City Council of Peachtree City
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 18, 2025
6:30 PM

Call to Order

The Mayor and Council of Peachtree City met in regular session on Thursday, September 18, 2025. Mayor Kim Learnard called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. Council members attending: Laura Johnson, Suzanne Brown, and Clinton Holland.

Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence

Announcements, Awards, Special Recognition

None

Public Comment

Brown moved that public comment time be extended so everyone was allowed to speak for the allotted three minutes. Johnson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Cliff Jackson, a member of the Peachtree City Hockey Association (PHA) Board, said it was not true that there was no travel hockey team. He pointed out players throughout the room displaying photos of travel teams and their awards. There was no 8-U team because that team was being phased out in travel tournaments, but if the interest was there, they could start one again. A new travel hockey program would split the local talent and reduce competitiveness, Jackson stated. He explained that this new club was formed after the PHA suspended a coach for one season. He asked Council to allow the PHA to remain as the single hockey association in the city.

Steve Brown said he and former Councilman Eric Imker had reviewed the proposed budget and saw multiple pathways to achieve a full rollback. He questioned how Council intended to approve a budget when they did not yet have the tax digest. Brown mentioned that the City Manager had said they were relying on a federal grant given out during the pandemic to fund maintenance projects instead of a fire station. He called the budget process unsustainable and claimed the Mayor had rezoned industrial land for residential use which would impact taxes for future residents.

Jeremy Richardson, an officer with the PHA, related that he had seen firsthand what could happen with division in a sports program and wanted PHA to avoid it. The PHA had worked to meet the needs of all hockey families and operate transparently, and travel teams were part of their history and would continue.

Hockey parent and coach Justin Reece said he wanted to explain that this rift began when a coach violated the Roller Hockey Association and the Amateur Athletic Association code of conduct, shared by the PHA, and was suspended for one year. If a league failed to enforce this code of conduct, it could be banned from future play. Many parents disagreed with that suspension, and the new hockey club was created to circumvent it, Reece remarked.

Peachtree City-Fayette Pickleball Club member Cheryl Averill asked Council to honor the voices of citizens in the 2023 Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) vote and move forward with plans to construct 18 pickleball courts at Meade.

Chad Dollahite said he did not see a need to duplicate what was already being offered through the PHA. He countered claims that the PHA travel teams were not competitive travel teams by listing medals they had won.

Chris York thanked all the parents who had turned out for the meeting. He said he had sons in the PHA and also registered with the new Fayette Hockey Club because it would open more doors for players. There was no reason to prevent rink access, he said, because this new club was not competition to the PHA.

Eric Bahne asked Council to approve the Fayette Hockey Club's request for rink time. Bahne said the PHA's practice of fielding an all-star team for travel play was not competitive. His son now played in north Atlanta with an elite ice hockey team. He said it was time to reconsider Peachtree City's policy that only City recreation leagues could use the facilities.

Mike Murtaugh commended the Recreation Advisory Group's (RAG) for its collaborative work to develop a recommendation on a pickleball complex. He said RAG had been serious stewards of the SPLOST money, and he urged Council to listen to their proposal and vote yes.

Matthew Pitts said he had been a PHA coach, and his son played on the 8-U travel team organized by a group of parents. He said the new travel club would allow the 8-U team to play and travel. He urged Council to allow the new hockey club to have rink time.

Jeff Williams mentioned the growth of pickleball, saying it appealed to all ages and was inexpensive to play. He pointed to nearby pickleball facilities, noting that the local players were asking only for something comparable.

Young hockey player Jack Pitts and his friends asked Council to approve the Fayette Hockey Club's request because that club would give them a chance to play travel hockey with kids their own age.

Melissa Maranzano, who had a husband and son who played with the PHA, said Peachtree City did not need another hockey program. She noted that soccer had a recreation league and a travel club in Peachtree City, but they were affiliated, with the recreation league being the parent of the travel teams. She asked Council to think of the PHA as they did the larger soccer association, saying the current league had everyone's best interest at heart and did not cater only to certain age groups.

Jacqueline Edwards wanted to introduce her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, founded in 1913. Last year, they chartered a Fayette County alumnae chapter, which had grown to

236 members. This was a community service organization, with projects including scholarships and partnerships with other organizations.

Fayette Hockey Club President Jim Forrestal told Council that hockey season had started and the club's 29 registered players and 25 families were excited about a new approach to travel hockey while continuing to play recreation hockey. All they wanted was three hours of practice time. He said they had complied with Peachtree City facility usage requirements and had worked out an agreement on sharing rink time with the PHA. Forrestal asked that Council allow them to have a one-year facility usage agreement.

Paul Schultz commented that he understood that approval of the budget was being held up because the reserve fund was not being reduced. He said the reserves were a rainy day fund to be used, for instance, in times of economic uncertainty or in case of natural disasters. Schultz pointed out that a reduction to a 25% reserve would reduce the average homeowner's tax bill by about $1,000, but it would have to increase by that amount the next year because there would be no more reserve to give back. He also stated that the reserve was not mentioned by any citizen in the public meetings on the budget, so perhaps it was not a major issue to citizens.

PHA President Chip Yarri told Council he wanted to leave them with an idea of the consequences if they made the wrong decision. He said dividing hockey into two programs would set a precedent for every other recreation sport in the City. This situation in other municipalities had led to confusion, strained facilities, and loss of trust, and Yarris urged Council not to let this happen in Peachtree City. Yarri mentioned the lack of an 8-U program, saying the PHA dropped that program because of lack of interest and because young players did not have skills for that setting. Also, the governing associations above them were dropping 8-U.

