



CITY COUNCIL REGULAR SESSION

Monday, May 05, 2025 at 7:00 PM
Council Chambers and YouTube Livestream

Website: www.forestparkga.gov
YouTube: <https://bit.ly/3c28p0A>
Phone Number: (404) 366.4720

FOREST PARK CITY HALL
745 Forest Parkway
Forest Park, GA 30297

The Honorable Mayor Angelyne Butler, MPA

The Honorable Kimberly James
The Honorable Hector Gutierrez

The Honorable Delores A. Gunn
The Honorable Latresa Akins-Wells
The Honorable Allan Mears

Ricky L. Clark Jr, City Manager
Randi Rainey, City Clerk
Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney

APPROVED MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME: Mayor Butler called the meeting to order at 7:12 p.m.

INVOCATION/PLEDGE: The invocation and pledge were led by Elder Cook.

ROLL CALL - CITY CLERK: A quorum was established.

Attendee's Name	Title	Absent	Present
Angelyne Butler, MPA	Mayor, At-Large		•
Kimberly James	Council Member, Ward 1		•
Delores Gunn	Councilmember, Ward 2		•
Hector Gutierrez	Council Member, Ward 3		•
Latresa Akins-Wells	Council Member, Ward 4		•
Allan Mears	Council Member, Ward 5		•

John Wiggins, Finance Director, Shalonda Brown, HR Director; Diane Lewis; Deputy HR Director, Javon Lloyd, PIO; Talisa Adams, Procurement Manager; David Halcomb, Deputy Fire Chief; Joshua Cox; IT Director; Pauline Warrior, Chief of Staff; Rodney Virgil; Level 2 Support Engineer, Nigel Wattley; Deputy Director Public Works, Alton Matthews, Public Works Director, Rochelle Dennis Interim Economic Dev. Director, Nicole Dozier; Planning Community Director, Dorthy Roper-Jackson; Director, Municipal Court, Michelle Hood; Deputy City Clerk; Brandon Criss; Police Chief, and Danielle Matricardi, City Attorney.

ADOPTION OF THE CONSENT AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS:

It was motioned to adopt the consent agenda with the removal of the Nova contract to be added to the regular agenda.

Motion made by Councilmember James, Seconded by Councilmember Gunn

Motion made by Councilmember Akins-Wells, Seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

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

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA WITH ANY ADDITIONS / DELETIONS:

It was motioned to adopt the agenda with the removal of the variance, and to add Nova and the Text amendment 2025-02

City Manager Clark noted that they would like to remove the variance under new business.

Mayor Butler stated they are adding discussion and approval for the Text amendment 2025-02, adding the Nova contract and removing the variance item number 7.

Motion made by Councilmember Akins-Wells James, Seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

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

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

1. **Council Approval of Council Work Session and Regular Meeting Minutes from April 21, 2025 - City Clerk**

It was motioned to approve the Council meeting minutes from April 21, 2025, with the minor updates sent to the clerk.

Motion made by Councilmember James, Seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells.

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

PUBLIC COMMENTS: (All Speakers will have 3 Minutes)

There were five (5) Public Comment Speakers.

Mrs. Ellington noted concern when the police arrived at her neighbor's home. Mrs. Ellington stated least 8 to 10 people live there, but no one answered the door for them. She stated she would like to know what they were hiding. She said they moved next door during the night, and she is concerned about who her neighbors are.

Ms. Evans noted she is concerned about the event that happened on the weekend of April 27th. She said there was a preplanned event with flyers at a location that was not licensed. She noted the neighborhoods have been safe, especially since Chief Criss has been here, and she is concerned. Ms. Evans asked them to make sure this type of activity is minimized.

Ms. Keith stated that she would like to discuss the raise and that she is neither for nor against it. She said, however, if they do want a raise, she expects them to raise the bar. She stated some of the things she would like to see happen are for Mayor and Council to build a relationship with DOT, to help clean up Forest Park, and she wants them to work

with the Georgia Agricultural Center and Atlanta State Farmers Market. Ms. Keith stated she would like to see Starr Park renovated and moving forward now, initiative for the neighborhoods and businesses to be cleaned up. Ms. Keith noted there seems to be no ordinance regarding business upkeep, and she would like to see city employees move to Forest Park and wants to know how they are going to change the way the city is perceived.

