



CITY OF
FORESTPARK

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

Monday, June 1, 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 Hector Gutierrez
The Honorable Allan Mears
The Honorable Delores A. Gunn
The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells
Latosha Clemons, Interim City Manager
Vanessa Holiday, City Clerk
Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

SUMMARY MINUTES

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

- I. **CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME** – The meeting was called to order by Mayor Ellison at 7:03 p.m.
- II. **INVOCATION/PLEDGE** – Led by Elder Justin Cook
- III. **ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK** – All members were present; there was a quorum.
- 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 Gunn. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
- V. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
 1. **Council Approval of Budget Retreat Minutes - May 15, 2026**
Council Approval of the Council Work Session Meeting Minutes - May 18, 2026
Council Approval of the Council Regular Session Meeting Minutes - May 18, 2026
Motion to approve the Budget Retreat Minutes for May 15, 2026, with amendments was made by Councilmember Gunn; seconded by Councilmember James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to approve the Work Session and Regular Session Minutes for May 18, 2026, was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Mears. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.
- VI. **CEREMONIAL - Proclamations: Ward 4 - Yard of the Quarter, Mental Health Awareness Month, and Juneteenth Celebration**
Mayor Ellison reviewed the Ceremonial presentations.

VII. CITY CLERK'S REPORT

Clerk Holiday reviewed the upcoming Early/Advanced Primary Election Runoff times and locations within Clayton County, citing each of the locations and hours for voting; noted the Budget Public Hearing dates for June 1 and June 15, and referenced the Budget Town Hall taking place on Wednesday, June 3, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

VIII. CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

Chief of Staff, Pauline Warrior, commented on behalf of Interim City Manager Clemons and invited Department Directors to introduce newly hired staff members for their departments: Marvin Hines, Assistant Public Works Director, and Ryan Saddler, City Planner; provided an update on the search for the City Manager, noting the next steps are to make the final selections and appointment; and thanked the Department Head, Leadership Team and Governing Body for their ongoing support of the city's operations.

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

Mr. Christopher Kerr commented on holding all staff accountable to the degree that has been placed on Police Chief Brandon Criss; asked for improvements to the ORR process; and noted Code Enforcement issuing citations when the city has non-compliant properties.

Dr. Lawanda Folami agreed with the comments from Mr. Kerr; asked for the city to unite; noted it is her opinion that most members of staff do not fully understand the chain of command; and referenced the proclamation issued for Juneteenth, asking if the true meaning is known.

Ms. Lois Wright echoed the sentiments of the previous speakers, specifically regarding Chief Criss; and asked the members of the governing body to do the right thing to unite the City.

Mr. Duane Thomas thanked Mayor Ellison for standing strong and moving forward with the veto, as it speaks to her leadership and standing on principle; asked that Chief Criss be restored to his position; noted there needs to be fairness and consistency to regain public trust.

Mr. Carl Evans thanked Mayor Ellison for issuing the veto and commended her for doing the right thing; and called for the removal of the Interim City Manager, HR Director, and any others who were involved in the process of removing Police Chief Criss.

Clerk Holiday noted the Office of the City Clerk serves as the conduit for Open Records Requests where the requests are received, forwarded to the appropriate department for response, and the information returned is sent to the requestor; noting the Clerk's Office is not withholding information, and can only provide information that has been submitted.

X. OLD BUSINESS

2. **Veto pursuant to Section 2.32(b) of the Charter and apply said authority to the Resolution approving a policy governing security detail from the City of Forest Park's Police Department for elected officials.** - Legislative

Background/History: Veto pursuant to Section 2.32b) of the Charter and apply said authority to the Resolution approving a policy governing security detail from the City of Forest Park's Police Department for elected officials.

Mayor Ellison read excerpts from the veto letter regarding the policy governing Security Detail.

There was no motion made to override the veto.

3. **Veto pursuant to Section 2.32(b) of the Charter and apply said authority to Appeal the Termination of Police Chief Brandon Criss.** - Legislative

Background/History: Veto pursuant to Section 2.32(b) of the Charter and apply said authority to Appeal the Termination of Police Chief Brandon Criss.

