

**AGENDA MINUTES
CITY COMMISSION MEETING
CITY HALL, 501 W MEADOW STREET
THURSDAY, JULY 10, 2025 5:30 PM**

1. CALL TO ORDER

The City of Leesburg Commission held a budget workshop meeting on Thursday, July 10, 2025, at Leesburg City Hall. Mayor Reisman called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. with the following members present:

Commissioner Allyson Berry
Commissioner Jimmy Burry
Commissioner Jay Connell
Commissioner Mike Pederson
Mayor Alan Reisman

Also, present were City Manager (CM) Al Minner, City Clerk (CC) J. Andi Purvis, Budget Director (BD) Brandy McDaniel, the news media, and others.

INVOCATION

Mayor Reisman gave the invocation followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

2. FY 2025-26 Budget Workshop Presentation

CM Minner explained that this evening they would review the enterprise funds, which consist of the electric and gas departments. Then they will review the special revenue funds, which consist of building permits, housing, the community redevelopment agencies, discretionary sales tax, and gas tax. He would like to keep it at a high level, but if the commission wanted to break it down by line item, they could do that. However, he felt they seemed to appreciate the highlight reviews.

Enterprise Funds:

The electric fund looked a lot like it did last year. We are continuing to be aggressive with capital improvement projects (CIP). We have two types of CIPs because there is stuff that we want to fix and there is stuff that is forced upon us to fix. Referring to a slide, he showed the city's growth CIPs which come to the commission in the form of contributions in aid agreements for all the different subdivisions that have been extended. Remember, when we talk about the growth of the electric fund, we are referring to the north side of Leesburg, because once we pass the 33/27 intersection-ish, it turns into Duke and SECO territory. When we talk about the growth impacts on the electric system, we are talking about the north Fruitland Park area and the northeast side of town around the Silver Lake area running up the CR

44 corridor. Inflation continues to have a huge impact on the electric fund, from poles, transformers, and meters to all sorts of things. We continue to look closely at how we handle the purchase of wholesale purchases and the transfer to the general fund is starting to benefit. It used to be in the stress column of the chart, but it has become less of a stressor on the electric fund. It has become minimal and we are getting better. Some of the minimal operation needs we trimmed back on were tree trimming and osmose pole replacement. However, hopefully this fiscal year we will start to catch up. With capital improvements, we have been very aggressive over the last several years. The money that we spent on capital improvements was \$5.97 million. He did not want to read out all the numbers, but said we saw the fund start to decrease post-covid and over the last two fiscal years. We have seen it start to shrink back, and we are starting to rebuild the cash reserves. We are now taking the pay-as-you-go approach with the electric fund.

Moving to the next slide, he said cautiously that we were starting to rebound. The electric fund this year is made up of about \$7.8 million for different projects. He wanted to repeat the three-legged stool that drives the electric capital improvements. For the audience, he would also use the acronym CIP, which stands for capital improvement projects. Capital improvement projects in the electric and gas funds are very similar in how the three-legged stool works. There are three CIP investments. First are customer-driven projects or growth-related projects. Those agreements come to the commission for extension services and those types of things. They cause a reciprocal impact on us where we have to go out and put in new transformers, poles, and wires. In the formal reports for transformers, they would see one number, which makes it confusing, because that transformer could be needed for three different reasons. The number one reason is customer-driven projects, and we estimate customer-driven projects will be about \$2.3 million. That number could go either way; it could be bigger or it could be smaller because it is based on where we will see impacts in the electric territory this year. The second reason is forced repairs, which are the things that go bump in the night. That would be the big storms where we are forced to repair transformers, poles and wires, those types of things. A bump in the night occurs when lightning strikes or when a squirrel jumps on a transformer and causes it to electrocute and blow a fuse. There could also be forced repairs caused by a driver hitting a utility pole where the pole snaps in half. These are the things we have to plan for, and we do that based on trends and that number hangs at around \$3.1 million. The last one is system upgrades, which are areas in the system where the electric department has identified as needing to be upgraded on transformers, lights and substations. We need to be more aggressive with lights, referring to streetlights and security lights. For instance, we receive requests from car dealerships to change out old lights and put in new LED heads. For example, Jenkins may notify us that they need to change out one of their old parking lot lights for security purposes. We will go out and change that light, which costs about \$150 per light, plus the cost of electricity, because Jenkins rents the lights from the city and that cost is a dollar a month. We have to come up with the initial capital, and that is then paid back to us over time. Some of those lights are expensive to change, and we do receive a lot of requests for that. Looking at the next two line items, the \$285,000 and \$945,000, those numbers, together, make up the northwest side of the system. More specifically, feeders L702 and L703 because those feeders are seeing a higher growth volume in the Fruitland Park area. If you drive by the dealership on North US 27, there is a stoplight after Lake Griffin Park where the road comes out from the left. That area to the west, in the Fruitland Park area, has a lot of development happening. That area is fed off the feeder that runs up and down US 27 in front of the dealership. That wire is old and small, so we really need to upgrade that wire. Some of it is a mix of customer-driven projects, and we will try to shift those costs to developers, and some of it is a system cost that we need to fix on our own. The last one is about \$665,000. That is to continue the transformer replacements as we go to the north substation. The north substation is the substation located in the area of Lewis Road and the Red Road.

