history of lawsuits; stated the Public Works department has low morale; stated the people (your bosses), want Police Chief Criss to return, and that the better option is to have a conversation with him; and commended the city's 911 Communications Team as the best, and should be recognized.

VIII. **CITY CLERK'S REPORT**

Clerk Holiday gave an overview of GMA Georgia Cities Week (April 20 – April 25) and highlighted events and activities taking place during the week; and referenced the County's Early/Advanced voting dates, noting locations are available throughout the County at various locations with Election Day voting only at your regular voting location, and to check your voting location and status at the My Voter Page website: <https://www.mvp.sos.ga.gov>

IX. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Director Shalonda Brown noted her presence in the absence of Interim City Manager Clemons and called upon Deputy Police Chief Andreas Smith who recognized the city's emergency/E911 Telecommunications Team for National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.

Ms. Jennifer Johnson, Communications Manager, reported that last week was National Public Safety Telecommunicator's Week, which is always the 2nd full week in April, celebrating the hard work and dedication of our 911 Dispatchers; noted dispatchers are the calm voice in moments of crisis, the critical link between the community and responders, and the unseen heroes who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the safety of our citizens, police officers, fire, and EMS personnel; stated that every call for service starts with 911, and the department is fortunate here in Forest Park to have a fully staffed 911 Center with 12 dispatchers, and Ms. Johnson, who in total, this group brings an incredible 145 years of combined 911 experience to serve our citizens every day; noted in the past year, all 911 personnel for the City of Forest Park received specialized training for Crisis Response so that they are better able to manage callers that are in crisis; referenced photos where some of the staff members are wearing a crown, noting there is a Crown of Excellence awarded weekly to the dispatcher that has the best call statistics for the previous week, a program that started in August and has acknowledged six different winners so far, and most importantly, they have worked individually and as a team to improve our overall numbers to make us one of the most efficient 911 Centers in the Metro Area; further noting that the faster the phones are answered, the faster staff can put the call in CAD, the faster staff can dispatch the call to the appropriate police, fire, or EMS unit, the faster assistance can get to our citizens.

Ms. Johnson highlighted the Center's statistics, noting the national standard for answering 911 is to answer within 15 seconds 90% of the time, and the City of Forest Park 911 Center maintains an average of answering 911 within 10 seconds 98% of the time, shattering the national average. Seconds count in emergencies and our dispatchers proudly answer 911 in less than 3 seconds on average. The City of Forest Park's average time to enter a call in CAD is around 45 seconds. The national standard for dispatching is to dispatch 90% of calls within one minute. The City of Forest Park currently has an average dispatch time between 1:15-1:30 and working daily and weekly to improve those numbers to reach the national standard. They truly are the first, first responders.

X. PRESENTATIONS

2. Mayor's Update

Mayor Ellison highlighted her first 100 days in Office, engaging with the youth as she launched the Mayor's Reading Club, targeting 3rd graders at Forest Park Elementary Schools, noting the focus of the third grade level because it has been proven that if a child is not reading at a 3rd grade level, they are more likely to drop out of school and/or have a higher rate of incarceration; reviewed the Literacy Pipeline, servicing students grades 3-5; sponsored two students for the A.D. King Foundation Civil Rights Tour in Birmingham, AL; established the Youth Council spearheaded by Councilmember Gutierrez and Council Aide Andre Henry; applied for a grant for a comprehensive mentoring and summer work program for ages 16-24 and collaborating with a third-party firm to expand opportunities for youth engagement; revitalizing the Senior Center Experience for legacy residents; reaching every legacy resident where they reside; veterans support, and honoring and

those who served through direct action and vital partnerships; noted a Veterans Brunch taking place on May 20 at 696 Main Street; noted plans of building an accessible, responsive and economic ecosystem that is structured, direct and social; referenced the Grapevine Project, the future hub for food and business incubation; referenced the New City Center and Starr Park renovations; meeting the community where they are through education, faith & civic engagement, women & Youth and seniors; referenced the first town hall with more than 250 in attendance and food giveaway for more than 150 families in partnership with Gateway Restoration, the Rock Church and Cold Storage Atlanta; referenced the improvements of Forest Park High School baseball fields; the Huie Elementary School Based Clinic; the Ribbon Cutting for Shoe Trend; and the Junior Achievement Delta Discovery Center; highlighted the Future is Forest Park with safe neighborhoods, growing economy and the bold tomorrow, with active collaborations with developers on new housing initiatives; Mayor Ellison closed the presentation with honoring the history, prioritizing inclusive growth, expanding opportunities, and noting together, we are building a city where every resident can see their future #ONEFOREST PARK.

XI. NEW BUSINESS

3. **Council Discussion and Action to Reappoint or Appoint a City Representative to the Clayton County Land Bank Board.** Presented by: SaVaughn Irons-Kumassah, Director of Planning and Community Development. **Background/History:** Since the establishment of the County Land Bank in 2020, the City of Forest Park has historically designated the Planning Director to serve as the City's representative on the Land Bank Board. Since that time, the City's appointed representative has been the Acting Planning Director.