Valerie Alexander thanked the children present for behaving so well. She then commented she had worked with City staff through her involvement with the Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB), Launch Fayette, and Peachtree City 101 and commended them for crafting a comprehensive budget that responded to every Council request presented to them. She noted Holland's demand to lower taxes benefited only businesses, not homeowners, and it also discouraged staff who had worked on the budget for months. She asked Council to pass the budget and support staff in doing the job they had been hired to do.

Agenda Changes

Brown moved to move Consent Agenda items A, D, and E to the New Agenda items for discussion. Holland seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Minutes

Holland moved to approve the August 21, 2025 City Council meeting minutes, the August 21, 2025 executive session minutes, the September 4, 2025 City Council work session minutes, and the September 4, 2025 executive session minutes. Brown seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

A. **August 21, 2025 City Council Meeting Minutes**
APPROVED 4-0

B. **August 21, 2025 Executive Session Minutes**
APPROVED 4-0

C. **September 4, 2025 City Council Work Session Minutes**
APPROVED 4-0

D. **September 4, 2025 Executive Session Minutes**
APPROVED 4-0

Consent Agenda

Brown moved to approve Consent Agenda items B, C, F, and G. Johnson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

The Mayor announced they had just appointed Margaret Amalfitano to the Airport Authority, with Kevin Brady as the alternate, and Scott Ritenour and Hans Gant to the Planning Commission, with Kenneth Hamner as the alternate.

A. **Consider appointments to the Airport Authority**
APPROVED 4-0

B. **Consider appointments to the Planning Commission**
APPROVED 4-0

C. **Tree Trimming and Removal Services Bid**
APPROVED 4-0

D. **Master Lease-Purchase – Lease Schedule #5**
APPROVED 4-0

New Agenda Items

A. **09-25-02 New Alcohol License, The Wine Bar, 312 Willowbend Rd**
Deputy City Clerk Stacey Collins said this was an application from Michael Surapine and Bailey Surapine-Meen for The Wine Bar, 312 Willowbend Road. The applicants and the location met all requirements. They would be selling wine, beer, and distilled spirits, including Sunday sales.

Johnson moved to approve New Agenda item 09-25-02, New Alcohol License, The Wine Bar, 312 Willowbend Road. Brown seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

B. **09-25-03 Fayette Hockey Club for a Facility Usage Agreement**
Assistant Recreation Director Michelle Johnson asked if there were any questions about the facility usage agreement for the Fayette Hockey Club. City Manager Justin Strickland said it was on the agenda at the request of Mayor and Council

from a previous meeting. The RAG decided to add this request to their agenda and wanted to make a recommendation to Council. He introduced RAG Chair Erin McDowell.

McDowell explained that several RAG members had experience with facility usage agreements and, based on the group's discussion, RAG voted unanimously to recommend Council deny the Fayette Hockey Club's request as a way to reinforce the City's commitment to recreational play and to the established PHA that already provided recreational and travel programs. RAG believed awarding a second program would undermine established partnerships, create scheduling and prioritization conflicts, and open the door to unnecessary future disputes. It would also hamper the ability of individual citizens to use the City's sole rink.

She said the City's commitment must remain to recreational play over travel, particularly when an existing organization offered both. It was not up to the City to determine the level of competition, but McDowell noted that Peachtree City's leagues remained some of the strongest in the area and in the state. True recreational play should be the heartbeat of the program, and they did not want to lose sight of that, McDowell concluded. Local organizations died when the focus shifted to travel, and the children were the one who suffered when adults could not get along.

Johnson observed that situations like this were often presented as being simple to fix, but, upon investigation, turned out to be more complex. She said she was grateful for the communication she had with both sides between the last meeting and this meeting. She attended the RAG meeting, made a house call, and talked to friends who had been affiliated with the hockey program. She thanked McDowell and RAG for their work, saying McDowell's experience as president of a league gave insight into what could happen if two associations were allowed to exist.

Johnson said the root of this was from a disagreement and could be solved. It would be devastating to the recreational programs, she remarked, if Council decided to accommodate every time there was a disagreement and a group wanted to split off. The Fayette Hockey Club was a splinter group, with 100% of its players coming from the PHA. Johnson said she supported PHA and was encouraged that they said they would consider opening an 8-U team. The Fayette Hockey Club players could join that team.

She concluded by saying she admired the passion the coaches, players, and parents had showed for hockey and felt that the differences could be resolved.

Brown said a vote against approving this would be a vote against the children, noting that they could not force the groups to get along. The fact that PHA was fighting Fayette Hockey Club's request for three hours of practice time was proof. She remarked that the new club had done everything they had been asked to do and to deny this would only hurt the kids.

Holland agreed with Brown that denial would hurt the children. He remarked that the Fayette Hockey Club was seeking high-skill players versus recreation hockey. There was no ordinance that barred having two organizations. Denial excluded the players who sought high-level competition. This would involve coordinating the recreation schedule to allow for sharing the facilities, and he said the Recreation Department could afford to set aside three hours. He thought the two leagues should share the rink.

Holland moved to approve New Agenda item 09-25-03, Fayette Hockey Club Facility Usage Agreement. Brown seconded. The motion was denied by a 2-2 vote, with Brown and Holland voting in favor, Johnson and Learnard in opposition.

C. Consider appointment to the Convention and Visitors Bureau Board

Brown objected to re-appointing a person who was running in the current municipal election and moved to re-convene the committee for a different selection or postpone this selection until after the election, at the committee's choice. Holland seconded.