With power supply costs, we estimate our cost to be at \$49.8 million. This was the single biggest expenditure in the budget and a lot of detail went into the chart. All in, we are considering a \$205 million

budget with all the funds and 25% of the entire budget is the power supply costs that we have to purchase. Looking at the numbers, if we break them down into megawatt hours over the past few fiscal years, we have been doing pretty well. When we had the big spike a couple of years ago in the power cost adjustment, it brought a lot of people into the commission meeting, and that number was about \$100 a megawatt and, before that, we were in the \$75 to \$80 a megawatt. The FMPA has done a superb job since that time, fighting gas prices, working and hedging to get back to the price of \$78, and it looks like we will end up at around \$84 this year. Now why is the estimate just south of \$50 million at \$92 a megawatt? Yes, it is a good number, so we should stick with it. However, knock-on wood, we hope it goes down. The reason it is higher is that halfway through this fiscal year, the FMPA hedging program started to stop. They will move that block out as they buy hedges, and hopefully we will see that number come down. Assuming they do not, we have planned for \$92 a megawatt. Now, does that ultimately shift into a price reduction? That is to be determined. With pricing, we went into FY 25 thinking we may need to have a rate adjustment. The rate structure is two-tiered because we have the fuel adjustment that we call the bulk cost to power adjustment, which the commission had given the city manager the authority to manage on a monthly basis. We try to keep that as consistent as possible and, right now, it is two or two and a half cents. That changes monthly based on where the fuel costs are. The second one is the price that the commission sets, which is the base rate. We toyed with the concept last year and this year about increasing the base rate, and he recommended that they not increase the base rate. They had discussions with the electric advisory board back in June and, based on the latest numbers, we are hopeful that we could manage at the same rate. Remember, as we went into FY 25 we said we would watch it and that we would keep an eye on it. Again, this year he recommended watching it and they will keep an eye on it. Moving into October, we can positively say there will not be an increase, but as we move into the second, third, or fourth quarter of FY 26, based on where the numbers go, where hedging goes and where gas goes, we may need to look at that.

Referring to the electric fund cash and reserve requirement chart. He did not want to cheer about it because the cash chart is always what we go to, and about a year and a half ago he was worried to death about dropping below the reserve requirement line. Referring to the blue line on the slide, that is total cash and some of it is restricted, like BCPA money. The total cash started to rebound over the last year and part of that was from us scrimping on the expenses while being conservative and frugal. Moving back to the CIP slide, with the cash looking better, gives us more comfort about keeping the needle in the red while watching it. That is not a bad position to be in because we have cash to lean on. We had gotten very good at managing that on the fly, and he did not see us doing anything crazy in terms of the BCPA. Part of that was leaning on our cash, and we did not have that reserve, so he did not see us making that mistake again. However, he was confident that we would have enough time to react and provide enough information to our customer base if we needed to do a rate increase. We can move into the next fiscal year safely, while keeping the base rate where it is. On that note, when we moved to the other side of the house, the finance director received the update on the BCPA numbers, and we were right on target with our assessments of the power cost adjustment numbers. Fortunately, there will be no base increase moving into the next fiscal year, but, unfortunately, there will be no decrease in the power cost adjustment, because that is set to where we are recovering and under recovering where we should be. Frankly, we are within a \$200,000 spread. That is a \$200,000 spread into \$3 million, so we have been pretty lucky so far this year. He then showed the rate comparisons and the electric debt covers a lot of old stuff.

