MINUTES

SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING OF THE STUART CITY COMMISSION
TENTATIVE MILLAGE & TENTATIVE BUDGET

SEPTEMBER 9, 2026
AT 5:15 PM
COMMISSION CHAMBERS
121 SW FLAGLER AVE.
STUART, FLORIDA 34994

CITY COMMISSION

Mayor Eula R. Clarke
Commissioner Laura Giobbi
Commissioner Merritt Matheson
Commissioner Sean Reed
Commissioner Campbell Rich

ADMINISTRATIVE

Interim City Manager, Jim Chrulski
City Attorney, Lee J. Baggett
City Clerk, Mary R. Kindel

ROLL CALL

5:15 PM

PRESENT: Mayor Clarke, Commissioner Giobbi, Commissioner Matheson, Commissioner Reed, Commissioner Rich

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Jimmy Smith, resident of East Stuart, provided an Invocation.

COMMENTS BY CITY COMMISSIONERS

Commissioner Matheson

- Commented on the Martin County Forever Conservation Program and proposed placing a D&D on the September 28th agenda for the use of the Martin County funds.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Requested consideration to be put on the agenda to address comments from a previous meeting.

5:20 PM MOTION: Presentation by Ms. Holmes (on the September 28th Agenda) to include an Oversight committee, possibility of bonding, pros and cons of that, and discussion on ways to rank the current undeveloped land in the City of Stuart for acquisition of conservation.
MOVED BY: Merritt Matheson
SECONDED BY: Campbell Rich
Motion approved unanimously.

Commissioner Reed

- Asked City Attorney if he is permitted to do PRR's against other public officials. [City Attorney Bagget answered yes and explained circumstances that can occur where it would not be permitted as it violates the Sunshine Law.]
- Read a letter he sent to the Attorney General concerning the denial of a public records request.
- Commented on Mike Mortell's City Manager contract and felt it should be an agenda item at a Regular City Commission Meeting (CCM) and that the City majority violated the Ordinance at the August 24, 2026 meeting. Pointed out statements by constituents that occurred when Mr. Mortell was let go. Noted Mr. Matheson's Facebook comments on Sunshine violations and lack of transparency in 2025. Stated Commissioner Rich admitted to local media that he spoke to Candidate Matheson about bringing back Mr. Mortell. Referred to a statement in the local newspaper, and asked Commissioner Clarke when she visited Mr. Mortell for transparency.

Commissioner Rich

- Commented on taxes and stated the State of Florida laws that regulate the authority are enforced and that contributed to the dismissal of the past City Manager (Giardino).
- Stated the Finance Department failed to follow state law and City procedures, including properly approving the millage rate, reconciling accounts since February, and completing the required annual audit on time, creating significant financial and compliance risks; these failures were serious enough to require immediate action.
- Provided his reasons and timeline of the dismissal of the City Manager and his replacement.

Commissioner Giobbi

- Commented on Commissioner Rich's remarks.
- Read an email from Mike Mortell on Friday, September 4th.
- Commented that she has not worked with the City Manager since 2025, discontinued the monthly meetings, preferred written proof of the City Manager's comments.
- Provided an explanation of the events of August 24th, CCM. Noted that the elections have consequences and why the majority exercised their right in a mean-spirited manner? Stated she left the meeting because she could not be part of the hypocrisy and emailed the City Clerk that evening to resign as Vice Mayor and remain a Commissioner.

- Commented on the local Friends and Neighbors newsletter and wondered why they sought the need to malign the reputation of Michael Giardino.

Commissioner Clarke

- Commented on Palm Beach Road being a County Road and informed that the construction is to build a trail.
- Commented on the selection of the Mayor and stated the City Attorney can respond to any questions.

COMMENTS BY CITY MANAGER

Interim City Manager Chrulski

- Commented on a request for an emergency purchase authorization. Lift Station #4's generator failed after it caught on fire. This cost is expected to be $52,038.51 to make the purchase under Chapter 26 of the Code of Ordinances.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Commented in favor of the generator purchase and on her case, claiming damages of 3 million dollars.
2. Walter Loyd - Stuart; Suggested upping the amount not to exceed for the purchase of equipment.