Learnard asked what difference it made if the appointee was a candidate. They might or might not win. She also pointed out that only one person showed up to interview for this position, so it was not a matter of choosing a candidate. However, she said, they had a great interview, and this was a well-qualified person with experience on this board.

Brown said he could remain on the board until after the election, adding that it conveyed the wrong idea to appoint a candidate. Learnard asked what she thought they should do, and Brown re-stated her motion to either re-convene the committee or wait until after the election to make an appointment.

The nominee in question, Joe Campbell, stated the CVB Board had previously had a situation where a position was not filled right away, so that person stayed on until it was filled. City Attorney Ted Meeker said he believed the bylaws allowed for that. Strickland noted that the term ended September 30, and Meeker added that the person would stay on.

Johnson made sure her understanding was correct that Campbell would stay on the board but not officially be appointed until after the election. Learnard said that was her understanding. Meeker said he would be in the position until someone else was appointed or he was re-appointed. Johnson asked if there was something illegal about him being appointed while a candidate, and Meeker told her there was not.

She asked Council if there was anything about Campbell's service that had been disappointing and should keep him from serving in this role. She said she did not understand the reasoning for this. Campbell responded that it was because he was running for the same Council post as Holland.

Learnard said these appointments were made by a committee consisting of the Mayor, a Councilmember, and the board, commission or authority chairperson. They went through a public posting of the position. This happened every summer, and they tried to be consistent and get a good number of applicants. In this case, there were only two applicants, but one could not make it to the interview. Campbell was the remaining candidate; he was extremely qualified, and the committee made its recommendation.

Holland called the question. Motion carried 3-1, with Brown, Holland, and Learnard voting in favor, and Johnson opposed.

Collins then asked if that meant the committee would start again with the same applicants? Brown said it was the committee's choice, and Learnard said they would have to figure it out.

D. Consider appointments to the Transportation Advisory Group

An incumbent who was not recommended for re-appointment, Keith Larson, was one of the most knowledgeable members and deserved to be re-appointed, Brown stated. Holland agreed, saying Larson was involved in County and State transportation matters. He was someone with outstanding credentials, and it was a travesty he was not re-appointed, Holland commented.

Learnard said she wished Brown and Holland had asked her why they appointed three quality people to the Transportation Advisory Group (TAG) and did not re-appoint Larson. She said she would have told them the same thing she told Larson when she called him and told him he was not re-appointed. She said she told him she was his biggest fan and she wanted him to continue his work with the County and State because they needed his input. There was now an opportunity for him to be effective and to introduce three more qualified people who wanted to get involved.

Holland countered by saying Larson told him Learnard said they were going to take TAG in a different direction. Learnard said there were three citizen volunteers who had been vetted and interviewed. They were the ones the committee chose. She told Holland he was relying on emotion, not communication. Learnard agreed that the appointment of three new people was going in a different direction. She said she wished Holland had talked to her about this, and Holland said she should call him instead of texting.

Johnson noted that it was the Mayor's role to appoint these committees, but she could bring in others to help her as she had done. Larson had served his term, but it was the natural progression to look at others. She asked Brown and Johnson if they had met the three people nominated to TAG? They deserved a chance to serve the community just like Larson. She thanked Larson and said she appreciated what he had done, but they had qualified individuals who would do a great job and deserved a change to serve.

No one could have the amount of experience and knowledge that Larson held, Brown responded. He had demonstrated his commitment to transportation for the four and a half years she had attended Council meetings and deserved to be re-appointed.

Learnard asked Meeker if she was correct that the City Charter said the Mayor could make appointments and served as an ex-officio member of all committees. Meeker said that was correct. Learnard said if this was not approved, she would make these three appointments. She mentioned that Larson would continue to serve the City, and they needed to show support for these three people who were qualified.

Holland said Larson was truly the best of the best of the best and the best transportation person in the City had been pushed aside after a year. He did not question the qualifications of the three nominees but said they could not touch Larson's expertise.

Johnson moved to approve Consent Agenda item D, the appointment of the three individuals selected for the TAG. Learnard seconded. Motion failed by a 2-2 vote, with Johnson and Learnard voting in favor; Brown and Holland voting against.

Learnard asked Meeker to advise her how to proceed as she appointed Heidi Becker, Jesse Wrice, and Joshua Hicks to the TAG. Meeker said he would first have to review the enabling ordinance for the group.

E. Consider appointments to the Recreation Advisory Group

Brown stated that she asked this be removed from the Consent Agenda because it involved the appointment of a candidate in the current City Council election. She said he was not a candidate at the time of the appointment committee meeting, but he was now, and she did not believe they should re-appoint anyone who was running for office. She moved to re-convene the committee for a different selection or postpone this appointment until after the election, at the committee's choice. Holland seconded.

Learnard asked Meeker to look at the RAG's bylaws and see if the current candidate could remain until after the election. She then mentioned that there were two other nominees; how could they get them on board?

Meeker said there was a motion and second on the table. If there was just one nominee they wanted to hold, but approve the other two, then that motion could be made, he explained. Brown then withdrew her motion and Holland his second.

Learnard said that would require a motion to approve Mike Pappas and Jordan

Childress and delay the approval of Polacek. Holland seconded. Learnard said it was her understanding that Polacek would remain in the position until the committee could reconvene. Meeker said he would have to check the bylaws, but it seemed that the person could remain in the seat until a new appointment was approved.

Motion carried 3-1, with Holland, Brown, and Learnard voting in favor, and Johnson voting against.

Johnson said she would like to make a motion to re-appoint Polacek and Pappas to three-year terms and to appoint Jordan Childress to fill the remainder of the term vacated by Derek White. Meeker said there had already been a motion that was approved to appoint Pappas and Childress. Now they would need a motion to re-consider Polacek, and it would have to pass. Johnson said she would not hold it up any longer.