Mayor Ellison read the veto letter regarding the Appeal of the Termination of Police Chief Brandon Criss

Councilmember Akins-Wells motioned to reinstate Brandon Criss; seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

During the discussion, Councilmember Akins-Wells noted the opinion of the Attorney was only an opinion, and the Charter cites that the Governing Body is the ultimate decision maker, and the veto can only be overturned by a vote of four members of the Council; noted there was a precedence set by the former Mayor, Angelene Butler, who vetoed the termination of Fire Chief Don Horton, and was reviewed by the former City Attorney Michael Williams, and was allowed to stand.

Attorney Matricardi stated the action of the Appeal by former Mayor Butler was improper, and stands by the Legal Opinion issued to the Governing Body regarding Mayor Ellison's veto.

Councilmember Akins-Wells noted there is inconsistency, and too much involvement by Legal Counsel.

Mayor Ellison called for the vote to address the motion on the floor. Councilmember Wells withdrew the motion, as there was confusion about what the Council is voting for.

Councilmember Gutierrez clarified that the motion was to override Mayor Ellison's veto; seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells. Clerk Holiday then conducted a roll call vote:
Councilmember James – Abstained.
Councilmember Gunn – No.
Councilmember Guterrez – No.
Councilmember Akins-Wells – No.
Councilmember Mears – No.

The motion failed.

Attorney Matricardi noted there could be further discussion on the matter during Executive Session.

XI. **NEW BUSINESS**

4. **Council Consideration to approve a Mental Health Awareness Policy.** Presented by: Councilmember Gunn. **Background/History:** Mental Health Awareness Policy at no additional cost to the city, similar to the city's Volunteer Day Policy.

Motion to approve the Resolution a Mental Health Awareness Policy for the City of Forest Park effective July 1, 2026, was made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gunn. The motion passed 3-0-1 (Councilmember James, Gunn and Gutierrez Approved); (Councilmember Akins-Wells Abstained); (Councilmember Mears was not present on the Dais for the vote).

XII. **PUBLIC HEARING** – Clerk Holiday read the Rules and Procedures

5. **Council Consideration to approve a proposed Urban Redevelopment Plan pursuant to the Urban Redevelopment Law, O.C.G.A. § 36-62.1** – Presented by: Rochelle Dennis, Economic Development Director

Background/History: URA Boundary Expansion

To promote revitalization and sustainable economic growth, the City of Forest Park’s Urban Redevelopment Agency (URA) engaged TSW to prepare a strategic plan for the City’s Urban Redevelopment Area. The planning process began with an evaluation of the existing URA boundaries and included recommendations for expansion informed by development pattern analysis and URA staff input. Within the expanded study area, four potential sites were identified as candidates for future redevelopment. Following a comprehensive review, the URA and TSW collaboratively selected one site for detailed concept planning to establish a clear and actionable vision for catalytic development.

During the planning process, the consultant team (TSW) met with City staff in January for an initial consultation to outline the project scope and schedule, which spans from January through the end of 2025.

Sources of data and information used in preparing this plan included: Forest Park and Clayton County GIS data; Clayton County Board of Assessors records; Field observations; Input from URA members and City staff.

The existing Urban Redevelopment Area (URA) in Forest Park is centered along Forest Parkway, extending from Old Dixie Road (US 41) to Ash Street. It encompasses the downtown area between Forest Parkway and Main Street/ Hill Street to the north, as well as the City Hall blocks and Starr Park to the south. In total, the existing URA covers approximately 122 acres.

To address blighted properties and support revitalization more effectively along the Jonesboro Road corridor—a major commercial spine within the City—the URA initiated an evaluation of potential boundary expansions. This process began with a windshield survey and mapping analysis to assess current development patterns and land uses along both the Forest Parkway and Jonesboro Road corridors. Blighted properties were identified by City staff and the consultant team and mapped within the context of these two primary corridors.

The expanded area encompasses properties fronting Forest Parkway and Main Street—from the City’s western limits to Jonesboro Road—and includes commercial parcels along Jonesboro Road extending north to the city limits. In total, the expanded URA area covers approximately 512 acres.

Mayor Ellison called for a motion to open the Public Hearing. Motion made by Councilmember James; seconded by Councilmember Gunn. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Speakers in Favor:

Dr. Lawanda Folami supported the map as presented, asking Ward 3 representative to stay abreast of what is happening with the expansion in the best interest of the community.

Ms. Ann Keith supports the expansion for future growth and development.

Speakers Opposed: None

This item will be presented during the June 15th Regular Session meeting.