5:50 PM MOTION: Approve Commission provide emergency funds needed to purchase this equipment, $52,500, to the Interim City Manager.
5:54 PM AMENDED MOTION: Provide emergency funds to the Interim City Manager for the generator that needs to be purchased in an amount not to exceed $60,000.
MOVED BY: Laura Giobbi
SECONDED BY: Campbell Rich
Motion approved unanimously.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Commissioner Reed commented that on August 24th, the Commission majority violated its own Ordinance pertaining to agendas.

5:57 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Campbell Rich
SECONDED BY: Merritt Matheson
Motion approved unanimously.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC (Non-Agenda Related) (3 Minutes Max.)

1. David Kehlmann - Stuart; Commented on the mood at the Dais, requested they unite.
2. Steven Potts - Stuart; Commented on the East Stuart Heritage and Opportunity Alliance and Guy Davis Park/skate park.

3. Janice Giardino - Stuart; Commented on the Campenni newsletter, provided Mr. Giardino's background to clarify the record, referred to the audit.
4. Michael Giardino - Stuart; Commented on his suspicion of his time cards being public, noted there must be insiders, his PTO, compliance with the law and his contract; grant authorizations, statutes.
5. Walter Loyd - Stuart; Thanked Commissioners Reed and Giobbi for their transparency
6. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Commented on her arrest in 2015 and her suspicion of Mr. Mortell hiding something.
7. Kodey Johnson - Stuart; Founder and Leader of Heritage of East Stuart; Commented on the organization's goals, asked the City to preserve flexibility to approve funds.
8. Jimmy Smith - Stuart; Commented that he has lived in Stuart all his life, commented in prayer, Stuart is being watched throughout the state of Florida, prays all can come together.
9. Robin Cartwright - Stuart; Commented regarding Commissioner Rich's comments, reviewed a timeline of resignations, budget votes, the Commissioners' oversight; stated that the Commissioners failed at their jobs.
10. Gwendolyn Hall Brinkley - Stuart; Commented on the removal of Mr. Giardino and rehiring of Mr. Mortell, election campaigns, transparency of meeting agenda, and asked to release all public records, (PRR996-2026) concerning Mr. Giardino, Mr. Mortell and City Manager position from Eula Clarke, Merritt Matheson and Campbell Rich. Also asked Commission to create safeguards in the process to remove and select senior employees in the future.
11. Robert Hamilton - Stuart; Commented on Mr. Mortell's return and stated Commissioner Reed and Giobbi brought truth into the room.
12. Joseph Cooper - Stuart; Commented on democracy, people voted for representatives and elected three commissioners, it should be respected and all should come together.

APPROVAL OF CONSENT CALENDAR

1. APPROVAL OF 08/10/2026 SCM-BUDGET WORKSHOP #1 MINUTES (REVISION) AND 08/24/2026 BUDGET WORKSHOP #2 MINUTES

END OF CONSENT CALENDAR

Clerk's Note: Amend the 8/10/2026 SCM-Budget Workshop #1 Minutes to state that a request for consensus was taken and then provide the outcome of the vote.

6:38 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Campbell Rich
SECONDED BY: Laura Giobbi
Motion approved unanimously.

COMMISSION ACTION

2. FY2027 TENTATIVE MILLAGE (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 64-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF

THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA ADOPTING THE TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Anthony Cooling, Budget & Procurement Manager, and William Perez, Temporary Finance Manager, presented a brief explanation of the proposed millage rate of 5.0, increased from 4.9.

Commissioner discussion included the tax increase, justification, shortfall if the millage was reduced, new positions and other potential expenses, and the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) Projects.

Pinal Gandhi-Savdas, Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Director, came forward and noted the correction to the CRA budget of the 500K to 250K and stated CRA funding is available, and future projects noted but not budgeted.

Commissioner discussion continued with the new positions, the need to address routine infrastructure maintenance, such as sidewalks and drainage, the prioritization of CIP's, and millage rate options and their effects on tax payers.