Old Agenda Items

A. 08-25-7F Pickleball Meade Site Update

Assistant City Manager Chris Hobby said he had been working on the pickleball project since joining the City late last year. He noted that the amount of public participation in Peachtree City far exceeded what he had encountered in other cities. RAG had met twice for public comment on the pickleball and asked Tarkett Sports to change the plans to reflect the needs expressed by the public.

RAG had made a unanimous recommendation to proceed with this design. During their discussions, they removed many items in an effort to be responsible about the budget, Hobby said, adding that, to his understanding, the pickleball community supported this recommendation.

Scott George of Tarkett Sports echoed Hobby's comment about the strength of public involvement in Peachtree City. He showed a layout of the proposal, with 18 courts, a gathering plaza on the west side, and 50 parking spaces. Stormwater management structures would be on the southwest corner of the site. They had reduced the number of shade structures at RAG's request, down to a total of eight with the idea that more could be added later. He showed a layout that included a playground on the east side, but that was not part of this proposal, just a request from RAG to show what could be done. There was also a shelter house to the north of the playground.

A depiction of a court showed a four-foot dividing fence between courts, shade structures, and an area where sponsorship banners could be placed. Logos or murals could be painted on the courts at an additional cost, George said. There would be paved walkways in between the courts, with drinking fountains at either end.

George showed a breakdown of the costs. The base scope, which included the courts, grading, walkways, stormwater, and lighting, came to about $1.3 million. Other items, such as the canopies, landscaping, benches, and fencing, totaled a little more than $633,000. The initial design charges, already approved by Council, were about $249,000. A few items were still awaiting a final cost, including the fountains, landscaping, and the entrance sign. George mentioned that the City might want to do the landscaping themselves. In total, the project was $2,376,092.05.

He noted that this project was about 13% below what most of their cooperative contracts totaled. There was a 10% contingency, which could be used only with the City's approval. It might be used for something like rock removal when installing the lights or anything the City decided to add during construction and would go back to the City if unused.

Learnard asked Hobby what they would be voting on. Hobby said RAG's recommendation that Council approve moving forward with this project as presented for the total budget number of $2,376,092.05.

Learnard said she was proud of the effort RAG had put into this.

Brown said Peachtree City deserved the best, but she felt this process was rushed because it was election season. She cited the failing hockey rink as an example of a rushed project. The pickleball project was bumped up to a tier one project in the SPLOST list, Brown noted, and two of the people who voted in favor of that were no longer on Council. Now, she went on, they had been hit with a bloated project budget, a rushed timeline, and a proposal that put them into direct competition with private businesses.

Maintenance costs for this facility would be significant, Brown remarked, yet the courts would provide free access for all, even people who did not pay taxes in Peachtree City. Other high maintenance facilities, like the Tennis Center and Kedron pool, charged fees; why was this different? Many people had complained that the proposed location was not convenient.

Brown said a public/private partnership was worth consideration. She also asked why non-resident members of the Pickleball Club had not asked their own local governments to invest in pickleball?

This timeline was too aggressive, designed to force a vote before the election, she remarked. She said she supported exploring better locations, public/private partnerships, and user fees and strongly opposed the vote until after the election in November. There was speculation this project was being used to buy votes, and by delaying action, Brown said they could prove they operated transparently and with fiscal responsibility. Peachtree City deserved thoughtful planning, not political theater, she concluded.

Johnson, looking at the packed house, noted this importance of recreation to Peachtree City's residents, saying it was why many people moved here. She had attended both of the RAG meetings where this proposal was ironed out, not as a participant, but a listener, and said they went through this proposal line by line. She reflected that it was inaccurate to say this was rushed, noting that pickleball players had been asking for this for years. She thanked RAG for their diligence, noting that it was this Council that thought they needed the RAG.

She acknowledged it was a higher cost than what was projected, but the SPLOST, which was the source of funding, had a $7 million contingency fund. A person from the SPLOST committee spoke at a RAG meeting, Johnson related, and he said not allocating enough money was common in a SPLOST because having a larger contingency fund allowed them to allot money where needed.

Regarding location, the Recreation Master Plan pointed out a need for more recreation on the south side. Johnson also said she did not feel that this vote was rushed; it had come when it came, and citizens deserved to see where their elected officials stood on these topics. She then read from recent meeting minutes where Holland had said he supported 18 new courts. Johnson noted that there were still opportunities for public-private partnerships.

Johnson moved to approve Old Agenda item 08-25-7F Pickleball Meade Site Update for the amount of $2,376,092.05. Learnard seconded.

Holland stated he was in favor of 18 courts but was concerned about all the amenities in this proposal. He appreciated RAG's work, he said, but they did not talk about the money. The SPLOST estimated the cost at $770,000, but the actual cost was three times that. Holland said they did have a $7 million contingency but that was for a new fire station on the south side. He did not think pickleball was more important than a fire station. He wanted to satisfy the pickleball players, but safety should be number one.

Holland wanted to scrutinize the amenities included in the pickleball project. Did they need benches initially? Public Works could do some of the items listed as amenities, which would cut costs. He wanted 18 courts but thought they needed to separate the amenities from the courts. They could start on the courts but save the amenities for another year. He proposed they only approve the base scope for $1.3 million and save the $7 million contingency for the fire station. He asked if he could amend the motion, and Meeker said someone would have to withdraw their motion and second. Learnard refused.