Mr. Kerr noted that on the road he lives on, there have been no parking signs along the road; they are a problem for the residents. He said the placement does not serve any function. He noted he left home one day and saw an officer come into the subdivision. He stated he turned onto a side street, and they asked him for his information, and he wanted to know why because he had not done anything. He noted the officer stated he received a call about illegal parking. He said it is a problem because if you are sitting in a place for 5 minutes, the police are called. He thinks the sign placement needs to be reconsidered.

Zack Parker continues to be concerned about transparency and free speech. He stated the form to file a police report is four pages long, three are for explanation of the complaint, and one has to be filled out to request a sergeant who can then be asked to provide a complaint form. He stated he is not sure that the Technique Contract is appropriate because they are a member of the board appointed by the same body that oversees them to be awarded a contract. He stated he is against the raises. Parker noted the accident on Jonesboro Road was unfortunate, but would like to know why, when he was not committing a crime, several police officers showed up on the scene, but hundreds of bikers entered the city, began taking others' lives, and no cops noticed anything until it was all over.

CITY MANAGER'S REPORT

City Manager Clark addressed the public comment about the incident a few weeks ago. He noted that it was an unfortunate, isolated incident, and the city immediately acted once it received the information. He stated that a Cease and Desist was issued to the property owner and tenant to ensure this type of stuff does not happen in the city. He noted there has been a reduction in crime and wants to keep it that way. He stated that, as it relates to the parking signs, there will be further discussion with public works and the police department regarding Hendrix Drive. He addressed the issues with the neighbors and noted that someone from the police department will reach out.

City Manager Clark highlighted several points in his 2 years working for the city of Forest Park. The Strategic Vision was created through community listening sessions, focusing on equity, growth, accountability, and connection. The Elevate Program was launched to support unemployed and underemployed residents through placement and wraparound services. He noted that a comprehensive audit was conducted for Operational Performance, consisting of a dashboard to be released for transparency. Mr. Clark stated significant financial growth of revenue from 28 million in 2019 to 39 million in 2024; the property tax digest increased by 76 percent, with fair market property value growing by 1.2 billion in 8 years. He noted there were two pay increases and a pension put in place. Mr. Clark noted that he felt immense gratitude and said that the legacy that will be left will continue to shape the future of the children and grandchildren. He closed by thanking everyone for being a part of the journey.

PRESENTATIONS:

2. Public Works Annual Presentation Update – Public Works Department

Background/History:

The Public Works Department will present its annual update to the Mayor and Council.

Director Matthews gave an overview of the public works team and the organization chart comprising four teams. He stated that taxpayers fund public works projects and aim to benefit the public by improving their quality of life. He talked about the differences and inconsistencies found on roads due to poor construction

and went on to explain the three courses used to build a proper road. Director Matthews stated that Public Works has launched a pothole brigade to address the various potholes throughout the city and spoke about other projects they are working on.

CEREMONIAL:

3. Proclamation in Recognition of Sania Feagin being drafted by the Los Angeles Sparks- Councilmember James, Legislative Office

Background/History:

The Forest Park City Council proudly recognizes Sania Nicole Feagin, a distinguished 2021 Forest Park High School graduate and former standout member of the University of South Carolina Gamecocks Women's Basketball Team. Sania played an integral role in the team's historic 2023–2024 season, culminating in an undefeated 39-0 record and the NCAA Women's Basketball National Championship title. On April 14, 2025, her exceptional talent and dedication were further recognized when the Los Angeles Sparks drafted her to the WNBA.

This item was removed from the agenda.

4. Proclamation in Recognition of the 56th Annual Professional Municipal Clerk's Week, May 4-10, 2025- Executive Office

Background/History:

Municipal Clerk's Week is celebrated during the first whole week of May. It's a time to recognize the vital role that municipal clerks play in local government. Municipal clerks are responsible for various administrative duties, including record-keeping, maintaining official documents, managing elections, and facilitating public meetings. They often serve as a central point of contact between government officials and the public. During Municipal Clerk's Week, communities may hold events or ceremonies to honor and thank their municipal clerks for their hard work and dedication to keeping local government running smoothly.

