



CITY OF
FORESTPARK

**CITY OF FOREST PARK
ETHICS HEARING**

Monday, July 13, 2026 at 9:30 AM
Forest Park City Hall | Council Chambers
745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297

Gregory D, Jay, Hearing Officer

Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

AGENDA

- I. **CALL TO ORDER- HEARING OFFICER**
- II. **ETHICS COMPLAINT NO. 05222026-02**
 - 1. **IN RE: Councilwoman Kimberly James**
Complainant: Mayor Gwendolyn Ellison
- III. **ADJOURNMENT**

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.



Vanessa Holiday, CMC
City Clerk

745 Forest Parkway
Forest Park, GA 30297
Phone: (404) 366-4720
vholiday@forestparkga.ga

May 22, 2026

Good afternoon Mayor and Council:

Please find attached Ethics Complaint No. 05222026-02 received by the City Clerk, filed by Mayor Gwendolyn Ellison, alleging violations of the City's Code of Ethics against Councilmember Kimberly James, Ward 1.

The complaint is being forwarded to the Hearing Officer, Chandler Brett & Jay LLC for review.

Respectfully,

Vanessa Holiday
City Clerk
City of Forest Park



CITY OF FOREST PARK

Mayor Gwen Webb Ellison, D.C.L. (Hon.)

745 Forest Parkway, Forest Park, GA 30297
404-366-4720 | gellison@forestparkga.gov



DATE: May 22, 2026

TO: Madam Clerk Vanessa Holiday

ETHICS COMPLAINT NO. 05222026-02
MAYOR GWENDOLYN VS.

**ETHICS COMPLAINT
AGAINST COUNCILWOMAN KIMBERLY JAMES
CITY OF FOREST PARK, GEORGIA**

COUNCILMEMBER KIMBERLY JAMES
MAY 22, 2026

Complainant: Mayor Gwendolyn W. Ellison

Respondent: Councilwoman Kimberly James, City of Forest Park

I. Introduction

This Complaint is filed against Councilwoman Kimberly James for acting unilaterally and without lawful authority — that is, as an individual rather than through the City Council acting as a body — in engaging the City Manager's office, Human Resources, and other administrative staff of the City of Forest Park concerning personnel matters. The conduct includes, without limitation, Respondent's engagement with the Interim City Manager and Human Resources regarding the employment status of Chief of Police Brandon Criss, and her advancement of a 3-2 Council action to dismiss the Chief that was thereafter vetoed by the Mayor.

II. Governing Legal Framework — Individual vs. Body

The City of Forest Park operates under a council-manager form of government. Under that structure, the Council acts as a deliberative body. Individual councilmembers do not, by virtue of holding office alone, possess authority to direct, instruct, evaluate, hire, discipline, or remove any employee of the City, or to engage the City Manager or Human Resources for purposes of any such administrative or personnel action.

The Charter identifies one collective pathway by which the Council may reach the administrative affairs of the City. Forest Park City Charter § 2.15 provides that "The City Council may make inquiries and investigations into the affairs of the city and the conduct of any department, office or agency thereof, and for this purpose may subpoena witnesses, administer oaths, take testimony, and require the production of evidence." That authority belongs to the City Council acting as a body, exercised by

formal action, in a noticed proceeding, on the record. It does not belong to any individual member acting alone.

Respondent's conduct fits none of those authorized channels. There was no Council vote authorizing an investigation of the Chief of Police. There was no **formal** proceeding under § 2.15. There was no subpoena, no oath, no record. There was, instead, a single council member engaging administrative staff and Human Resources on a personnel matter, directing or attempting to influence the outcome — conduct for which the Charter identifies no individual-member authority.

III. Provisions Implicated

1. Forest Park City Charter § 2.15 — the Council's investigative authority is collective and formal; not exercisable by an individual member.
2. Forest Park Code of Ethics § 2-6-5(1) — prohibition on use of position to threaten, intimidate, or humiliate the City workforce.
3. Forest Park Code of Conduct (as adopted by Mayor and Council) — directing elected officials to “not get involved in administrative functions” and to treat all staff as professionals.
4. Forest Park Ordinance No. 2025-14 – Forest Park City Charter § 2.15 – removing the authority of mayor and council members to individually make inquiries of any city employee concerning the operations of the city.

IV. Factual Allegations

- A. Respondent is a duly seated member of the Forest Park City Council. As an individual member, Respondent has no identified Charter authority to direct, instruct, or engage administrative staff or Human Resources on personnel matters outside a Council proceeding authorized under § 2.15.
- B. Respondent directly engaged the Interim City Manager regarding the employment status of Chief of Police Brandon Criss, outside any noticed Council session and outside any formal inquiry authorized by the Council under § 2.15.
- C. Respondent engaged the Human Resources function of the City regarding the same personnel matter, again outside any noticed Council session and outside any formal inquiry authorized under § 2.15.
- D. Mayor Gwendolyn W. Ellison vetoed the Council action, pursuant to Charter § 2.32(b) and precedent established by the former Mayor Angelyne Butler's veto reinstating Fire Chief Horton. Both vetos are on file with the City Clerk.

E. On information and belief, Respondent has continued to engage administrative staff regarding the same personnel matter following the Mayoral veto, again as an individual member and outside any authorized § 2.15 proceeding.

V. Pattern of Conduct

Respondent's conduct is not an isolated incident. It reflects a continuing pattern of acting beyond the authority of a single councilmember — including prior conduct documented in governance memoranda issued by the Mayor's Office — in which Respondent has sought to engage administrative officers and personnel functions exercisable, if at all by the Council, only by the body acting collectively under § 2.15.

VI. Relief Requested

Complainant respectfully requests that the appropriate Ethics authority:

1. Open a formal investigation into the conduct described above;
2. Issue interim relief barring Respondent, in her individual capacity, from any direct contact with the Interim City Manager, the Chief of Police, the Human Resources function, or any administrative officer or employee of the City regarding personnel matters during the pendency of this Complaint, all communications to be routed in writing through the City Manager;
3. Issue findings of fact and conclusions of law confirming that an individual councilmember has no Charter authority to engage administrative staff or HR on personnel matters outside a formal Council proceeding under § 2.15;
4. Order such other relief as justice requires.

VII. Verification

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Georgia that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Gwendolyn W. Ellison

Signature of Complainant

Printed Name: Gwendolyn W. Ellison