Learnard commented that she often took her grandchildren to Newnan with their bikes to use the Pump Track for free. They sometimes visited the Castle Park for free. Peachtree City had a free splash pad, tennis courts, and playgrounds. That's what cities did: provide facilities for people to come and play for free, she stated.

These courts were intended to be free.

The SPLOST committee brought its proposed $67 million project list to Council in September 2022. Council debated one item—bathrooms at Battery Way Park. Because they feared that opposition from neighbors would result in the SPLOST being voted down, Council unanimously decided to substitute the pickleball facility. The SPLOST was voted in resoundingly in 2023. Now, two years later, private businesses had decided to put indoor pickleball courts.

She said this City pickleball project was the result of years of review and planning, and they should ensure it met Peachtree City's standard of uncompromised excellence. It was clear this was what the citizens wanted.

Johnson asked George if they would lose the 13% discount if they proceeded only with the base scope? George said that was correct. There would be additional costs to come back for a second phase. There were several items on the alternate list that should be done initially because it would involve demolition of concrete to come back later. The dividing fences and perimeter gates were examples. The City could certainly do some items, such as the fence top caps and benches. George said grading for the parking lot could be done by the City, but Tarkett would have all the equipment to do it onsite already. He said they could forego parking lot lighting if they wanted.

Johnson mentioned that they had experience with a project where costs were cut, and now the City was having to pay to have it rebuilt. She did not think they should be squabbling over water fountains or benches. Sure, this was a high cost, but that's what it was, Johnson continued.

RAG Chair McDowell explained the list of alternates RAG had recommended was developed in collaboration with citizens. Some items might seem like upgrades, but were necessary, such as the eight-foot fence that would allow novice players to keep their shots on the court. There were no excessive upgrades, she told Council, just what Peachtree City needed to be the best of the best.

Johnson said prices would not be going down and this was least expensive it was ever going to be. They had a 13% discount. She mentioned that shade and a championship court had been removed. The four-foot fences were important for safety. This was what was involved in building a nice facility with a 13% discount, she concluded.

Brown recalled that there was initially discussion about how the City could do a lot of work itself; where was that now? Strickland said they would be paving the parking lot. Holland said he believed Public Works could do a lot more. His suggestion was to send this project to staff and bring it back to the next meeting for a vote.

Johnson mentioned that they would save money by having Tarkett do the grading. She asked Hobby what the City could do. He said if they moved Public Works to this project, that would take away from their everyday tasks, such as mowing. He mentioned Tarkett provided a 10-year warranty on this project, with a 50-year warranty on the concrete. There would be no maintenance at all for 10 years, and he said he had never seen a 50-year warranty on concrete in his career. They could move Public Works to this project, but it would take away from something else, he concluded. They just did not have the staff to do it.

Holland said he was not trying to cut corners and do things cheaply. He was just looking for a better deal.

Brown asked Strickland if using money from the contingency would leave any other projects short? He said he had no concern that SPLOST would run out of money and that they would not be able to complete all the projects, including the fire station. Johnson noted that they were legally obligated to spend all the SPLOST money.

Holland said he was not in favor of doing all the alternates because it was taxpayer dollars they were spending. He was in favor of the courts but was trying to spend their money wisely. Some things might need to be kicked down the road.

Learnard said she believed Holland wanted to know that a project related to public safety would not be compromised, and that was reasonable. He said he felt better after Strickland said that was not a concern. He also understood from Hobby that there was nothing they could pull from the list and have the City complete. Strickland said there were things they could do, but it was a matter of opportunity costs. Holland said they could put off cutting grass to save money on this. He wanted staff to talk to Tarkett and figure out what the City could do.

Learnard said that was what Tarkett had been doing with the RAG for the past few weeks. George said the list was originally $2.7 million, but they had drilled it down to $2.3 million. He also reminded Council that the $2.3 million included about $190,000 in contingency that he hoped the City would not need to use.

Again, Learnard said those were the considerations RAG took on, with staff in the room. They had pared that larger number down and decided paving was all that the City could reasonably do. Hobby assured Holland that they would not touch that contingency unless they ran into rock, which he did not think they would. That would be about $200,000 in savings.

Holland said it made him nervous because he understood the importance of fire stations and having them in strategic sites around the city.

Johnson said she appreciated that Holland wanted to be a good steward of tax dollars. She noted that the alternate list was really not that long. It would cost more money for the City to do the grading. RAG had removed some of the canopies, and George had said it would cost more to add them later. What about parking lot lights? Johnson asked, noting that leaving them off would save $75,000. Hobby said they would have to be added later.

Police Chief Janet Moon stepped up to say that from a crime reduction perspective, parking lot lights were mandatory. This was an area of town that was already very dark and having an unlit parking lot was just an invitation to people who wanted to break into cars. Holland said he was recommending that staff install them, not to omit them.

Public Works Director Jonathan Miller said they did not have the equipment to install the parking lot lights and would have to hire subcontractors. He then said if Public Works did other items off the list, they would not be able to do their normal jobs. They would also have to meet Tarkett's deadlines, and it was difficult when you had multiple hands involved and could delay the project. The paving they could do; the grading, Tarkett should handle. The only thing he saw that could be pulled off was $26,000 for seeding. He said Recreation could do some of the fence top caps, perhaps. Maybe they could pull things out as they went along.

Holland said he respected Miller's opinion. Holland asked George if he could make it a $2 million project. George said it was already well below the normal market cost. He also mentioned the warranties. He said the timing of the year was why they were seeing the numbers they were seeing. Typically, they would not see numbers this low, but they had enjoyed the discussions with the community or staff. George said this was the best deal he could give them. Once things got under way, and Hobby wanted the City to do a few more things, George said he would work with him.