The Mayor read the proclamation, and they took pictures.

5. Proclamation in Recognition of Public Works Week, May 18-24, 2025- Public Works Department

Background/History:

National Public Works Week is celebrated annually during the third week of May to recognize public works professionals' vital role in maintaining and enhancing the infrastructure and services that support our daily lives. These individuals are responsible for essential functions such as road maintenance, water and sewer systems, public buildings, waste management, and community facilities. Public Works Week honors their dedication and hard work, often performed behind the scenes, ensuring our communities' health, safety, and quality of life. The City of Forest Park proudly recognizes and celebrates each of its Public Works employees for their unwavering commitment and valuable contributions to the community.

The Mayor read the proclamation, and they took pictures.

The State of Georgia recognized Tenesha Dixon with a resolution. The Mayor, the Council, and some Clayton County officials took pictures.

PUBLIC HEARINGS:

It was motioned to close the regular meeting and open the Public Hearing for CUP-2025-02, Conditional Use Permit for constructing a sixty-unit mixed-use development in the Downtown Mainstreet District, Ward 2.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells.

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

6. Council Approval to Approve Case # CUP-2025-02, Conditional Use Permit to authorize the construction of a sixty-unit mixed-use development within the Downtown Mainstreet District (DM), Ward 2-Planning and Community Development Department

Background/History:

Prestwick Land Holdings is requesting a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) to authorize the construction of forty-eight additional residential units, bringing the total unit count to sixty, within a proposed mixed-use development located on a 1.62+/- acre lot within the Downtown Mainstreet District (DM), Ward 2. The project area lies within the Traditional Downtown Core (TDC), which supports higher-density, mixed-use development in alignment with the City's land use and economic development goals.

On Thursday April 17, 2025, the City of Forest Park Planning Commission, which serves as an advisory board to Mayor and Council, voted to approve the Conditional Use Permit request. With a careful overview, some potential impacts of the proposed development include increased traffic and density. However, with proper design, such as pedestrian-oriented features, modern safety standards, and integration with public infrastructure, many of these effects could be mitigated. The project could improve access to amenities, reduce commuting needs, and support downtown revitalization efforts.

There were two speakers in favor:

Ann Keith is in favor of this and hopes the council will vote to move it forward, and hopes the future will allow for more projects so the city will prosper, move ahead, and bring forward the lifestyle they are all hoping for.

Jay Evans noted she is in favor of this as the area on Main Street can use some sprucing up. She noted that area has been torn down for a while and there has been a big gap there. Ms. Evans thinks this is going to be great and it is right across from where she walks her pooch.

There were no speakers in opposition to the text amendment.

It was motioned to close the Public Hearing and reopen the regular meeting.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Gunn.

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

It was motioned to approve the CUP-2025-02, Conditional Use Permit to authorize the construction of a sixty-unit mixed-use development within the Downtown Mainstreet District (DM), Ward 2.

Motion made by Councilmember Akins-Wells, seconded by Councilmember James.

City Manager Clark asked to add to the motion the condition requiring a traffic study to be submitted before a C.O. is issued and other conditions listed within the staff report.

Councilmember James noted that doing a traffic study at this point would be pointless, as Main has no traffic. She asked why would they need to do one before the project starts.

City Manager Clark noted that based on the developer's density, the study will show if the road is sufficient for the increased density and provide for modifications that the developer needs to do to lower the impact of the added congestion on the road. He stated he does not know how long it will take the study.

Edrick Harris, Prestwick Development Company, noted it should be around a 30-day process.

Attorney Matricardi stated that instead of rescinding the prior motion, make an addition to adopt the recommendations in the staff report.

Councilmember Akins-Wells asked if they were going to discuss what they are.

Attorney Matricardi noted that if granted approval, staff recommend that the applicant preserve the architectural design as presented in the rendered photo provided to staff. She stated similar architectural design is the additional condition.