The highlight of this fund is that it is back up. We will continue to monitor the rate and there will be no rate increase moving into the fiscal year. Part of it comes from the relief that we saw with the shifting of the metering from GE to Itron. We should see the full impact of that by the end of the first quarter of FY 26. In all the proprietary funds, we budget for depreciation. That is the value of all the assets with a formula. We take cash out of our pocket, and put it in a special fund for depreciation to cover planned

repairs. When we do that, the cash graph looks nice, but when we do not do that, we short depreciation and the cash graph looks bad. Again, we made that call with the determination that cash was high so we could lean on cash to subsidize the rate. Frankly, he wanted to brag about the utility, and he could not stress enough that this is where being a locally-owned utility benefits our customers. He knows our customers sometimes complain about high prices and electric rates being horrible, but regionally we are one of the best, and we do a great job of managing that. We strive to keep the rates low, to keep the lights on, and to work safe. That has become our motto in the electric fund. With the competitors in the region, Duke is still high, and their rates are going up. SECO and the city are staying nip and tuck. Our rate looks like an FPL rate and the FPL is the elephant in the state. They have the most customers, they are the most profitable, and they are the most legislatively active. In his opinion, FPL is the driver of the train when it comes to politics in Tallahassee, and they say municipalities are horrible because they do not respond and that municipalities have bad rates. Well, guess what? Our rates are better than FPL's and that is important to remember, so when our customers yell at us or the electric advisory board members, they can remind our customers of what we do for them on the electric side of the house, because nobody likes to pay their electric bill. With that, depreciation is back up and doing well. Hopefully, in FY 26, we can start sliding more money back into capital projects to do system changeouts and that kind of stuff. They could bet that he, the electric director, and the team would have constant conversations about cash and CPIs. He asked if there were any questions about the electric fund.

Commissioner Pederson said he saw costs going up in the first half of the year, and he was referencing the hedging by FMPA. Do we have any idea if FPL or Duke are hedging? We hedged back in 2022 when gas prices spiked, and he was assuming they also hedged at that time. **CM Minner** replied that everyone in the industry is hedging, and we are all hedging at about the same levels. We hedged about 75% of our gas load, but the difference is that we are seeing those numbers start to tick up. That is where the hedging slides out and those are the futures that we have not covered yet. That \$97.14 may be high, but that is what it is right now. We have not hedged out the last couple quarters of next fiscal year. **Commissioner Burry** mentioned when we talk about gas, we are talking about natural gas. He wanted everyone to be aware that 75% of the electricity generated in the State of Florida comes from natural gas. As natural gas spikes without hedging, that is when we get into problems. **CM Minner** added that they do hear a lot of talk about solar, going green and wind. It is not just in Florida because it is a nationwide phenomenon. The nation still relies heavily on natural gas. So, as prices go up, it is energy that drives it. It is not just a Florida thing, nor is it a Leesburg thing, because the nation relies on natural gas to run power plants. **Commissioner Burry** pointed out that when the electricity goes out due to storms, everyone needs to compare how long our electric is off compared to Duke or Florida Power and Light, because we are usually twenty-four hours ahead when it comes to reconnecting. Having our own local utility is a huge advantage to the citizens of Leesburg. **Commissioner Berry** wanted more clarification about not recommending a rate increase in October. **CM Minner** stated that starting the next fiscal year, October 1st, there will be no increase. However, if we see a need for a rate increase, that may be in the second or third quarter of FY 26. We will need to make that determination somewhere in the January to April timeframe so we do not get whacked in the summer when usage goes up.

Moving to the gas fund. This fund looks similar to the electric fund with issues, but gas has a 3% CPI built into the rate, which is an inflationary issue as well. The cash levels look reasonable. This fund is about \$4 million above the recovery, but we are still working aggressively with growth, other issues with inflation, and we have some main trunk lines that we have to get into the ground. The main issue with gas is trying to build the new facility and the gas director has received the first draft for the new headquarters building. We are trying to knock out three birds with one stone and that is to get gas out of downtown so we can have that area for parking. With that flip-flop, we can reshuffle the deck. We will build a new home for gas that includes their storage needs. It will be married with more storage needs for the electric department and a new climate-controlled storage facility for the clerks' office. We have set aside \$1

