



City of Naples

City Council Chamber
735 Eighth Street South
Naples, Florida 34102

City Council Workshop Meeting – August 18, 2025 – 8:31 a.m.

It is noted for the record that all: 1) documentation electronically appended hereto is also contained in the file for this meeting with the City Clerk's Office; 2) experts who testified during quasi-judicial hearings were accepted as qualified to do so in their respective fields of expertise.

1. CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL

City Council Members Present

Teresa Heitmann, Mayor
Terry Hutchison, Vice Mayor

Berne Barton
Ray Christman
Bill Kramer
Linda Penniman
Beth Petrunoff

Staff Present:

Gary Young, City Manager
Stefan Massol, Finance Director
Ben Copeland, Budget & Cap. Projects Mgr.
Robert Middleton, Public Works Director
Stephen Beckman, Building Services Dir.
Ciro Dominguez, Police Chief
Phillip Pendleton, Fire Chief
Erica Martin, Planning Director

Matthew McConnell, City Attorney
Chad Merritt, Community Services Director
Andrew Hunter, Information Tech. Services Dir.
Charlotte Lowell, Human Resources Director
Patricia Rambosk, City Clerk
Michael Murawski, Ethics Commission
Executive Director
Ali Duran, Executive Assistant

2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Vice Mayor Hutchison led in the Pledge of Allegiance.

3. SET AGENDA (add or remove items)

MOTION by Penniman to SET AGENDA; seconded by Petrunoff and unanimously carried, all members present and voting (Barton-yes, Christman-yes, Hutchison-yes, Kramer-yes, Penniman-yes, Petrunoff-yes, Heitmann-yes).

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5.A. Discussion and Review of the Proposed FY 2025-26 Operating and Capital Budget.

City Manager Gary Young confirmed that the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–26 budget maintains the millage rate of 1.23 with no increase. Finance Director Stefan Massol utilized an electronic presentation highlighting projected revenues of \$203 million, up \$16.32 million from the previous year, and noted no new debt except a \$27 million beach outfall project scheduled early in FY 2025–26.

Finance Director Stefan Massol stated that charges for services represent 40.4 percent of revenues, with ad valorem and other taxes about one-third. He noted that expenditures are budgeted at \$236.8 million, an increase of \$28 million, including \$61 million in capital projects

such as the Cambier Park playground replacement, seawall reconstruction, stormwater improvements, and the City Dock fuel tank replacement.

Finance Director Massol explained that Naples receives fourteen cents of every property tax dollar, while the School District receives forty-eight cents and Collier County thirty-six cents. He added that the maximum millage remains at 1.23 mills, with a rollback rate of 1.1658 mills. He said pension funds remain well supported, Police at 84.1 percent, Fire at 89.6 percent, and General at 85.6 percent, with an additional \$2.46 million above actuarial requirements budgeted to reduce liabilities.

Finance Director Massol referenced \$4.5 million in seawall reconstruction funding for FY 2025–26 and \$3.2 million in FY 2026–27, partially offset by a \$3.75 million state appropriation. He stated that a \$2.69 million reduction to the General Fund balance is projected. Council Member Christman noted the 1.23 millage rate is the fourth lowest in Florida for cities over 5,000 population, crediting past fiscal management for low debt and budget flexibility.

Public Works

Ben Copeland, Budget and Capital Projects Manager, used an electronic presentation to review the five funds in the Public Works Department totaling \$88 million, reflecting increases in the Water-Sewer Fund and stormwater projects.

Manager Copeland stated that the Streets Fund totals just under \$6 million, including the Gordon Drive intersection improvements and an alleyway project north of Central Avenue. Manager Copeland explained that operating expenses decreased by \$456,000 due to reduced resurfacing, while personnel, administration, and road repair costs increased. In response to Council Member Petrunoff, Public Works Director Robert Middleton explained that projects are prioritized through the Pavement Management Plan, which is scheduled to be presented at the September 3, 2025 Regular City Council meeting.