City Attorney Baggett read the Resolution into the record.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Robin Cartwright - Stuart; Commented on the millage rate pertaining to fire employees and rate adjustments. Look at all positions, not the public safety positions.
2. Bonnie Moser - Stuart; Commented in reference to the beautification projects and their benefits.
3. Jimmy Smith - Stuart; Commented on his opposition to cutting positions, feels the City overall needs staff to keep the City running and safe.

6:44 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Campbell Rich
SECONDED BY: Merritt Matheson
VOTE: Motion passed 4/1 7:23 PM
YES: Eula Clarke, Campbell Rich, Laura Giobbi, Merritt Matheson
NO: Sean Reed

3. ADOPT ASSESSMENT FOR FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES FOR FY 27 (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 65-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA, APPROVING THE FISCAL YEAR 2026-27 NON-AD VALOREM ASSESSMENT ROLL FOR FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES, FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS; DIRECTING CERTIFICATION OF THE ASSESSMENT ROLL TO THE MARTIN COUNTY TAX COLLECTOR; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Anthony Cooling, Budget and Procurement Manager, briefly presented the assessment for the fire protection services.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Caryn Hall Yost Rudge - Stuart; Commented that we call it a fire assessment; it is a tax.

7:27 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Merritt Matheson
SECONDED BY: Sean Reed
Motion approved unanimously.

4. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 72-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA APPROPRIATING CAPITAL BUDGET FOR FY 2027 AND PROVIDING FOR A THREE-YEAR CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR PROJECTS WITHIN THE CITY; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

The Commissioners reviewed and included suggestions for providing Capital Improvement Plan listings and ranking the projects by department and priority.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Kodey Johnson - Stuart; Commented on the East Stuart Guy Davis Park plans, and the East Stuart community is not interested in the Skate Park; request it is put on hold. [Pinal Gandhi-Savdas commented that bids are being requested with and without the skate park.]

7:31 PM MOTION: Approve Resolution No. 72-2026, noting the Capital Improvement Plan's should be ranked by priority.
MOVED BY: Sean Reed
SECONDED BY: Laura Giobbi
Motion approved unanimously. 7:44 PM

5. GENERAL WAGE INCREASE (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 63-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA APPROVING COST OF LIVING INCREASES AND MERIT RAISES FOR THE CITY'S NON-BARGAINING UNIT EMPLOYEES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-2027; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Supports wage increases, but her wages were affected by her arrest; opposes Mike Mortell's wage.

2. Robert Hamilton - Stuart; Commented on wage increases and people getting paid what they are worth.

7:45 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Laura Giobbi
SECONDED BY: Merritt Matheson
Motion approved unanimously. 7:53 PM

6. FY2027 TENTATIVE BUDGET (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 66-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA ADOPTING THE TENTATIVE BUDGETS OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA, FOR FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2026 AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2027; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Anthony Cooling, Procurement & Budget Manager, presented the Tentative FY2027 Budget.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Commented on an $800,000 gap that happened during Mike Mortell's employment.

Commissioners requested information on subsidized leases.

8:08 PM MOTION: Approve.
MOVED BY: Campbell Rich
SECONDED BY: Merritt Matheson
VOTE: Motion passed 4/1. 8:14 PM
YES: Eula Clarke, Campbell Rich, Laura Giobbi, Merritt Matheson
NO: Sean Reed

***** 8:14 PM RECESS *****

***** 8:22 PM RECONVENED *****

7. CONFIRMING APPOINTMENT OF MICHAEL J. MORTELL AS CITY MANAGER AND AUTHORIZING EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT (RC):

RESOLUTION No. 75-2026; A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF STUART, FLORIDA CONFIRMING THE APPOINTMENT OF MICHAEL J. MORTELL AS CITY MANAGER AND AUTHORIZING AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT WITH THE CITY MANAGER; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE; AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