million for that this fiscal year. Of that \$1 million, we have spent roughly \$125,000 on the design and that leaves about \$875,000 for construction. We did not allocate more construction dollars to the gas fund, because they have the cash to lean on. We wanted to get this out to bid, so we could see where it went. We wanted to keep that number small, so we worked within our budget, but we never knew how things go until it goes out to bid and see where it is. However, he was okay with moving forward, but if we miss this number, as long as it is something not crazy, we will have the cash to fall back on. They would like to add three positions to this department, and there are two big projects for extending gas mains down CR 33 and CR 48. There is a requirement from FDOT to move the gas line due to the widening of the Turnpike. With project CR 33 and CR 48, he did not want folks to misinterpret growth as being the cause for extending the gas main down CR 33 and CR 48. In the gas and electric worlds, and more so in the gas world, gas is a utility that is not seen as a requirement. The operators of the gas system, whether you are on the public side or the private sector side, gas is seen as a choice. Those investor-owned utilities who extend gas lines are at risk because they are banking on customers using gas appliances or gas services to necessitate those main extensions. That is us, and we are just like Apopka Gas, Teco, and Sun City Gas. We are banking on potential development going up the CR 33 and CR 48 corridor. The turnpike issue is a totally separate issue because the state is widening the turnpike and the statutes are written that it is incumbent on the utilities to move the stuff out of the state's way. We will also see that on the water and sewer sides. Water and sewer are different in the world because water and sewer are seen as a needed utility. Therefore, governments who typically manage water and sewer try to pass those extension costs on to developers, but gas and electric are a little different. He asked if there were any questions about the gas fund. There were none.

Special Revenue Funds:

There is not much to report on in the housing fund. This fund manages the Mispah Simmons apartments and the housing director has done a good job keeping those apartments filled. She also works with the county on the rent subsidies. Once we get out of Mispah Simmons, there is not much to talk about in the housing fund. He asked if there were any questions about the housing division. **Commissioner Berry** asked about the timeframe for residents and are they lobbying for residents? **CM Minner** answered that he thought it was a year, but he would have to get back to her on that answer.

The building fund is another fund that the lobbyists really watch like a hawk. Instead of having big investors in utilities, it is the construction industry and construction is a big and powerful lobbyist as well. The laws are written such that building fees should equal what it costs to operate the building department. What we saw in high times of growth was money coming in. Costs were low, and the reserves were built. That phenomenon has gone on a little bit around the community and cities handle it differently. Back around the 2018 timeframe, we were sitting on \$2 million with the requirement back in 2018, and we only needed about \$250,000 in a reserve requirement. So, that was indicative of the fees being high, so we reduced them. If they recall, in 2018, we endeavored to reduce the building fees from the 2018 level. We did that in two steps and now our fees are about 25% of what they were in 2018, and we have kept our fees down. We have grown the department a little bit and, all the while, we anticipated the cash levels dropping by FY 24. That was when we were going to come back and say we needed to increase the rates, but we were wrong because we did not need to increase the rate in FY 24 like we originally thought. However, we do need to increase them for FY 26.

Referring to a chart, he said we had dwindled the reserves, because that money needed to go back into the contractor's pockets, and we had to get a market-rate fee, so they were only paying for a fee that justified the expense of inspections. We have done a good job of staving off increases, but that time has passed because we have whittled down that fund as much as we can. So, effective October 1st, we are recommending that we go back to the 2018 rates. Similar to how we talk about the fleet fund in terms of

percentages of where we are, we need to go back to the 100% level and of all our funds, the building fund has the most complicated fee structure, because there are so many different permits. For example, fence permits, pool permits, building permits, ac permits and electrical permits. Putting all that stuff on one slide while trying to boil it down is extremely difficult. If we were to go back up to where our fees were in 2018 to build the typical single-family house, which is about a 2,000-foot house, it would cost the contractor or whoever about \$2,500 to build that house. Groveland fees are \$5,900, Eustis is at \$4,900, Mount Dora is \$3,100, Lady Lake is relatively inexpensive, Clermont is \$2,900 and Mascotte sits at \$6,349. Lake and Sumter Counties remain relatively inexpensive, but remember that was a 2018 number, which is where we need to be. Basically, every fee goes back to where it was in 2018. If the commission is okay with this, we will bring a rate resolution along with some other little things between now and October 1st where the commission will formally say yay or nay. We will bring a rate resolution that implements these fees effective October 1st. We will also talk about impact fees at a regular meeting. However, the feedback he has received from various sources, mostly in the construction industry, is that impact fees, and building fees, need to go up. So, moving back to the 2018 fees, we should not see all the contractors in the room. He may be wrong, but he did not anticipate that happening. He asked if there were any questions.