Manager Copeland reported that the Water and Sewer Fund totals nearly \$54 million, an increase of \$5.4 million, with \$18.75 million in capital projects. Manager Copeland stated that revenues include \$22 million from water and \$8.8 million from sewer, reflecting a 2.2 percent Consumer Price Index (CPI) adjustment. Manager Copeland presented a list of capital projects, including chlorine gas conversion, wellfield replacements, transmission mains, and SCADA fiber optic upgrades. In response to Council Member Penniman, Director Middleton confirmed that a 54-inch pipe near Park Shore had been cleaned and lined with a backflow preventer to be installed within two weeks. Manager Copeland reported that \$1.6 million is budgeted for stormwater improvements, up from \$1.1 million, with 60 to 70 percent dedicated to inspection and cleaning.

Council Member Penniman emphasized the need for ongoing outfall cleaning. Vice Mayor Hutchison emphasized the need to identify costs and frequency of cleanings. Council Member Barton suggested researching barnacle-resistant materials.

In response to Council Member Petrunoff, City Manager Gary Young explained the safeguards now in place addressing the previous misuse with purchasing cards.

Manager Copeland reported that the Solid Waste Fund totals \$10.3 million, a decrease of \$500,000, with revenues projected to increase \$252,000 from the 2.2 percent CPI adjustment. Manager Copeland stated that the budget includes \$1.1 million in capital for two refuse trucks and confirmed staffing remains at 29 positions.

Manager Copeland reported that the Stormwater Fund totals \$14.7 million, an increase of \$5.8 million, with \$7.8 million in capital projects. Manager Copeland explained that \$6.5 million for a multi-basin stormwater design was moved to the FY 2025–26 budget as well as street sweeper replacement. Council Member Christman noted that Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) funding for River Park and Lake Park stormwater projects will be discussed at the August 28, 2025 CRA meeting.

Manager Copeland concluded by reporting that the Equipment Services Fund totals \$3.1 million, a decrease of \$1.5 million, with capital purchases including a forklift, vehicle lift, lube system replacement, and staffing for ten positions.

Building

Building Services Director Stephen Beckman, using an electronic presentation, explained that the department is funded entirely by permit fees through a special revenue fund, with spending limited to \$6 million, the four-year average of revenues.

Director Beckman stated that \$1 million per year is reserved for a future building and that activity remains strong with new single-family, multifamily, and commercial redevelopment projects underway. Director Beckman reported that the Building Fund is projected to decrease by \$867,000, with reserves used for space needs evaluations, preliminary design, and technology enhancements.

Director Beckman explained that personnel services will increase by 13.5 percent, or \$587,000, though staffing levels remain unchanged, and that expenses will rise by 4.57 percent, or \$391,000, due to wage adjustments, software upgrades, and operating costs. Director Beckman reported that capital projects include two vehicle replacements and partial funding for an elevator.

In response to Mayor Heitmann, Director Beckman confirmed that a detailed needs assessment will be conducted for a future building project, and that technology improvements include Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration for the building permitting process. Director Beckman stated that AI will begin with sufficiency checks on applications, phased in over one to two years through CityView system enhancements.

In response to Council Member Barton, Director Beckman reported six to seven vacancies, including permit technicians and licensed staff, with professional services funds supplementing until positions are filled. In response to Council Member Petrunoff, Director Beckman stated that no slowdown is observed with residential permitting and that statutory deadlines are being met or exceeded through CityView improvements.

Director Beckman confirmed that developer roundtables will be held twice yearly and that monthly meetings with the Collier Building Industry Association continue. Vice Mayor Hutchison raised concerns regarding AI use and emphasized the need for legal guidance and to develop a formal policy. Assistant City Attorney Andrew Dickman agreed, stating AI records must be preserved under public records law. Director Beckman clarified that AI is limited to closed systems using City codes and that outputs will be treated as public records.

Council Member Christman asked about Senate Bill 1080 impacts and requested a written update on flood panel permits. Director Beckman acknowledged a strong demand for flood panel permits and expressed the need for statewide guidance. City Manager Gary Young added that flood panel issues also arise in planning reviews and may require future Code changes.

City Manager Young further observed that long project delays may justify a policy requiring new submittals after prolonged inactivity. Council Member Barton suggested that general contractors be included in recurring developer meetings. Director Beckman confirmed that the Planning Department engages architects while the Building Department engages contractors and both are committed to share schedules.