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

7. Council Approval to Approve Case VAR-2025-06 Variance Request- Planning and Community Development Department

Background/History:

Prestwick Land Holdings is requesting a series of variances to support the development of a proposed mixed-use project located on a 1.62 +/- acre parcel within the Traditional Downtown Core (TDC) of the Downtown Mainstreet District (DM). As required by zoning regulations, any variance request associated with a Conditional Use Permit must be reviewed and approved by the Mayor and City Council.

Should the Mayor and Council approve the variance request with the conditions recommended by the Planning Commission and staff, the applicant will be able to move forward with a thoughtfully scaled development that supports increased residential density in the Downtown Core—further advancing the city's goals of growth, walkability, and revitalization in this key district.

This item was removed from the agenda.

Attorney Matricardi noted there is one more Public Hearing regarding the Text Amendment.

It was motioned to close the regular meeting and open the second hearing for the added item Text Amendment 2025-02.

Motioned made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Gunn.

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

8. **Council Approval of Text Amendment 2025-02, existing Ordinance related to Mini warehouse, Storage facilities, section 8-8-97.**

Director Dozier noted the provision of this Text amendment is to address outstanding issues of concern with mini storage and storage facilities.

There were no speakers in favor:

There were no speakers in opposition to the text amendment.

It was motioned to close the Public Hearing and reopen the regular meeting.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

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

It was motioned to approve the Text Amendment 2025-02, **existing Ordinance related to Mini warehouse, Storage facilities, section 8-8-97.**

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells.

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

CONSENT AGENDA:

Council Approval to enter into a contract with NOVA Engineering & Environmental - Planning & Community Development/Procurement

This item was removed and placed under New Business.

9. Council Approval to purchase 6 Self-Contained Breathing Apparatus (SCBA) units - Procurement/Fire & EMS Department

10. Council Approval on the Lighting Service Agreement for 883 Mimosa Dr & Bowden Dr – Public Works Department

NEW BUSINESS:

11. Council Approval to enter into a contract with NOVA Engineering & Environmental - Planning & Community Development/Procurement

It was motioned to approve the contract with Nova Engineering & Environmental to include an amendment regarding work hours or weekend-specific, and the additional cost will be borne by the requestor.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Akins-Wells.

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

12. Council Approval of an Ordinance to increase the compensation of the Mayor and Councilmember pursuant to O.C.G.A. 36-35-4- Executive Office

It was motioned to approve the ordinance to increase the compensation of the Mayor and Councilmember pursuant to O.C.G.A. 36-35-4.

Motion made by Councilmember Akins-Wells, seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

Voting Yea: Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells

Voting Abstaining: Councilmember James, Councilmember Mears

The Mayor vetoed this decision. Mayor Butler was not in agreement with this.

13. Council Approval to enter into a contract with Technique Concrete Construction, LLC for Grapevine Buildout Project - Executive Office/Procurement

It was motioned to approve entering into a contract with Technique Concrete Construction, LLC, for the Grapevine Buildout Project.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Mears.

Councilmember Gunn noted she would like the information implemented as asked earlier.

Councilmember Gutierrez noted that, out of respect for his new colleague, he would like to wait until the next meeting to give her time to review the information. He said that the City Manager has informed them that postponing it by one meeting will not affect the process.

Councilmember Akins-Wells asked her if her daughter worked for Technique Concrete.

Councilmember James noted she has never worked for them. Councilmember Akins Wells asked if her son works there.

Councilmember James noted that he used to, but he does not anymore.

City Manager Clark noted he would need to know the date on the document as it relates to the 90 days. He said they could get together and show Councilmember Gunn the site.

Councilmember Gutierrez noted he is in agreement with moving the Grapevine forward, but he wants to make sure everyone understands everything.

Councilmember James stated she knows Councilmember Gunn is just getting on board, and she understands that, but they have been discussing this for a long time, and it is beautiful on the inside. She stated that out of the hundreds of bids, and to get down to three, this one was at 2.8, and the others started at 3.7. She said they know the quality of work that Technique Concrete does, and he has moved his headquarters to the city, and it would be beneficial to use the resources they have there.

Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Mears

Recused: Councilmember Gunn,

Voting Nay: Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Akins-Wells

The vote failed.

Attorney Matricardi noted that there was a motion on the floor to approve the staff recommendation, but it failed due to a lack of votes. Now, the floor is back open, and they can make a motion to reconsider, followed by a motion to table.

Councilmember Gunn noted she would agree to do that.

Attorney Matricardi said it should be stated as a motion.

Councilmember James asked for a Point of Order. She asked if it was possible to approve and then get the information.

Councilmember Akins-Wells noted she wants the information to be able to vote on it, if she understands correctly.

Councilmember Gunn stated it was plain and simple. She would like the information beforehand, and she does not have that right now. She noted she understands there is a contract, but she does not know what the building looks like, what the plans are, or what it is for. Councilmember Gunn noted that she thinks it is fair and has a right to the same information.

Councilmember Gutierrez noted it is not saying no, but pushing it back by 2 weeks. He said it is not detrimental because he would have voted yes. He stated they cleared procurement and have faith that staff did the right thing. He would like her to have the opportunity to get the information she requested

Mr. Clark asked, since they are in the same meeting, can they make a motion to reconsider the failed vote by the prevailing individuals so that it is clear on the record? He stated that the intent of the governing body is not to deny, but to table the item until next week.

Councilmember Akins-Wells noted that was her intent, and she is clear on her vote.

It was motioned to reconsider the denial of Technique Construction as the contractor for the Grapevine Project.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Gutierrez.

Voting Yea: Councilmember James, Councilmember Gunn, Councilmember Gutierrez, Councilmember Mears

Voting Nay: Councilmember Akins-Wells

It was motioned to table the contract with Technique Construction until the next council meeting.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Mears.

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

14. Council Approval of the 2025 Haitian Flag Day Celebration MOU Agreement- Recreation and Leisure Department

It was motioned to approve the 2025 Haitian Flag Day Celebration MOU Agreement.

Motion made by Councilmember James, seconded by Councilmember Gunn.

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

CLOSING COMMENTS BY GOVERNING BODY:

Councilmember James stated she would like to address Mr. Christopher, and will call him regarding the no-parking signs that were put up a few years ago. She plans to bring the residents together to come up with a resolution. She thanked everyone for coming out and gave kudos to Tenisha for getting recognition from the state. She said it is graduation season and asked everyone to come out for the service to celebrate them. She noted the Community Field Day and Senior Car parade is on the 17th and graduation is on the 21st.

Councilmember Gunn thanked everyone for coming out. She stated they will have an open forum on May 8 from 6 to 7:30 for Ward 2 and anyone in the city who would like to attend. Councilmember Gunns stated she would like the department heads to be in attendance.

Councilmember Gutierrez thanked everyone who came out for the award ceremony. He congratulated everyone who received an award. He gave a shoutout to Tenisha Dixon and said he loves her and her family. He stated she is a joy to work with and a true servant in the city. Councilmember Gutierrez noted he would not be successful without her.

Councilmember Akins-Wells sent Chairman Jeff Turner her condolences on his father's passing. She said Wellness with Wells' last class is tomorrow, and Let's Get Fit with Gunn will start from 6 to 7 at 696 Main Street. She thanked Councilmember Gunn for continuing the event because the residents loved it. Councilmember Gunn thanked the churches in the community, the surrounding churches, and everyone who participated in the event for coming out to the Gospel Jam. She thanked Tenisha and Andre and noted they did an amazing job with the event, as always. She stated that crime will happen everywhere, and everything cannot be controlled. She stated, however, Chief Criss and the police department did an amazing job handling it, and she agrees with what Mr. Parker had to say, and they should have been a bit more aware, but you do not expect these things to happen.

Councilmember Akins-Wells thanked the Chief and his department for all that they do. She stated she agrees that Councilmember Gunn should receive the information she needs to make a decision. She stated they have been talking about Starr Park for a long time, which is what the community asks about. She said they are not asking about the Grapevine. She thanked Ms. Falomi for the certificate and congratulated Tenisha on receiving her recognition.