Following the departure of the former Planning Director and the transition of Planning & Community Development leadership, the Land Bank requested clarification regarding the City's designated representative. At that time, the City's seat was temporarily listed as vacant pending formal action by the Mayor and City Council.

On February 16, 2026, Mayor and Council appointed the Interim Planning Director to serve as the City's representative on the Clayton County Land Bank Board. The current appointment term for the City's seat is set to expire on April 21, 2026. As such, this item is being brought forward at the April 20, 2026, Council meeting to allow Mayor and Council to take timely action to either reappoint the current representative or designate a new appointee for the upcoming term.

Per the Clayton County Land Bank Board structure, appointments are for a four (4) year term and members serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority. Acting prior to the expiration date will ensure the City maintains uninterrupted representation and voting authority on the Board. Accordingly, the staff is bringing this item forward for Mayor and Council consideration to formally designate a representative to serve on the Land Bank Board on behalf of the City of Forest Park.

Motion to re-appoint SaVaughn Irons-Kumassah to a four-year term April 21, 2026 - April 21, 2030, was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gunn. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

4. **Council Consideration to approve Amphitheater Facility Request Usages –**
Presented by: Tarik Maxwell, Director of Recreation and Leisure
Background/History: The 4th Annual “Jam for Peace” festival is looking to return to the City of Forest Park on Saturday, May 9th. This event will feature performances by local artists, church, and school choirs. This event will also provide the community with an educational, job and health fair.
Motion to approve the 4th Annual “Jam for Peace” was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
5. **Council Consideration to approve 696 Main Street Facility Request Usages -**
Presented by: Tarik Maxwell, Director of Recreation and Leisure
Background/History: Clayton County Community Orators Toastmasters Club is a dynamic and supportive public speaking and leadership development club dedicated to empowering individuals to find their voice and lead with confidence. Proudly housed in Forest Park, the club serves as a central hub for communication and leadership growth within Clayton County. The club meets in person on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of the Month. As part of Toastmasters International, the club follows a proven education program that helps members enhance public speaking, strengthen leadership skills, and build self-confidence through structured speeches, evaluations, and interactive roles.
Motion to approve the Toastmasters Club meetings at the 696 Main Street facility for a 6-month testing period was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
6. **Council Consideration to approve surplus items list from the Economic Development Department –** Presented by: Rochelle Dennis, Director of Economic Development. **Background/History:** The Economic Development and Planning & Community Development Departments request approval for surplus items pe attached list.

Councilmember Akins-Wells inquired about the city’s procurement policy that allows city employees to have the first opportunity to bid on items before opening it up to the public.

Attorney Matricardi stated the policy is not currently in effect.

Finance Director Wiggins confirmed that the policy is not currently in effect.

Councilmember Mears asked Mr. Wiggins to confirm that the items will be placed on a government bidding site.

Finance Director Wiggins confirmed the items would be placed on the GovDeals website for bidding.

Motion to approve Phase I of the Economic Development Department Surplus List was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez. The motion passed unanimously.

CLOSING COMMENTS BY GOVERNING BODY

Ward 5 – Councilmember Mears thanked everyone for attending, and commended the city’s E911 staff, police, and fire departments for their excellence in service to the Forest Park community.

Ward 1 – Councilmember James reminded everyone of the Ward 1 Meetings held every 3rd Thursday of the month, and are uploaded to the city’s YouTube webpage, noting the city’s *Subject Matter Experts* provide updates and information to the community, and noted during the last meeting great statistics were provided by the police and fire departments, and that each department graciously reminded the community of the upcoming Georgia Milestone testing and encouraged students to be in attendance; addressed the Gillem Logistics Center, noting she appreciates the comments made by the residents, stating they are doing the right thing by banding together as there is safety in numbers, and provided the drilling company: Maine Drilling and Blasting, Inc., noting the property was sold and is not owned by the City of Forest Park, however, the City is concerned about the issues that are happening there, and referenced the Community Benefits Agreement, an active document with Digital Realty, in reference to the data center, noting the water and utility matters have been vetted; noted the information given to her following Maine Drilling’s investigation of complaints was that the blasting did not cause the damages, and noted that she has been advised by the city’s legal counsel to direct residents to the property owner on this matter; commended the E911 Team for all that they do for the City of Forest Park; thanked Clerk Holiday for bringing forward the proclamations to recognize Autism Awareness Month, Administrative Professionals Day, and reiterating GA811 Call before you dig; and noted that she does not take the concerns of the of those who made public comments lightly, reiterating that the residents need to bombard the right entity to address their concerns.

Councilmember Gunn asked if the city could reach out to the property owner.

Attorney Matricardi stated that the city can make contact, reiterating that it is private company, and the city can only do so much within its own powers, noting taxpayer monies cannot be used without there being substantial benefits to the city in return per the State Gratuities Law; however, the city can reach out to the property owner and negotiate the Community Benefits Agreement.