Director Beckman reported projected revenues of \$8.09 million against \$8.96 million in expenses, emphasizing that permit fees are designed to cover costs. City Manager Young added that the last across-the-board fee increase was in 2018, with base rates unchanged since 2008, and suggested reviewing fee structures in the coming year.

Police

Police Chief Ciro Dominguez reported that the department is fully staffed for the first time in decades, with two additional hires starting in October. Chief Dominguez stated that the department maintains a waiting list of applicants and emphasized that competitive pay has made Naples a regional leader in recruitment and retention.

Chief Dominguez, using an electronic presentation, explained that the FY 2025–26 budget aligns with the Police Department’s 2029 strategic plan, focusing on talent development, technology, and succession planning. He emphasized that turnover is limited to retirements and that employees are engaged. He stated that departmental branding will be reinforced through standardized police vehicles. He said the department has 116 employees and highlighted the operational theme of “urgency and ownership.”

Chief Dominguez announced the creation of a two-person Cybercrimes Unit, expansion of community policing with a dedicated sergeant, and an increase in in-service training from 40 to over 100 hours annually. He stated that personnel costs total \$20.7 million and represent the majority of increases. He noted that operating costs have risen incrementally and that capital projects include license plate readers, AEDs, virtual reality training, drones, and vehicles.

In response to Council Member Petrunoff, Chief Dominguez confirmed that the budget includes two unmarked vehicles and that the Criminal Investigations Division will be divided into General Investigations, Cybercrimes, and Special Investigations. He reported that the department has an emotional support and bomb-sniffing dog and that a drug-sniffing dog may be added in the future at an estimated cost of \$300,000. He stated that overtime represents about four percent of personnel costs and is required for emergencies, illnesses, and some special events.

Mayor Heitmann emphasized tracking manpower and costs for special events. In response to Council Member Penniman, Chief Dominguez explained that vehicles serve as mobile offices and that each officer is assigned a dedicated unit.

In response to Vice Mayor Hutchison, City Manager Gary Young explained that revenue generated from the \$900,000 state insurance tax offsets pensions under the union agreement and is shown as both a revenue and expense. Vice Mayor Hutchison asked about AI and cybercrime staffing. Chief Dominguez responded that specialized units would address these needs and stressed the importance of staying ahead of technological change. Vice Mayor Hutchison urged proactive staffing, citing challenges such as autonomous vehicles.

Vice Mayor Hutchison asked how the Police Department is funded. City Manager Young replied that property taxes are the main source, and he warned that pending legislation could reduce revenues in 2027. He explained that many police expenses are essential, not discretionary. Chief Dominguez agreed, stating that technology upgrades require continual investment.

City Manager Young clarified that capital improvements are funded through the public service tax. In response to Mayor Heitmann, Chief Dominguez confirmed that no funding is included for a new police station, explaining that current priorities are staffing, training, and technology, and that fire facilities will take precedence.

Recess: 11:18 a.m. to 11:33 a.m. It is noted for the record that the same Council Members were present when the meeting reconvened.

Fire

Fire Chief Phillip Pennington reported on accomplishments from the prior year, including the completion of a five-year strategic plan, deployment of new portable radios, creation of two command staff positions (Logistics Chief and EMS Training Chief), and an increase of two personnel per shift (six new firefighters). The department also implemented a maintenance program for bunker gear in compliance with NFPA 1851 and selected a design and architecture firm for the new Fire Station 2. Chief Pennington reported that the proposed FY 2025–26 Fire Rescue budget totals \$18.9 million, an increase of \$2.6 million (16%) over the prior year. He added that personnel services account for more than \$17 million of the budget, while operating expenses are \$1.6 million, an increase of approximately \$179,000 due to inflation. He added that non-operating expenses decreased slightly by \$500.

Chief Pennington noted that capital items include two chest compression devices and replacement of personal protective equipment, both reclassified from operating to CIP for accuracy.

Planning

Planning Director Erica Martin utilized an electronic presentation to review the FY 2025–26 Planning Department budget noting a net decrease of \$414,697. Director Martin explained that the reduction is primarily due to \$450,000 in professional services for the Comprehensive Plan, which had been funded in the prior year.