Councilmember Mears noted the one thing that bothers him, which will eventually take over Forest Park. He stated that people are buying these large homes and putting multiple people in them. This has happened in his neighborhood, where about 8 to 10 people live, and it is undesirable. He stated that if this situation is not handled or stopped, Forest Park will be eaten up by it. Councilmember Mears said, "If you see something, say something," and he thanked Mr. Finch for attending the meeting.

Mayor Butler - After careful consideration, I hereby exercise my veto authority pursuant to Section 2.32(b) of the Charter, and apply said authority to the ordinance approving an increase in the compensation of the Mayor and Council in accordance with O.C.G.A. 36-5-4, during the May 5th, 2025, meeting of the City Council of Forest Park. The conversation surrounding an increase in compensation for the Mayor and Council is neither new nor unfamiliar. On July 2, 2018, the first attempt was introduced by some members of the Governing Body. Just days later, on July 5, 2018, I exercised my veto authority as Mayor and vetoed the proposal on three key grounds: 1. A pay increase during our inaugural year as a governing body was not only misguided, but it was also a misalignment of priorities. 2. As quoted in said veto, "As elected officials, our needs assessment hierarchy should be residents, employees, and then governing body. 3. At that juncture, we had no tangible wins under our belt, no proven track record, and no justification to ask more of the taxpayers.

Now, a second attempt emerged during our October 3, 2022, Work Session but failed due to a lack of a second during our Regular Session, indicating that consensus had yet been reached. However, during the May 1st, 2024, Budget

Retreat, the conversation evolved. For the first time, all six members of the governing body unanimously agreed that it was appropriate to consider a pay adjustment. Yet there was one condition that we took care of our employees first.

This stance and timing echoed the position I took in 2018 when I vetoed a similar proposal. At that time, I firmly believed we needed tangible wins and a proven track record to justify a pay increase, and that philosophy has not changed. The difference in 2024 is that we came to the table with measurable results, and a record of meaningful progress, and we have so much to be proud of, because under this Administration, we have done a remarkable job in strengthening the financial foundation of the City of Forest Park. In 2018, when I assumed office as Mayor, the General Fund for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 2018, was \$28,600,782. As of June 30th, 2024, our General Fund revenue stands strong at \$39,485,216, with a projected increase of an additional \$2,000,000 for the FY coming up. Even more telling is the City's property tax digest. In 2018, the 40% value of all the property in the City of Forest Park was \$625,048,825. By 2024, that sum had grown to \$1,097,897,811, a \$475 million increase, or 76%. So, in total, the fair market value of property in Forest Park has increased by \$1.2 billion dollars over the past eight years.

The position taken during the 2024 Budget Retreat also reflects my original 2018 stance on prioritizing our employees. Since 2018, through the support of the Governing Body, our employees have received two pay increases, a pension, and benefits offered through the LEAF Life Initiative. During one of the most economically disruptive periods in modern history, a global pandemic, Forest Park did not merely survive; we thrived. While neighboring jurisdictions, other institutions, and organizations laid off or furloughed employees, we gave raises, increased our workforce, and reinforced our service for commitment. But let me be very clear, none of that growth happened without accident. It was a result of divine alignment, strategic vision, deliberate planning, disciplined execution, and a steadfast commitment to accountability. This financial progress affirms that our early restraint was not only justified but is necessary. Now that we have honored our commitment to our employees, our responsibility must shift toward ensuring long-term financial stability so we can continue meeting the needs of our residents. So, when the conversation around our pay resumed in 2024, the local, national, and global economy was considerably stable.

However, to date, we are navigating an increasingly uncertain and complex series of fiscal conundrums. Locally, we stand at a pivotal crossroads. Our capital improvement projects, as you have heard earlier, are bold in scope and in cost, and just as one component of a broader portfolio of infrastructure enhancements, the City Center project alone exceeds \$100 million. Delaying these projects, the continual delay of these projects will only increase costs due to inflation and material surges. If we choose to pursue additional funding, we must do so with a repayment plan SANS, and I repeat SANS, increasing taxes on our residents, which requires fiscal restraint and strategic planning. Furthermore, the City Manager's memo dated May 1, 2025, warns: "We are facing a significant and likely increase in insurance premiums, driven by a rise in incidents and risk exposure". The implications are serious and include: Substantial Increases in Premiums, which will divert funds from essential services, programs, initiatives, and activities. Higher stop-loss premiums or lower thresholds: reduced coverage, place more conditions on when coverage is applied, and tighter claims scrutiny which may increase our reserve requirements and then there is Mandatory Budget Cuts: In addition to departmental cuts, we are at the threshold of possibly reducing the Governing Body's budget, staffing, services, ongoing projects, and activities.