Brown said she was still suffering from sticker shock. She also mentioned that the County was no longer paying Peachtree City for County residents to use City recreation facilities. There were many pickleball players who did not live in Peachtree City, yet Peachtree City was spending its SPLOST money on this. She was reassured that there was adequate funding for other projects. In conclusion, she said she did not want to hear any demands for more recreation facilities to be built. The Recreation Master Plan was a long range plan, and this was a pretty sizable chunk of money.

Holland said he was glad they had gone through this painful process, and Learnard said she was, too. He said he felt like he had gotten the answers he needed.

Johnson wanted to make sure everyone understood each of the costs and how they were justified. Holland said his next battle would be for the fire station. Brown noted that the City would be building the parking lot, and the number of spaces was insufficient. Golf cart parking was needed, too. Holland asked Strickland if he was satisfied, and he said he was.

Learnard called the vote. The motion to approve this project carried unanimously.

Learnard called for a break. The meeting resumed at 9:25 p.m.

B. 07-24-06 Resolution #08212025-OA-A to Adopt FY2026 Operating Budget & CIP

Strickland showed a timeline of the budget process. Council set budget goals at an April 3 work session, he said, and he, Hobby, and Finance Director Kelly Bush met with all department heads during the week of May 5. The proposed budget was sent to Council and released to the public on May 30. The budget was reviewed at a work session on June 5. A special called meeting on the budget was set for June 18, but Council decided it was not needed. A public hearing on the proposed budget and CIP was held on July 11. The adoption was scheduled, but tabled, at the August 21 meeting. Strickland said he needed direction on what to do.

At the August 21 meeting, Brown stated, Strickland had said he would rather cut the budget than use reserve funds, so she had asked him for a specific list of things that could be removed. The first item on that list was the fire training tower at $387,000, followed by a Public Works equipment operator at $87,353; two golf carts for Code Enforcement at $30,000, plus two part-time Code Enforcement officers at $87,105. Also on the list were salaries divided among all departments at $50,611. These cuts added up to $642,069.

Brown said she asked Strickland if this would put them in the position of having a full rollback, and he said he thought that would be sufficient. Brown then moved to amend the proposed budget with the proposed cuts, which would take $642,069 out of it to equal a full rollback of the millage rate for fiscal year 2026. Holland seconded.

Holland wanted everyone to know this was without any cuts in the number of employees. There were no cuts to Police or Fire. All services would continue at the same level. These cuts were extras in the budget, and he said they were not needed for efficient operations of the City. That satisfied his demand at the last meeting for a rollback. He thanked staff for proposing these cuts and Brown for asking for them.

Johnson asked how salaries were cut without staff taking a hit. Strickland said the $642,069 was originally for the employee merit program. The one change between the June 5 budget and the July 11 budget was reallocating those merit funds for these other things. There was about $50,000 left over that they were going to possibly to give one-time awards to employees who had excelled.

Holland said they were not taking away any positions, and Johnson noted they were taking away merit awards.

At the retreat in January, Johnson said, Council asked Strickland to get the budget to them as soon as possible, and he delivered it on May 30, which she had been told was the earliest ever. After the August 21 meeting, she looked back over the June 5 meeting minutes to see what Council had said about this year's budget. Holland had stated he was glad to see new Code Enforcement officers added to the paths, as did Brown. None of this was part of that discussion.

Council was asked if they needed an extra meeting in June to go over the budget, and they unanimously told staff they were fine, Johnson related. She said Strickland offered to meet with Councilmembers individually.

There were two meetings after which changes were made to the budget by the City Manager. She reflected that the City Manager was in a difficult position because of Council dynamics. Out of those two meetings, he decided to reduce salaries by the $642,069. He was asked what he would put back in, and he suggested the fire training tower, the Code Enforcement, and the golf carts. She said Strickland approached her and Learnard and told them what had been decided. She said she asked him if, after those changes, Brown and Holland would support the budget, and his feeling was that they would. She and Learnard agreed that they could support this compromise.

There was also a public hearing on the budget where the only people who came to speak were in favor of it. Then, Johnson continued, the August 21 meeting happened. There was a policy that they did not run the City off of reserves, so this led her to believe that dipping into the reserves was not brought up in those private two meetings.

She said she first saw this list of proposed cuts less than three hours before the start of the meeting, and she did not know how she could be a responsible representative of the citizens by approving something they had not had a chance to weigh in on. There had been ample opportunity for these ideas to have been brought forward. She added that she was not necessarily against these things, but she wanted citizen input before making any changes. She said she could not support Brown's motion because this had not been an open process.

On June 28, 2024, Learnard said she sent an email to Council and the City Manager regarding the budget process. At that time, there were two Council members going through the budget process for the first time. She wrote then that Holland had been having meetings with staff behind closed doors, and that deeply concerned her because this was supposed to be a public process. She had explained how Fayetteville, Newnan, and Tyrone presented their budgets. She could not overstate the importance of public participation.

Seeing this today, Learnard stated, might indicate that this was not a well-thought-out process. Where was the government transparency? Did they need another public hearing? They had had a very responsible process, with agreement from

Council that things were fine. The City Manager had given his best effort in preparing this budget. She presented a clip from the July meeting of Holland saying that living in Peachtree City was a bargain from a tax standpoint. He complimented Strickland for putting the budget together. Learnard said all of these objections had come after all the public meetings.

Holland was right that they should ask all the questions, she stated. That's why they had all the meetings and all the give and take. This year should be the one year in which they should have to have a conversation about rollbacks. Last year they reduced the millage rate from 6.043 to 5.983, and this year they had agreed to maintain that lower millage rate. Because of House Bill 581, the assessments on homesteaded properties were frozen.