Director Martin stated that 80 percent of the budget is for personnel, with minor increases in printing, equipment rental, and CityView software costs. Director Martin reported that a record number of mailed notices were sent in the past year and explained that costs are recovered through chargebacks, though staff workload is high. Director Martin noted that new state law allows posting of legal notices on County websites instead of newspapers, which should reduce costs if implemented by the City.

Director Martin announced that a Senior Planner will begin September 8, and that recruitments are underway for a Planner II, Deputy Director, and Zoning Plans Reviewer. She explained that Planning reviews permits for zoning compliance, with larger projects handled by planners and routine checks by the Zoning Plans Reviewer. She reported that as of June 30, approximately 1,100 surveys had been reviewed in addition to permits and petitions.

Director Martin stated that the Comprehensive Plan Update remains in Phase 1 and that Phase 2 deliverables are expected soon. She reported that application fee increases took effect in April 2025 and that revenue impacts will be reviewed later. She also announced that Jeff Brammer has been appointed Long-Range Senior Planner and will lead the Comprehensive Plan update.

In response to Council Member Barton, Director Martin clarified that Planning staff prepare notices in-house while a vendor does the mailing, and outsourcing options may be considered to reduce workload. Council Member Christman observed that Planning remains thinly staffed and faces recruitment challenges due to higher private sector pay. Director Martin acknowledged the difficulty of retention but noted that a slowdown in new petitions has provided time to focus on recruitment.

Council Member Kramer expressed concern that with three vacancies out of eight positions, staffing is unsustainable. Director Martin reported that a part-time temporary staff member has been added and that third-party support may also be pursued. Council Members discussed shifting some noticing responsibilities to petitioners, a practice, Director Martin confirmed, is used in other jurisdictions.

Vice Mayor Hutchison asked about staffing responsibilities. Director Martin responded that Senior Planners manage large projects from design review through entitlements, while smaller items such as façade changes are handled administratively. Director Martin added that outdoor dining requests are infrequent and processed with certificates if parameters are met. In response to Vice Mayor Hutchison, Director Martin stated that additional major initiatives would strain the department, but staff would continue to meet demands.

Council Member Penniman asked about qualifications for a Planner II. In response, Director Martin explained that the role requires a bachelor's degree and about five years of planning experience. She clarified that survey reviews are courtesy checks of builder-submitted surveys to verify compliance before construction proceeds.

Community Services

Community Services Director Chad Merritt utilized an electronic presentation to review the FY 2025–26 budget. Director Merritt said that general fund revenue is projected at \$1.2 million, a 5.3 percent decrease, due largely to adjustments following the City's first full year managing the Norris Center. He outlined goals to stabilize and grow revenue, including fee increases (last adjusted in 2019), restructuring athletic contracts, revising the Kids Camp model, and expanding in-house programming. He added that strategies also include facility improvements, sponsorship changes, grants, and ensuring privately organized events cover 100 percent of costs.

Director Merritt stated that the general fund budget is \$14.5 million, with \$5.6 million for Parks and Parkways, \$3.3 million for Facilities Maintenance, \$4.4 million for Recreation, and \$1.1 million for Administration. He explained that increases were largely driven by personnel adjustments and higher contracted services, especially tree trimming, new facility maintenance, and utility costs. He highlighted that the Dog Park expenses were separated for transparency, totaling \$77,000, and noted that a 2010 resolution requires user fees if donations are insufficient. He reported that the Community Services Advisory Board recommended that the City cover expenses through the general fund.

In response to Mayor Teresa Heitmann, Director Merritt explained that \$50,000 for Fifth Avenue holiday lighting was shifted from the CRA to the general fund after it was deemed ineligible for CRA funding. Mayor Heitmann suggested that the Fifth Avenue Business Improvement District (FASBID) should fund decorations, while City Manager Gary Young responded that further review was needed. City Manager Young emphasized that, in principle, such commercial enhancements should be CRA-funded.

Director Merritt reported that the Baker Park's budget increased to \$347,000, including staffing and Dog Park expenses. He explained that the Naples Preserve increased 11 percent to \$157,000 for tree thinning and maintenance, while Cambier Park decreased slightly after adjustments from Norris Center operations. He highlighted that River Park and Anthony Park increased to just over \$1 million due to personnel increases.

Council Member Christman asked how small public spaces were funded. In response, Director Merritt responded that pocket parks and linear parks are covered through Parks and Parkways contracts, with replacements drawn from operating funds.