Ward 3 – Councilmember Gutierrez thanked everyone for coming out; commended Mayor Ellison on the 100 Days update noting she captured every age group; referenced the GA811 Call before you Dig was great information; noted the Pilates classes are continuing; thanked Councilmembers Gunn, Akins-Wells, and Mayor Ellison for assisting with funding for the upcoming Selena Day event, noting this is a cultural event that is important for the community; referenced an incident in another area of the metro Atlanta where he had to call 911 and was placed on hold for 5+ minutes, and is thankful and proud of the speed in which the residents of Forest Park receive responses from our E911 team; noted the Adopt-A-Road Program has received good traction, and that he is working on translation to allow more groups to participate; addressed the public comments made by residents regarding the Ft. Gillem blasts, noting his disappointment on the responses received from the property owner, as the cracks that he saw were out of place, and noted that he is not pleased that any company can come to the neighborhoods here in Forest Park and treat our residents however they want, and asked members of the governing body to speak up for our homeowners, when we can, and agrees

with Councilmember James that the residents need to put the pressure on the owners with your numbers; referenced the upcoming Selena Day, where there will be look-a-like contests, and a watch party for the Atlanta United team, noting he is a hopeless Atlanta sports team follower, as Mr. Finch would want him to be, even though the teams are not performing well, he is committed to them; and stated that he agrees with Mayor Ellison that public comments are important, and wants to be known for transparency.

Ward 2 – Councilmember Gunn thanked everyone for coming out; stated she has seen the pictures and wants to visit the homes, noting she had a personal experience in Douglasville, GA that caused her family to have to relocate due to blasting, and could therefore relate to their experiences, noting the damages of cracks and separations need to be addressed, legally, and agrees there is strength in numbers; and noted that collectively, everyone should come together to get this matter resolved, and offered sincere heartfelt concerns; congratulated Babb Middle School as they are the Clayton County Football Champions, finishing the season 16-0, and is recognized as a Power House in the County; thanked Gateway Restoration for their support of the Food Pantry that takes place on the 2nd Monday of each month, where 200 – 300 families are served; noted the upcoming Mother’s Day Tea Event, which has already reached capacity, noting the event will honor and celebrate senior mothers in the community; and thanked everyone for a successful Re-Entry event, with special thanks to the Council Aides and IT Team, and was pleased with the support of vendors and sponsors, and noted the collaborative efforts helped to make a positive impact on individuals lives, as Forest Park is here to serve.

Ward 4 – Councilmember Akins-Wells thanked her colleagues and officials for hosting great community events that serve the public; commended Mayor Ellison’s 100 Days presentation; requested a proclamation recognizing the E911 Dispatchers and First Responders; expressed empathy for the residents affected by the blasting, noting she was not in favor of the data center; apologized to the residents for the responses from the property owner and that the decision makers need to be accountable, noting the property is located in unincorporated Clayton County; and noted the City of Forest Park needs grocery stores, retail and restaurants, not a data center; invited District 4 residents to a “Chat and Chew” initiative to connect over a meal to discuss issues and address concerns without excuses; and thanked Mr. Evans and Mr. and Mrs. Pellegrine for being outspoken voices for the community.

Ward 3 – Councilmember Gutierrez referenced the upcoming spring football game between Babb Middle School and Forest Park Middle School taking place on April 30th at Kiwanis Field; and stated there would be a Free Food Giveaway at Forest Park Middle School tomorrow, April 21st with fresh vegetables.

Ward 1 – Councilmember James reminded everyone of the High School Seniors Caravan on Saturday, May 16th for the class of 2026 as they parade around the city; and noted July 17th is going to be the Christmas in July Gifts at the Park Giveaway, and that registration will be required, and the expectation is to provide \$200,000 - \$300,000 in gifts to the community, and that a flyer will be available soon with more detailed information; and noted the rock at Ft. Gillem was going to require blasting whether there was a data center or not, and the city will do what it can to assist.

Mayor Ellison congratulated Councilmember Gunn on the success of the Re-Entry Summit, noting there was a lot of great information provided, and the next one is expected to have even more attendees as word gets out that there is help in Forest Park; congratulated the Hickson family on their new home, noting Mr. Hickson is a member of the city's IT Department, who were all in attendance, along with others, to celebrate as Mr. Hickson received the keys to his home, noting he has worked for the city as he worked with Habitat for Humanity to help build his home for a year, and noted that Mr. Hickson also worked on the neighbor's house across the street as well.

**XIII. EXECUTIVE SESSION - Personnel, Litigation, Real Estate or CyberSecurity
O.C.G.A. §50-14-1 (A) (2)**

Motion to convene Executive Session was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to adjourn Executive Session, sign an Affidavit, and reconvene the meeting was made by Councilmember Akins-Wells; seconded by Councilmember James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XIV. ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, Mayor Ellison adjourned the meeting at 9:29 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by:

Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk

Gwendolyn Ellison, Mayor

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