Strickland explained assessments were not frozen, but the amount of taxes would be the same as last year. Bush clarified that was because the taxable assessment would remain the same as the previous year. That was effectively a rollback for homesteaders, the Mayor commented.

After all those meetings and input, Learnard said, they could not expect her to vote in favor of a proposal she never saw before that day.

Holland said when he was elected in 2024, he often met with the City Manager when he had questions, and the Mayor did, too. Was that not allowed? He did not want to point fingers when the real point was cutting the budget so everyone would pay less taxes. These cuts were what was recommended by the City Manager. He asked Learnard if she was not supporting the City Manager's recommended budget?

Learnard asked Strickland if the list they had received that day was what he would recommend, and Strickland replied it was not. The list was his response to Brown's and Holland's question regarding what he would cut if they wanted a rollback. He said his proposed budget was what he supported, but if Council decided to roll back the millage rate, these would be his recommendations to cut. If that was Council's decision, they needed to cut things that did not yet exist over existing items.

Johnson asked Strickland which budget he most supported, the original one or the one where compromises were made? Strickland told her he felt the original proposed budget was the best version.

A month ago, Brown said she and Holland suggested they take money from the reserves and use it to offset what they would have to levy in taxes. That was defeated, and they were told not to use reserves for budget, even though it would be a one-time thing. She had been emailing everyone over the past few weeks regarding potential cuts. Strickland had said he had rather cut the budget than use reserves, and this was the list of cuts he came up with, Brown continued.

The City Manager felt the original was the best version, Johnson stated, so that was the budget she wanted, but she was willing to cut the reserves if done responsibly. She understood that the City Manager had promised the fire training tower to the Fire Department for quite a while. If it was built, it would help maintain the ISO rating of 1, which would lower homeowners' insurance premiums for citizens. She suggested they go back to the original June 5 budget but take the money for the fire tower from the reserves. Citizens would be saving money on fire insurance. Learnard said she could support that. Johnson mentioned that this was a one-time expense, which was how the reserves were supposed to be used. If they went back to the June 5 budget, staff would get their merit increases.

Johnson said there were benefits to having the reserves. They were there for worst-case scenarios, but they could give some back to the citizens in a responsible manner, such as a fire tower.

If they wanted to talk about surprises, Holland said he would like to recall in 2023 when Johnson and Learnard "sprung" ordinance 1216 on the Council. That ordinance limited the ability of citizens and Council to place items on the agenda. He said he was given no time to research it. At least today, they got three hours to look at the list.

Johnson said she felt like this was a tangent, and they were losing focus. However, she wanted to clarify her portion of that. She said she proposed an amendment to 1216 and remembered calling Holland before the meeting. Also, she agreed at the last meeting that they should revisit this. She recalled that Holland told her during the phone call that he thought he could support her amendment. When she called Brown, Brown told her she would speak about First Amendment rights but did not offer support.

Brown returned the discussion to the budget, saying the money they were talking about was supposed to be a merit pay program for staff that they had cut into component parts. There were issues with some of them. They had learned that a bigger Police presence was what was needed on the paths, not more Code Enforcement officers. So they could remove the two part-time Code Enforcement and their golf carts. The Public Works operator was supposed to be a second street sweeper employee. There was already a fire training tower in Fayette County, so there could be a cooperative agreement to continue its use by Peachtree City. The remaining $50,000 was for merit pay at the City Manager's discretion, Brown explained.

She said this started with a $650,000 merit pay program on top of a $500,000 cost of living adjustment (COLA). Brown said guaranteed pay raises year after year were not sustainable.

Strickland corrected her, noting that they did not currently have a street sweeper operator in Public Works.

Johnson asked if the merit was year after year, and Strickland said it was because it was a salary increase. They had done awards in 2023, but this year they did salaries and had proposed the same thing for next year.

None of this was unreasonable, Learnard said, and asked if they could pass the original proposed budget and continue the conversations. She noted that a budget was just a plan or a forecast for the coming year. It did not bind them to all of these individual things.

What they were doing now was not fair to staff, Learnard said, pointing out that employees were worried about their paychecks. Brown scoffed at that, but Strickland verified that he had had a lot of questions from staff. Learnard again said she would be happy to have these discussions later if they could just pass the original budget.

There was nothing on the list that was not reasonable, the Mayor continued, and Holland said in that case they should pass the amended version. They were talking about less than 1% of the budget. He said they could have another public meeting if transparency was an issue. He said he had rather approve an amended budget or postpone it and have another meeting.

Brown said another meeting was not necessary. This was a small amount of money, but it would put them in a situation to have a full rollback, which was her goal. The biggest concession she was willing to make was to add the street sweeper back into the budget.

Learnard asked if they could pass the budget and make these changes as amendments, but Holland said he wanted them to be part of the budget. Learnard said she did not see why they could not have had these discussions over the past few months. Holland said he had talked with her many times about the reserves. Learnard agreed they had discussed the reserves but pointed out that Holland said he approved of the budget when initially presented with it. Brown added that she had never said that.

The motion had been to approve the budget with the listed changes. It was denied by a 2-2 vote, with Brown and Holland voting in favor, Johnson and Learnard against.

Learnard asked Meeker if they needed to pass a continuing resolution. He said it would need to be passed before October 1 so spending could continue.

Brown made an amended motion to take out everything that was proposed except the Public Works equipment operator. Holland seconded.

Brown explained this would cut the budget by about $550,000. Learnard asked her why she opposed the fire training tower. Brown said they might have the money later in the year, and there were other alternatives.