City Manager Young added context on Dog Park donations, noting the original fund once held \$100,000 but is now depleted, with general fund support required. Mayor Heitmann questioned the frequency of cleaning the grounds, and Director Merritt explained that pressure washing occurs three times a year, and that daily cleaning would be cost-prohibitive.

Director Merritt then reported on the Beach Fund, budgeted at \$2.1 million, with \$1.5 million for maintenance. He noted that Lowdermilk Park increased to \$531,000 for repairs, Naples Pier was held at \$107,768 to maintain flexibility, and City Dock revenue is projected at \$3.5 million, led by fuel sales. He reported that overtime remains significant, and a dock keeper position may be required. City Manager Young clarified that the Dock operates as an enterprise fund, with loan payments ahead of schedule despite upcoming capital costs for fuel tank replacement.

Council Member Barton asked about the fuel tank project, and Director Merritt explained that work will begin after October 1st if approved in the CIP. Mayor Heitmann asked why fuel sales appeared lower. In response, Director Merritt clarified that fluctuations reflect fuel prices, not volume.

Director Merritt concluded with the Arthur L. Allen Tennis Center, reporting just over \$1 million in revenue and expenses. Director Merritt noted that the facility received a national award, that memberships and lessons are trending upward, and courts are maintained on a set resurfacing cycle. Vice Mayor Hutchison observed that revenue and expenses were nearly balanced, and Director Merritt responded that the budget remains steady despite prior cuts.

Recess: 1:08 p.m. to 1:335 p.m. It is noted for the record that the same Council Members were present when the meeting reconvened.

Technology Services

Information Technology Services Director Andrew Hunter utilized an electronic presentation to outline departmental responsibilities, including maintaining workstations, audiovisual systems, two data centers, the City's fiber optic network, and mobile connectivity for public safety integrated with Collier County.

Director Hunter stated that the proposed FY 2025–26 Technology Services budget is \$4,747,000, a 12 percent (\$513,000) increase over the prior year. Director Hunter explained that the increase is driven by \$147,000 in personnel services, reflecting the addition of a Senior Network Specialist and the full-year cost of a Public Safety Technician.

Director Hunter stated that \$189,000 of the increase is due to software maintenance, largely from transferring licensing costs from other departments for centralized management. He emphasized this shift is not a net new cost but standardizes licensing. He added that other increases include proactive IT monitoring tools, expanded Microsoft licensing to support Human Resources initiatives, and a \$33,000 annual rise in licensing fees.

Director Hunter reported that non-discretionary charges, including transportation, insurance, and administrative allocations, account for \$57,645 of the increase. He noted that TV and video production expenses rose slightly, while professional services decreased as costs were shifted into software maintenance.

Director Hunter confirmed that the IT Department has ten authorized positions and is fully staffed. He reiterated that the overall budget increase of \$513,000 is primarily personnel and consolidated software licensing.

In response to Mayor Heitmann, Director Hunter reported that new air conditioning and uninterruptible power supply units performed successfully during recent power outages, keeping IT systems online with minimal disruption.

In response to Vice Mayor Hutchison, Director Hunter acknowledged concerns about reliance on semiconductors from Taiwan and agreed staff would assess risks and explore alternative supply options to safeguard City operations.

Human Resources

Human Resources Director Charlotte Lowell utilized an electronic presentation to overview the FY 2025–26 budget, reporting General Fund expenses of \$1,069,609, a 5.7 percent increase supporting six positions. She stated that primary costs include professional services, medical services, technology agreements, and training.

Director Lowell reported that the Risk Management Fund totals \$5,289,051, a 0.2 percent decrease, with one staff member assigned. Director Lowell added that unrestricted net assets are projected at \$6.39 million by FY 2026.

Director Lowell stated that the Employee Benefits Fund is proposed at \$10.4 million, a 5 percent increase due to higher health and prescription claims. Director Lowell highlighted that employee premiums will not rise for a fourth consecutive year, and the Health Reimbursement Account will continue.

Mayor Heitmann thanked Director Lowell for her work and emphasized the need to keep filling vacancies. Director Lowell responded that attrition has dropped from 20 percent in 2022 to 8 percent this year.