The first CRA where we cannot spend another penny is the Downtown Leesburg CRA. There is a small cash reserve of \$400,000, which is not a lot of money, but this CRA brings in about \$1.1 million, but remember that the increment comes from two places. It comes from the increment, which was the baseline from when the CRA was created to today, and that increment does not go into the general fund. It goes into the Downtown CRA fund. Whatever the taxing rate is for the county and the city, those two numbers go together, and that money has to be spent in the CRA district. So, where are we going to spend \$1.2 million? First we have to give half of the money to the CDC, and that goes back to the decree from 1997. So, right off the top, half of the Downtown CRA money goes to the CDC. The other two places it goes are to debt and the Main Street project, which retires in three years. After 2027, that \$100,000 should be done. We have the CDC payment, and the debt payment for the Main Street project. The Main Street project included all the trees and the extension from 9th Street to US 27, plus the big arches and all that was \$1 million, and we have been paying about \$100,000 a year for that project. Then we have the special events expense. That division was created, and it is now in its third year of operation. When the Partnership decided to dissolve, we picked that baton up, and we funded all that stuff. The Bikefest expense is in the general fund, which we all looked at on Monday, but the special events include the Fourth of July, Christmas and so on. **Mayor Reisman** wanted to know, in the long term, would having special events in this CRA hurt it from future projects? If so, could we look at funding some of it from somewhere else? **CM Minner** responded yes, but that would be a commission call because when we made the call to do special events, because we thought that was important, they decided that this CRA was a good place to fund and house it. It also fell within the CRA master plan. It is an eligible expense, so we are working within the rules. However, the danger would be the sunset of this CRA more than anything. We know that CRAs will eventually sunset and once they sunset, that expense will have to come from somewhere, and we all know where that somewhere is. It is the general fund. However, we should not worry about that right now, but we will also keep an eye on it. He would not change the funding mechanism until we are forced to, or if it sunsets naturally. There was a force during this legislative session, where there was a lot of talk about sunsetting CRAs. The initial legislation was to sunset all CRAs except for debt effective October 1, 2025. That legislation was really watered down, and it was rolled back because the scuttlebutt was that the state legislature was picking one community, but there was a special bill or a local act that occurred to address that. So will the CRA banter be picked up again this session? Probably, will anything happen from it? We do not know. So that question goes back to the two things. When does it matriculate naturally, and when is it forced to? If it is forced, we will have two big questions on our hands. How do we deal with the CDC, and what do we do with special events? **Mayor Reisman** mentioned that he was referring to future facade landscape grants, and things

like that, because they have not been funded in a while because we have not had any funding for them. He would like that to be kept on the radar. **Commissioner Berry** questioned the special events. Are we allowing additional events to be added or are they set for the ones that we already do? **CM Minner** replied that they could add whatever they want as long as it is kept within \$403,461. **Commissioner Berry** pointed out that there were one, two or three events named, so does the special events division have anything to add for this year, or will it be the same thing it has been? **CM Minner** replied no. They have not added anything. **Mayor Reisman** said they have pop-up events all the time. If you follow them on social media, you can see what they are doing. **Commissioner Berry** said she was referring to largely funded events. **CM Minner** explained that they handle the major events such as the Christmas parade, Fourth of July, and Halloween, and they also have little events that pop up. They are adding little stuff all the time, as long as it has a de minimis type of impact. However, they are not adding anything major to it at this time. He asked if there were any further questions about this fund. There were none.