6. **First Reading of the FY26-27 Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Plan –**

Presented by: John Wiggins, Finance Director

Background/History presented by Director Wiggins: FY2026-2027 Proposed Operating Budget and Capital Improvement Plan. The Proposed Funded dollar amount of the FY26-27 Budget is \$46,439,729.00; noted this budget allocates resources across various city priorities and programs. These allocations are made with the intent to enhance public safety, improve infrastructure, promote economic development, and provide essential services. From maintaining our parks and recreational facilities to supporting educational programs and ensuring the upkeep of our streets and utilities, the budget is designed to meet the diverse needs of our community; noted this is the First Reading, with the Second Reading taking place on June 15th; and a Budget Town Hall will take place on Wednesday, June 3, 2026 here in the Chamber at 7pm.

Speakers in Favor: None

Speakers Opposed: None

Mayor Ellison called for a motion to close the Public Hearing. Motion made by Councilmember Gunn; seconded by Councilmember James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

The Second Public Hearing and adoption of the budget will take place on June 15, 2026.

XIII. **CLOSING COMMENTS BY GOVERNING BODY**

Ward 1 – Councilmember James thanked everyone for coming out; reminded everyone of the monthly meeting every third Thursday of the month at 696 Main Street (Hartsfield Community Center), noting the Ward meeting is made available online, where staff provides information regarding city operations; welcomed new staff members; noted the budget adoption is coming up, and recommends the new City Manager review all new positions and title changes before a final decision is made, and the impact to the budget; noted regarding the proceedings that took place earlier in the meeting, noted the vote was not on a Resolution, and that she stands with the opinion of the City Attorney; noted her job as an elected official is to be a fiscal responsible representative for the community; referenced a former employee whose personnel file was stamped Not Eligible for Rehire in July 2025, and contrary to comments being made regarding the matter, she had no part in those actions, and is by no means political, nor is she the mastermind; stated she is grateful for discernment and that she shared information in great detail during the last Ward 1 meeting, and will provide information at the next meeting as well; noted next year there will be an election and residents can vote for whomever they choose to represent the city in each of the seats.

Ward 2- Councilmember Gunn asked that everyone make it home safely, and is able to emotionally and mentally be able to detox; referenced the Food Pantry at Gateway Restoration, serving almost 300 people on the 2nd Monday of every month from 3pm – 5pm, and also thanked Liberty Church for their support in serving those members of the community who fall short during the month; noted the first Community Meeting for Ward 2 will take place on June 11th at 696 Main Street, and will be available via Zoom, noting you will have an opportunity to answer questions and you will be provided information; noted her job is to serve the residents of Forest Park to operate with character and integrity, stating that she has been called out of her name on social media, and that with all of the verbal abuse, as officials, you have to be able to continue to stand, noting you represent the city, and you also represent yourself and your family; and is praying there are no attacks; noted the job is to serve; noted the Ward 2 seat is up for election in three years, and suggested the voters choose wisely, check the record, and look at the money that is being brought to the city, and not just passing out food; noted your vote is powerful, and asked that people refrain from making harsh and cruel and cruel comments on social media; and wished everyone well, and appreciates those who agree and don't agree.

Ward 3 – Councilmember Gutierrez referenced the URA Boundary Expansion, noting he will make sure the zoning guidelines are being followed, and wants to make sure the URA is addressing the blight, and asked that there be more transparency with the URA being more engaged with the community and hear their desires of what types of businesses will be brought to the area; welcomed the new employees, apologizing, noting a new employee should not be brought in to a divided city regarding the employment of a former employee; noted the meeting was both disheartening and embarrassing, stating he prides himself on being the ultimate professional and taken it on the chin, noting there have been many vetoes in the past that did not go his way, and that the Charter is in place for checks and balances, as that it how the city is governed, and that vetoes are in the rights of the Mayor, noting his frustration in that this type of matter has happened before, and because there is a difference of opinion, in this instance, it's not being followed even when there is precedence, and believes the actions of the Council will cost the city a lot of money, even if all of the other vetoes are questioned; apologized to Chief Criss noting the investigation was questionable, and there were no unethical findings; noted to his colleagues that he is frustrated and hurt by this matter, noting there does not seem to be a care for the bigger picture for the city, and that it is affecting the entire community; noted he respects everyone on the Dais, and that the community has been torn apart over comp time, and stated the he agrees with Councilmember Mears that the Council should have had a conversation with Chief Criss before it came to this, stating that if you are a Director here, it could happen to you because all it takes is three votes; noted Interim City Manager Clemons (who was not present for the meeting) made an operational decision, and is now listening to Legal, and did not listen to Legal or the former City Manager previously, who the city hired as a paid consultant for six months, and failed to take his advice, as he reach out to him, and it was confirmed that Interim City Manager Clemons did not take his advice; stated the truth is out, and that he is about transparency, and that truthfully, this investigation was embarrassing, and seems to have been a manhunt to out the Chief, and sees members of the Council differently, as it seems personal; questioned Councilmember Mears actions on the Chief Criss matter; noting again that he is disheartened and that he takes this home to his family; commented to Councilmember Gunn that you don't have to worry about being called names when you make good decisions, you can sleep at night, and if you justifications for what you do; noted he does not agree with the name calling, and stated that he can sleep at night based on the decisions that he makes; stated he wants to focus on serving the community who elected him, and is pleased with the passing of the Mental Health policy; apologized to the public and to those who