Lee Baggett, City Attorney, reviewed the history and the proposed contract. Mr. Mortell agreed to a $225,000.00 salary and to forgo the first COLA in FY2026-2027. Contract is similar to the City Attorney's contracts, Mr. Giardino's contract and Mr. Mortell's prior contract.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Deanna Peterson - Stuart; Commented on the language used for Mr. Mortell's dismissal and is opposed to Commissioner Reeds removal as Mayor.
2. Robin Cartwright - Stuart; Commented on whether two Commissioners planned the incidents, backroom deals; opposed.
3. Caryn Hall Yost-Rudge - Stuart; Commented on her opposition to Mr. Mortell returning to the City Manager position.
4. Robert Hamilton - Stuart; Commented that the Board can do the right thing and make a payment for the damages to his church/home.
5. Janine Alexander - Gainesville; Commented on her case; in opposition.
6. Joe Cooper - Stuart; Commented on the word redemption; supports Mr. Mortell being returned as City Manager.
7. Jimmy Smith - Stuart; Commented on second chances, in favor.
8. Walter Loyd - Stuart; Commented on special interests; opposed.
9. Dayne Oldenborg - Stuart; Commented on Mr. Mortell's situations, opposed.
10. Frank McChrystal - Stuart; Empathizes with City staff.

Commissioner Giobbi spoke in response to public comments. She requested additional language be added to the City Manager's contract to include that Human Resources provide a log to the Commission reporting on the time he spends on personal clients.

City Attorney Baggett explained the language is currently in the contract for the City Manager to report such information to the Human Resource Director, and the issue not using City resources or City staff, can be added.

Commissioner's continued discussion topics with Roz Johnson Strong, Human Resource Director, and City Attorney, Lee Baggett pertaining to language of residency being within 15 miles of the City, performance evaluation review procedure, secondary employment form, and deferred retirement.

9:35 PM - Point of Order: Commissioner Reed raised a Point of Order, requesting use of the projector and stated he was being restricted from displaying a projector slide. The projector was powered on and Reed presented an email in reference to Mr. Mortell that he felt was a violation of his contract.

Commissioner Giobbi requested to amend the current motion to change the deferred comp amount from 12% to 10%. The Motion maker declined the requested change.

10:07 PM - Point of Order: Commissioner Reed raised a Point of Order, stating that additional public comment should be heard on an amended motion.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Walter Loyd - Stuart; Commented that there are contract changes and the person is not here.
2. Robert Hamilton - Stuart; Asked if the City has a signed contract.
3. Gary Ehrler - Martin County; Commented on the point of order, does not feel this contract should be voted on tonight.

4. Dayne Oldenborg - Stuart; Commented on a personal experience of a suspended license; in favor of change to contract from 12% to 10%.

8:26 PM MOTION: Approve.
10:07 PM AMENDED MOTION: To add language for reporting outside work, Human Resource to send reports to Commissioners every month, and cannot use City staff to work with personal clients.
MOVED BY: Campbell Rich
SECONDED BY: Merritt Matheson
VOTE: Motion passed 3/2.
YES: Campbell Rich, Merritt Matheson, Eula Clarke
NO: Sean Reed, Laura Giobbi

PUBLIC COMMENT:

1. Walter Loyd - Stuart; Thanked Commissioner Giobbi and Commissioner Reed for their full transparency and professionalism.
2. Gail Goldy - Stuart; Thanked Commissioner Reed and Commissioner Giobbi and expressed her displeasure with the other Board members.
3. Joseph Cooper - Stuart; Expressed the people voted for Mayor Clarke, Commissioner Rich and Commissioner Matheson and we need to unite.
4. Robert Hamilton - Stuart; Commented on his personal experience with Mr. Mortell.

10:09 PM MOTION: To bring back an action item to the October 12th City Commission Meeting to give up Commissioner paychecks after benefits for 2 years.
MOVED BY: Sean Reed
SECONDED BY: Laura Giobbi
VOTE: Motion passed 4/1.
YES: Sean Reed, Laura Giobbi, Merritt Matheson, Campbell Rich
NO: Eula Clarke

DISCUSSION AND DELIBERATION

ADJOURNMENT

10:22 PM

Mary R. Kindel, City Clerk

Eula R. Clarke, Mayor

Minutes to be approved at the Regular Commission Meeting this 28th day of September, 2026.