Moving on to Carver Heights CRA. The Carver Heights CRA and the US Highway 441 CRA are probably where they have the most flexibility. The Carver Heights CRA is sitting on about \$280,000 in cash, and they bring in about \$1 million a year. There are three areas that the Carver Heights budget covers. First, personnel and housing services along with operating expenses for the Resource Center. Then there is the debt on the Resource Center. These are all fixed expenses and there is not a lot that we can do there. It pays the bills and cost of services for running that CRA. It is self-sustaining, and it is fixed by the CRA and there are no bleed outs into the general fund. We made a debt to build the Resource Center, just as we did with Main Street, and that expense must be paid. We can nip and tuck that, but there is not a lot to nip and tuck in there. However, after paying these there is about \$600,000 left in the budget. The way we laid it out in the budget books is that we just copied what we did last year for the home grant program, but that is not fixed to do that. He also anticipated that there would be some discussions about that. At this time, there is \$600,000 available for different programs and projects in the CRA. There have been meetings and different discussions. He tried to string all this together with a price tag, and he was there to get their feedback about how they wanted to move forward into FY 26. The biggest project would be the home grants, and he stuck \$600,000 there, but they do not have to do that. It is completely up to the commission. Each grant was worth \$25,000, but it all depended on how many homes they wanted to cover. The home grant program has been successful in Carver Heights, and we are about to fix over twenty homes. So, this program has been accepted very well by the CRA, and they may want to continue funding it, but at what level is up to the commission. They may want to start peeling money away from this as we have accumulated some success, so they may want to fund other things. There is a project priorities list that includes items like the Berry Park surveillance due to concerns about public safety. **Mayor Reisman** inquired if that would tie into the police department and their review? Who would have access to the cameras? **CM Minner** replied yes, that would tie into the police department. **Mayor Reisman** wanted to verify that they would have the ability to monitor that park. **CM Minner** responded yes, and they are monitoring it now. There are ADA improvements needed at Berry Park as well. Plus, Commissioner Berry would like the commission to consider a tutoring program that the city would operate and that is estimated at \$150,000. There was also talk about updating the master plan and that came in at \$150,000. There was a consideration of resurfacing and completing the fencing around Berry Park because we did two of the four sides, so to finish that it would cost about \$350,000. That was an estimate to close the westside and the trailside of the park, which would totally secure Berry Park. We would lose the chain-link fence on the south and west sides and finish off the paving of the parking lot. Another request we received was to do some dredging and stormwater improvements in that area. However, he would advise them to take that project out of the CRA and put it into stormwater. They still have several weeks to consider where they want to go, but these are the projects of priority that came from feedback his office received. **Mayor Reisman** asked about the resurfacing and fencing. Would that assist our police with the issues they are having in that area, and would that fence help to keep people from sleeping in Berry Park? **CM Minner** answered yes. **Mayor Reisman** stated that should be

something they consider because it is a high police issue out there when it comes to the park.

Commissioner Berry agreed. **Mayor Reisman** remarked that surveillance would assist the police, so that should be something they consider. He then asked about the ADA improvements. **CM Minner** responded that it would be for playground equipment and sidewalks to make sure everything is good. **Mayor Reisman** agreed and if that is a safety issue, that should be addressed as well. **Commissioner Berry** said she thought it covered disability issues. **CM Minner** replied yes. **Commissioner Berry** said it was important to finish the fencing, so the park could be secured. **Mayor Reisman** mentioned that when he volunteered for cleanups at Berry Park he saw people driving from the trail into the park. If the fence helps prevent that along with people driving down the trail, that would be good. That fence should also go around the parking lot to prevent people from driving through the park. It would also keep people from driving all over the park. **Commissioner Pederson** mentioned that he has made this comment before, but he does not understand why we would need another CRA master plan. He looks at that as being another six home improvement grants, plus we have plenty of other ways to spend that money. However, he was pretty open-minded about what the commission wanted to do. **Commissioner Berry** said, for him, the home grant program is the most important thing that we are doing out there. It increases the value of homes, and we are getting people to buy into their homes. We are making the area nicer, and it will only help the community more. **CM Minner** pointed out that there were some people in the audience whispering, so there might be some public input if he wanted to take it. **Mayor Reisman** asked if there were any public comments on this CRA.