Council Member Christman congratulated the Human Resources department for reducing vacancies but stressed the need to focus on difficult-to-fill vacancies. Vice Mayor Hutchison praised progress and suggested recruiting from other jurisdictions. Council Member Petrunoff urged expanding regional recruitment and considering outsourcing.

Director Lowell acknowledged challenges in niche fields and noted creative recruitment efforts, citing Planning Director Erica Martin's success in hiring a senior planner. Director Lowell added that pay adjustments and reclassified positions have improved competitiveness, though some maintenance and utility roles remain difficult to fill. Council Members encouraged continued flexibility, career path development, and regional recruitment. Director Lowell closed by reaffirming HR's focus on retention and collaboration with departments.

Mayor and City Council / City Manager

City Manager Gary Young presented the FY 2025–26 Mayor and City Council budget, reporting a \$5,771 net decrease from last year, though \$4,500 above projected actuals. City Manager Young explained that operational expenses remain consistent.

City Manager Young noted that the City Manager’s Department, including Code Compliance and Purchasing, totals \$2,261,000.

Finance

Finance Director Stefan Massol reported that the Finance Department operates across four funds: General, Water/Sewer, Beach, and Solid Waste. He stated that most costs lie in the General Fund, with 11.5 positions, including a recently added Senior Accountant.

Finance Director Massol explained that consolidating customer service has improved efficiency, including the addition of a person dedicated to issuing beach parking permits. He reported that personnel costs reflect negotiated increases and the new position, while operating expenses remain stable.

Finance Director Massol stated that the Beach Fund excludes last year’s major encumbered Pier costs. He reported modest increases in services, offset by lower interdepartmental charges, with Pier bond debt payments included. He added that parking ticket revenues are down due to beach closures, but TDC funding, state grants, and FEMA reimbursements, estimated near \$10 million, will strengthen balances.

Council Member Christman asked about staffing allocations across funds. Finance Director Massol explained that the Stormwater Department has not historically shared those costs but water/sewer demands justify higher allocations. City Manager Young explained that the stormwater fund pays a \$40,000 administrative fee to help share costs fairly across all funds.

City Clerk

City Clerk Patricia Rambosk presented the FY 2025–26 Clerk’s Office budget, reporting a 9.1 percent increase attributed entirely to personnel services. She explained that revenues included \$2,700 from public records fees, \$8,000 from the Ethics Commission, and \$3,000 in reimbursements for petitioner advertising costs and recording expenses. In addition, Clerk Rambosk stated that \$80,000 was returned to the General Fund, as the funds were allocated for a position requiring Laserfiche experience which is now proposed for reclassification as an Executive Assistant.

City Clerk Rambosk announced the launch of the upgraded Granicus software, Swagit, which introduces automatic indexing, closed captioning, searchable video archives, and cross-linking of meeting documents. She demonstrated a forthcoming transcript search feature that will allow users to locate highlighted terms within meeting videos, with printed transcripts also available.

City Clerk Rambosk highlighted that the total annual meeting hours clerked of 475 have decreased by about 100 hours over the past five years but are still 100 hours higher than years prior to 2022. Clerk Rambosk overviewed public records requests, utilizing JustFOIA to streamline the process, and projected that the City expects approximately 4,300 this year and 4,600 next year requiring staff time of employees in the Clerk’s Office of 2,122 to 2,700 hours. Regarding goals for the next fiscal year, Clerk Rambosk overviewed the upcoming election preparations for the February 3, 2026 General Election; records management initiatives to focus on expanding digitization, improving searchability, streamlining storage, and strengthening policy and training; implementing electronic publication of legal notices that is expected to result in cost savings of up to \$80,000 annually; updating the City’s records policy, and continuing quarterly training for records coordinators.

In response to Council Member Petrunoff, City Clerk Rambosk stated that the Swagit transition will occur very soon, possibly within the week, and emphasized that the City is ahead of most cities with technology advancements.

City Attorney

City Attorney Matthew McConnell presented the FY 2025–26 budget, noting that the City Attorney's Office now includes four other attorneys besides himself; Assistant City Attorneys Andrew Dickman and Ralph Brooks, Attorney Odie Dickman, and Attorney Sharon Linsner, who manages procurement and purchasing. He also recognized Legal Coordinator Maureen Taylor, whose role is being expanded toward paralegal functions.