have to view this, noting he is a believer and does not like to insert religion, but there are things that you will have to answer for one day, noting these titles are temporary; and stated you want to be remembered for the people, the relationships and the good that you did; and invited everyone to attend Food Truck Friday for good music and food at Bill Lee Park.

Ward 4 - Councilmember Akins-Wells concurred with Councilmember Gutierrez; stated it is important to make good decisions so that you can sleep at night; apologized to the residents of Ward 2 as she asked residents of Ward 2 to elect Councilmember Gunn with the intent to serve with understanding, having been through things; noted she is transparent, and that investigation into the incident that happened at her home where a rock was thrown through the window at 2:00 a.m. remains open, with no action on the matter since Chief Criss left; noted everyone is aware that Mr. Duane Thomas was a candidate for the last Ward 1 election, and apologized to the residents of Ward 1 as well, thanking him for giving up his livelihood and running for office, further noting that although he was not elected, Mr. Thomas is still active in the community, and speaks to his character; noted the matter is disheartening; commented to the Directors that if directed by the City Manager, and you don't do it, you could lose your job; noted elected officials can be recalled by the community by getting together and being on one accord; noting decisions were made based on emotions noted the facts were not there on the matter relating to Chief Criss, as was seen during his presentation, and you still choose to vote for his removal, as voices for the community of Wards 1, 2 & 5; noted the city is preparing for interviews for a new City Manager, and hopes the Council can come together and agree on the best person for the community; agrees the city's Charter definitely needs to be changed whereas certain actions can be taken as an Interim, but not as a Fire Chief, and apologized for failing the community, as she had faith and trusted that the Fire Chief was going to operate as the Interim City Manager in the same manner as has been done as the Fire Chief, and has lost faith in her leadership; apologized Chief Criss for all that he and his family have gone through with this matter; noted he is an amazing man, and that no matter who was being investigated, he was doing his job, and doing so very well; noted next year is Ward 4 election and that she intends to run, commenting that she works for her bosses who elected her as their representative, and does not exchange food for votes, but that she does her job; commenting to Councilmember Gunn as her reason for being in office for thirteen years; and asked that everyone has a blessed night.

Ward 5 - Councilmember Mears thanked everyone for attending, overwhelming crowd; welcomed the new employees; noted the scoreboard does not look good for this group of people who are supposed to make good hiring decisions, excluding Chief Criss; noted there is not a good track record for hiring the City Manager; stated he has nothing against Chief Criss; and asked that everyone listen and hear the information, and then verify what you have heard.

Mayor Ellison welcomed the new employees; stated to the citizens that she understands there are a lot of emotions, frustration, disappointment and hurt, and that as officials, they all need to do better as a city and as a Dias; noted the governing body needs to pull it together; and apologized on behalf of the governing body, stating, better days are coming.

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

Motion to convene Executive Session for Personnel, Litigation, Real Estate or Cyber Security was made by Councilmember Gunn; seconded by James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

Motion to adjourn Executive Session at 9:15 p.m. to sign an Affidavit with No Action was made by Councilmember Gunn; seconded by Councilmember James. The motion passed unanimously 5-0.

XV. **ADJOURNMENT** – With no further business, Mayor Ellison adjourned the meeting at 9:15 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

Gwendolyn Ellison, Mayor