Samantha Ponder of 1204 Baker Street asked about the home improvement grant being on that side of town, because on her side of town, which is the east side, people have been asking her if they could receive preference as well. On the website under the grant, it sounds like it is for all of Leesburg, but it says preference is given to that neighborhood. She was looking for clarification that she could give her neighbors. **Commissioner Pederson** responded that the money from this CRA has to be spent in this CRA district by law. **Mayor Reisman** added that the Downtown CRA has no more money, and he believed we were looking to possibly put money for grants into the US Highway 27/441 CRA. **CM Minner** added that we have had this discussion. The story there is that we created the home grant program two years ago, and it is a citywide program that could be funded in four ways; the general fund, the Carver Heights CRA, the US Highway 441/27 CRA, and the Greater Leesburg CRA. At this time, the commission has opted to only fund the home grant program through the Carver Heights CRA. So, if we are only going to fund the home grants from the Carver Heights CRA, that means that money has to be spent in the Carver Heights CRA. It can only be used for homes in that CRA because those are incremental boxes. That is where we get the TIF money from, so that TIF money has to be spent in that box. If they had US Highway 441/27 CRA money, they would only be allowed to spend it on homes in that box. However, in that box the only place we see residential homes is near John L. Johnson Park. In the Greater Leesburg CRA we could address homes in the East Pine Street area, but there is no money available for that. Any other area around the city that has not been mentioned, the general fund would pick up. It could also pick up everybody because it is all-inclusive. However, the commission has opted not to do that. He was sure Commissioner Berry would talk to her again because she had brought up this conversation ad nauseam. Really, it is however the commission wants to fund the home grant program, but since its inception, we have chosen to only fund it through the Carver Height CRA. **Ms. Ponder** said when she spoke to individuals in her community, they asked what she could bring because they had a need for it. People mentioned things like beautification, because we have some areas on the sidewalks where tree roots have been uprooted, and it makes it too hard for people to walk and kids cannot ride their bikes or walk safely in that area. However, the thing that she heard repeatedly was the home improvement grant program. We have people who are older, some who have low-income who own homes and their houses have become dilapidated, and they cannot afford to fix them. That was why she brought it up. Was there a way that they could look at this so it could be extended to her side of town? They could look at how the special events division is funded or could there be some type of hybrid where

part of it comes from that CRA and another part comes from the general fund because people need that program on her side of town.

Robert Alderman of 1113 Beecher Street said he knew he was supposed to submit his information to the city by email. However, he had a couple of things he wanted under project priorities for the Carver Heights CRA. One thing he would like to add are gateways into the community, into Montclair and Carver Heights. He would like to have LED signage boards established at the gateways. He would like one put across from the fireplace business and another one at the other end. This way, they could communicate information to the people that live in that community. There are a lot of things that happen that the people in this community are not aware of. If we established a better way to communicate with digital boards, that would be great because Facebook does not always work. He is on Facebook, but he does not get on there all the time. That should be added to the project priorities. It could be used for communicating things from the City of Leesburg about anything that is happening. The other thing that he would like is another mini-community center that would serve people who want to hold meetings. That way, they do not have to worry about driving across town or to Montclair to use the Resource Center. They should have another community center located right in that community. He had previously mentioned where the old pool was located, but he heard an argument about parking being a problem. However, he was sure there were other areas where they could establish a community center or an activity center for the people in that neighborhood. Also, to piggyback on the previous speaker, he has lived on both sides of town, and he still has relations on the other side, so we need help on that side of town too with the home grant program. **Mayor Reisman** asked if there were any other public comments. There were none. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to make sure she understood what he meant by gateways. Are we looking at the entrance into the CRA area and Montclair? She then pointed out that they were working on a beautification project that establishes signs throughout Leesburg. Also, with the home improvement grants, Carver Heights Montclair CRA is the only one that has been able to fund this project. At this time, there are no funds available for the Downtown CRA. However, in the future they are hoping to bring that to other CRAs. **Mr. Alderman** said he agreed that the other side of town needs help because he has ties with both sides.

Moving on to US Highway 441/27, CRA, **CM Minner** said he would not belabor the history of where they have been. There was a decrease in funds, and our policy for the US Highway 441/27 CRA had always been to keep as much money as we could rolling to cover the bond that crashed when the CRA was first created. We have significantly achieved that goal and the expense in this CRA becomes paying that bond, which is about \$1 million, and then what do we do with the money left over? This CRA brings in about \$3 million, and the bond is about \$1 million, which leaves around \$2 million. **Commissioner Burry** wanted to know when that bond would end. **CM Minner** answered 2036. Last year, in preparation for FY 25 when we did Susan Street, we identified that our bases on the bond were covered. Therefore, we had significant revenues that we could grab for that project, which is why we have a decrease. We stashed the cash, which was specifically permitted based on the bond and indebtedness that was associated with the CRA. Now that we have identified that the CRA has now grown out of that danger period, we recalculated the base, and we now have a \$3.4 million fund. The bond payment of \$890,000 leaves us with \$2.5 million. So, we have about \$2.5 million, and they have to determine what they want from this fund. The Susan Street project has been paid for barring any calamity during construction. We are now back to the principle of, do we want to take this money and squirrel it away to secure the note, or do we want to peel a little off to hit some miscellaneous things? There was a discussion about putting some of this money into the home grant program for this CRA. However, this CRA is the most commercially based CRA, but there is a small portion of the CRA block that faces US Highway 441 near John L. Johnson Park. Those homes in that area are around the Holiday Marine, so we could pick up some of those homes. If they want to carve some home grant money out for that area, they could do so, because they certainly have the financial ability to do that. If they did that, he would advise that they not