City Attorney McConnell reported that his office has implemented a variety of standardized contract templates. These templates, he asserted, have significantly reduced review time and streamlined agenda preparation.

City Attorney McConnell then explained the process for requesting legal services which all departments use. He said that the Office maintains an Excel spreadsheet of the pending and completed requests, which will be shared with the City Council. He noted that legal requests such as code interpretation and planning inquiries remain a large portion of the daily workload.

City Attorney McConnell stated that litigation management continues, with some inherited cases resolved and new cases initiated. He reminded Council Members that an amendment to the contract for legal services added responsibilities for Comprehensive Plan matters and certain risk management cases.

Regarding the budget, City Attorney McConnell noted that in May the adopted amount was increased by \$300,000 to \$960,000. He said current estimated actuals are \$832,000, not including pending invoices. In addition, he clarified that while \$234,000 was shown under “other legal services,” his office currently calculates that amount to be \$102,109. He explained that by handling matters such as small wireless facility applications in-house, reliance on outside counsel has been reduced, resulting in cost savings and quicker turnaround. He recommended maintaining the \$960,000 allocation but reducing the \$150,000 itemized for outside legal services.

In response to Council Member Petrunoff, Attorney McConnell stated that no funds are specifically budgeted for potential home rule litigation, but Council could authorize supplemental funding if needed. He expressed confidence that current budgeted levels are adequate to support City Council decisions. City Manager Gary Young added that any necessary mid-year changes could be accommodated and emphasized that the General Fund remains on track to maintain a \$20 million fund balance.

Ethics Commission

Executive Director of the Ethics Commission Mike Murawski utilized an electronic presentation to review the Commission's proposed FY 2025–26 budget of \$264,432, a 1.9 percent increase from the prior year but still below the prior three years. He attributed the increase to salary and benefits for the Commission's sole employee. He reported continued payments of \$3,000 per month for general counsel, \$8,000 annually to the Clerk's Office for meeting support, and the addition of a lobbying line item to address home rule legislation. He noted the investigative account was reduced to \$15,000 due to limited complaint activity.

Executive Director Murawski stated that the Commission held three meetings and delivered four live training sessions, with 248 employees completing online training. He reported nearly full compliance among City employees, 80 percent compliance for board and committee members, and 64 percent for lobbyists. He emphasized that no complaints were filed in 2025. He highlighted accomplishments such as amendments to the ethics code, expanded training for boards, participation with Collier County Schools' Get to Know Your Local Government program, and a planned January 2026 ethics event with local universities.

Council Member Christman reported that he had completed both local and state ethics training with Director Murawski and recommended the in-person format to colleagues. Vice Mayor Hutchison commended the addition of lobbying expenses and requested training for the Naples Youth Council, while also encouraging exploration of artificial intelligence and ethics.

[Agenda Memorandum](#)
[FY2025-26 Proposed Budget](#)

[Certified Values TRIM Forms](#)

[Millage Rate Scenarios and Related Proceeds](#)

[Presentation](#)

[Pictures \(Penniman/Added Attachment\)](#)

[Ethics Commission Presentation \(M. Murawski/Added Attachment\)](#)

[Revised Presentation \(Staff/Added Attachment\)](#)

5.B) City Attorney Annual Review.

City Attorney Matthew McConnell explained that pursuant to the Agreement for legal services, an annual review is required at the close of each fiscal year. He stated that although he is the designated City Attorney, legal services are provided through the Dickman Law Firm team, which includes Assistant City Attorney Andrew Dickman, Attorneys Odie Dickman and Sharon Linsner, and Legal Coordinator Maureen Taylor, with additional support provided by Assistant City Attorney Ralph Brookes, who is not part of the firm but continues to serve the City in that role.

City Attorney McConnell reported that monthly invoices and spreadsheets are prepared to track expenditures by category and emphasized that transparency is a priority. He highlighted accomplishments during the past year, noting that seven of eleven inherited litigation cases were resolved, with four still pending and two of those near settlement. He further noted that agreement templates have been implemented, reducing review time and improving efficiency. He explained that a Legal Request for Services (LRS) form has been introduced to streamline departmental requests and ensure timely responses. He stated that legal counsel is provided on a daily basis to departments on contracts, planning, and operational issues. He emphasized his accessibility, noting that weekly office hours are provided and he remains available by phone as needed. He reported that while his individual billing rate is \$230 per hour, the blended hourly rate billed to the City averages \$180 due to the use of associate attorneys and paralegal staff. He explained that all final contract documents are controlled and signed off by his office, utilizing track-change reviews to ensure legal sufficiency.