Johnson said the lack of transparency was a roadblock for her. Brown said this was the small tweak that would allow for a rollback. Holland said it was a compromise instead of using the reserves.

There were a lot of opinions in the community about how the August 21 meeting went, Johnson continued, and some people might want to express their opinions about any changes. There was a lot of emotion out there. She said she understood why they might want to pass a budget now, but part of the process was citizen input. Holland said he agreed and had no problem with having another meeting.

Brown remarked that she got the numbers on pickleball less that a week prior, but they went ahead and had a vote. What they were looking at tonight amounted to minor changes. The fire training tower could come out of reserves, but Holland said if first needed to come out of the budget.

Johnson asked about the process of amending the proposed budget, and Strickland said it was within Council's rights to suggest amendments. She again wondered why they were making changes after they told citizens they were okay with it, but Holland said he had changed his mind, like he had done after the pickleball discussion. This was not a major change in the budget.

Learnard asked Strickland about the $50,000. Strickland said that what remained of the salary changes and would enable him to give one-time awards to employees who excelled.

Learnard stated that it was 100% objectionable how this was handled, but she also wanted a budget.

Brown stated that one of her biggest objections last year was to the merit pay and how it was crafted. That needed to be fixed, but that was a separate issue.

Brown told the Mayor she was willing to leave a small amount of money to be used as merit awards. Brown said they could cut the two Code Enforcement officers, the carts, and the fire training tower, keeping the Public Works equipment operator at $87,353 and the $50,611 for salaries. That was about $130,000, leaving a cut of about $500,000, which should equal what was needed for a rollback. Learnard said she could live with that.

Strickland said that was not guaranteed because they did not yet have the digest from the County. He said they usually estimated the tax digest initially and had been within 1% the past two years.

Learnard remarked that she could agree with the motion, and it was critical that they pass a budget.

Brown moved to cut the fire training tower at $387,000, the two Code Enforcement carts for $30,000, the two Code Enforcement part-time salaries in the amount of $87,105. Meeker corrected her phrasing, saying she wanted to approve the budget as presented with the following changes: elimination of the fire training tower at $387,000, removal of the two Code Enforcement carts for $30,000, and removal of the two Code Enforcement part-time salaries in the amount of $87,105. Strickland thought it should say it would be balanced with a commensurate reduction in property tax revenue in order to have a balanced budget. Brown said so moved. Learnard seconded.

Johnson asked Strickland for his opinion, and Brown noted that he worked at the pleasure of Council, and Strickland agreed. Johnson said she hoped they could look at the fire training tower in the future, and Brown agreed that there would be opportunities. Learnard said she would hold her to that.

The Mayor called for a vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

C. 04-02-05 FY2026 Fee Schedule

Brown moved to approve New Agenda item 04-02-05, FY2026 Fee Schedule. Johnson seconded.

Holland remarked that the County would no longer pay Peachtree City to use their facilities, and he hoped the City Manager had raised the fees enough to compensate for that loss. Strickland said it all came down to usage and would be evaluated after this first year. He intended to review the fee schedule every year, and it could be adjusted.

Motion carried unanimously.

Public Hearings

None

Council/Staff Topics

A. Council Work Session Temporary Time Change Due to Construction (December 2025 - June 2026)

Collins recalled that at the last work session, the City Engineer mentioned that morning work sessions would be moved to Thursday nights due to construction at City Hall. This would begin with the December work session. Strickland said they usually had just one meeting in December.

B. Low Speed Vehicles

Holland said the TAG had been discussing low-speed vehicles (LSVs), which State law said could only be used on the roads. He wanted action taken soon to keep them off the paths. They had to be registered for the street.

Meeker said TAG was working on some ordinance changes. TAG Chairman Schultz said opinions were split. They would take it up again when the new TAG members joined.

C. Moratorium on multi-family housing

Brown proposed they adopt a moratorium on rezoning for multi-family housing, as had been done in the past. Meeker said it would have to go to the Planning Commission, which Brown said she understood. She moved to place this on the Council agenda for discussion at the October 2 work session. Holland seconded.

Johnson asked about issues that could arise during a long-term moratorium. He said in Peachtree City it was perfunctorily reviewed every year without any real debate. There were ways to achieve goals without having a moratorium, such as by eliminating certain zoning classifications. You could also do an inventory of housing needs, such as one that showed the needed for over-55 housing and was later used in a lawsuit against the City. Meeker said his concern was letting a moratorium just drag on without any supporting data.

Brown said she wanted to discuss this openly, and Johnson said she would be happy to discuss it.

Learnard said she believed they stopped doing the moratorium because the same Council that imposed it also had the right to lift it if there was a project they wanted to consider.

Brown said putting a moratorium in place would keep staff from spending time on requests they had no intention of approving. Meeker said if that was their desire, they should get certain things out of the zoning ordinance.

Motion carried unanimously.

Police Patrols

Brown also said she wanted the Police to conduct more rigorous monitoring on the path system.

Advisory Group Holdovers

Meeker referred back to discussion earlier in the meeting regarding advisory group members retaining their seats. He said he had been researching the matter, and, unless something was stated in the enabling document, the incumbent could remain until a successor was appointed.

Brown said they needed to address the stopping and starting times of the terms for these groups. It should be near the beginning of a Council term. Meeker said he would be bringing that up in a few weeks regarding the Public Facilities Authority.

Executive Session

Adjourn

There being no further business, Holland moved to adjourn at 10;37 p.m. Brown seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Martha Barksdale, Recording Secretary

Kim Learnard, Mayor