Additionally, the poverty levels in Forest Park remain a pressing concern. With 16.2 percent of our residents living at or below poverty line, our budgetary priorities must reflect a commitment to relief, essential services, and community investment, not self-compensation. On the national level, we face three critical issues: Interest Rate Increases: Interest rates have risen by 1% year-to-date, significantly raising the cost of borrowing. If Forest Park pursues bonds for our capital projects like the City Center, we will pay far more in interest. These higher rates also discourage development and homebuying, affecting our tax base and slowing economic growth. Stock Market Volatility: Fluctuations in the U.S. stock market fuel broader economic uncertainty. While the city may not be directly invested, this volatility affects employee and resident retirement portfolios, investor confidence, philanthropic giving, and limits

public-private partnership opportunities. Inflation: Raising inflation continues to drive up operation costs, including fuel, utilities, supplies, materials contracts, and services. This reduces the purchasing power of every public dollar and strains municipal budgets. Globally, we are contending with increased tariffs on imported goods and raw materials, which are driving up the cost of construction and infrastructure projects. For a City like Forest Park, which is actively investing in such projects to include but is not limited to the City Center, roads, public facilities, and community development, this results in higher bids, fewer competitive offers, and more constrained project scopes, unless additional funding is secured.

Foresight is what separates responsible governance from reactive politics. While an \$18,720.26 increase may appear insignificant within a \$41.5 million budget, the issue is not affordability, it is about accountability. When economic indicators signal caution, not comfort, leadership must act accordingly. Under this Administration, a needs-based hierarchy was established in 2018, which was reaffirmed in 2024, prioritizing the foundational stability of our city and/or employees before considering compensation adjustments for elected officials. This veto upholds that same value system. Cuts are imminent, not in theory, but in reality. Departments will be asked to operate with less. Capital projects are weighing on our budget. Insurance premiums are projected to rise, and pending litigation threatens our reserves. With those pressures mounting, no responsible leader would consider a pay increase at a moment like this.

Knowing the environment we are in, the idea of increasing compensation is disconnected from the realities facing our residents. Other communities are freezing budgets and laying off staff. In the past, Forest Park has avoided those outcomes. We survived a global pandemic and emerged stronger, but the current global economic climate presents a different kind of challenge. Unlike the pandemic, which tested our unity, this one test, particularly given the nominal amount of the proposed, tests our financial discipline, strategic foresight, and saliently, our priorities. At another time, this conversation may have merit, but for today, the timing is not aligned with our financial reality.

You, the residents of Forest Park, have entrusted us with more than leadership, you have entrusted us with judgment. That judgment must reflect your priorities, even and especially when it is unpopular or uncomfortable. At this moment, with economic instability surrounding us, that means ensuring services are preserved, departments are supported, and every dollar spent brings value to the people we serve.

Our city's future hinges on the decisions we are making now. While we cannot change inflation rates or global markets, we absolutely control how we prepare, respond, and lead locally. Therefore, we must prioritize our obligations and fiscal health so that we can continue to deliver the services and stability our residents deserve.

Until we ensure stability for our departments, navigate through these economic headwinds, safeguard our fiscal health, secure essential services, and meet the full scope of our responsibility as elected officials, I cannot and will not support a raise for elected officials. This veto is not about dismissing the possibility of future consideration; it is about standing firmly in the present, protecting our vision, and honoring our commitment to those we serve.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: (When an Executive Session is required, one will be called for the following issues: Personnel, Litigation, or Real Estate)

There was no Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Butler adjourned the meeting at 8:59 pm.

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

APPROVED