Council Member Christman commended City Attorney McConnell and the firm for providing clear recommendations and observed that the current legal team is the strongest in depth compared to previous years. He also noted the continuing value of Assistant City Attorney Brookes, particularly for land use and environmental matters.

Council Member Barton emphasized the importance of receiving professional legal advice. He reported that constituents and petitioners had provided positive feedback on the pragmatic approach taken by City Attorney McConnell.

Council Member Petrunoff praised City Attorney McConnell for responsiveness and noted that boldness in defending City interests is appreciated. She stated that collaboration with staff has been noticeably improved and that code enforcement has become more consistent. In addition, she emphasized that residents expect fair application of codes and expressed satisfaction with the firm's toughness on enforcement. She also credited the firm with creativity in problem solving and requested continued focus on resolving recurring issues such as airport noise, the zoning petition processes and charter height interpretations.

Vice Mayor Hutchison commended City Attorney McConnell and the Dickman Law Firm for embodying the City's vision of ethical and effective government.

Mayor Heitmann concluded that City Attorney McConnell has demonstrated accessibility, efficiency, and fiscal accountability. She expressed confidence in the continued partnership between the City and the Dickman Law Firm.

[Agenda Memorandum](#)

[2024-25 DLF Fiscal Year Annual Report](#)

6) PUBLIC COMMENTS

None.

7) COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE MAYOR, CITY COUNCIL, AND STAFF

Council Member Barton stated that although the City Council had been on recess for two months, constituents continued to reach out, and he asked for an update on the Naples Pier. In response, City Manager Gary Young responded that the largest hurdle is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, though other agencies were involved. He stated that a retired Army Corps engineer was assisting the City, and that staff were working with Senator Rick Scott's and Representative Byron Donalds' offices. He reported that permits might be issued within weeks, demolition could begin in November or December, and a four-month demolition period would precede construction. He added that decking wood had already been ordered from Brazil, and reserves were sufficient with a projected \$7 million fund balance. In response to Council Member Barton's question regarding the City's readiness, City Manager Young stated that internal movement was occurring and that staging areas were ready once permits were secured. Mayor Heitmann recommended providing an update to the residents.

Council Member Kramer remarked that the City Manager's evaluation merited an "A+," praised his willingness to take clear positions, and expressed hope for Tourist Development Council funding.

Vice Mayor Hutchison expressed concerns regarding dredging activities at Lakes 8 and 9. In response, City Manager Young agreed to provide the City Council with a detailed update. Mayor Heitmann added that the discussion should also address dewatering policies. Council Member Christman stressed that the lake projects were tied to the beach outfall project.

Mayor Heitmann expressed concern regarding ways to improve the efficiency of public mailings, and suggested the possibility of outsourcing mailing services, which could reduce staff workload if properly managed. City Manager Young stated that he would explore costs for mail pre-sorting services as an intermediate step, noting that many agencies already use such services successfully. Council Member Barton further agreed that costs should be structured as chargebacks to applicants, creating no net expense to the City.

Regarding private providers, Mayor Heitmann emphasized that this is a separate matter from mail outsourcing and should be scheduled for a future Workshop. City Manager Young acknowledged that State law limits City authority in this area but agreed the City should still verify the accuracy of any documents submitted by private providers. City Attorney McConnell confirmed that new state restrictions on private providers will be reviewed at an upcoming meeting.

Mayor Heitmann asked about the status of the 5th Avenue South rooftop bar, and clarification on whether the business planned to convert to a private club and sell memberships.

8) ADJOURNMENT

3:37 p.m.

Teresa Lee Heitmann, Mayor

Patricia L. Rambosk, City Clerk

Meeting clerked by:

Ali Duran, Executive Assistant

Minutes prepared by:
David Horton, Executive Assistant

Minutes Approved: 10-1-25.