carve out more than \$50,000 or \$100,000 because there would not be a lot of participation in that area, but at least they would have expanded the home grant program. Also, with the beautification item. We talked about it last year and at that time it did not pick up a lot of traction. However, one thing in the corridor that we need to do is expand the facade sign landscape grant down the US 27 corridor specifically. We still see a lot of the old signage ways and the old signage ways are the monopole signs. Every community that is like Leesburg has those old monopole signs from the 1950s. So, concepts nationwide, we have gone into monument-style signs where we bring those signs down lower, and it makes it more ambient and prettier. We even have a code that says these signs need to be changed by a certain time. However, that time has certainly long since passed, and we have not actively initiated enforcement on those businesses. He suggested that if they want to affect esthetics, specifically in the US 27 corridors, we need to up the ante like we did on the home grants. We did not have a lot of participation in the home grant until we made that grant value significant to where the city's TIF money took on the burden of that expense. So, in the program, if we are going to address this, we have a list of non-compliant signs that could be targeted. The cost of the signs today runs anywhere between \$30,000 and \$50,000. We could cap out at \$20,000, which would cover about 80%. If we capped it at \$18,000, the businesses would still be looking at \$20,000 to \$30,000 out of their pocket to match. If we flipped that switch, we could give up to an "x" percentage or up to \$40,000, but we still need to MacGyver those numbers. We need to make that a significant number, like a million dollars, and put it into that program and upgrade the facade sign landscape grant. That way, we could assign staff to go out to the businesses and market this program so we can tackle that corridor. Another thing that would be a beautification thing in the US 27 corridor would be underground electric utilities. However, that will never happen because Duke Energy has a giant transmission line that starts at Picciola and runs all the way down our corridor in that area, and we piggyback on their poles. The undergrounding cost to remove a transmission pole of that size is about \$4 million, so that would be \$4 million multiplied by the number of poles. So, unfortunately, he does not see those ever being underground. The big giant transmission line that cuts down the center of the US 27 corridor will never go away. We will always have that issue, but at least we could tackle the signage, because we have the funds to do that. The home grants and the facade sign landscape grants are where he would point their attention to. **Commissioner Berry** asked about the Susan Street project. She knows they are getting that done, but is there anything that could come afterward that we might need to fund? She could see in the future expanding Susan Street to add splash pads. **CM Minner** responded that he had a conversation with Commissioner Berry earlier, and she envisions that once the rectangle fields at Susan Street are completed, that we will continue adding on to that. He suggested that the concept needed to go in the hopper for our years. The problem with Susan Street, funding wise, is that right about where Susan Street goes into the park that is the line between the US Highway 441/27 CRA and the Carver Heights CRA. So, between those two CRAs, we might be able to tackle some other areas. We are also stretching into a growth area of Susan Street behind the Publix Plaza where there are wetlands, and we are extending those rugby fields into that area. He thinks that will be a project that we will keep our eyes on because we need to see where it finishes first. We can then revisit that in our years to grow the rectangle field concept. He feels good about where the budget is at right now for Susan Street. Again, barring any big crazy stuff, he does not see significant overruns, but if we do, we have the CRAs to fall back on. That budget was put together with a reasonable contingency and at this stage, nothing alarming had happened. The plan is to be conservative and to hold onto the \$2.5 million to cover the bond or split a little off between the FSL and home grant programs. **Commissioner Pederson** said he asks this question every year, but what is the interest rate on the bond? **CM Minner** replied it was at 2.5%. All the bonds that we have throughout all the funds are all 3% or lower. We did a good job when interest rates dropped back in the day of refinancing everything. **Commissioner Pederson** thanked him for that answer. He thought we had one or two that were high and that was why he was seeking clarification. **CM Minner** stated there are one or two that we do have that are high, but those are cash-driven bonds. When we ran out of cash, we went and borrowed money for cash purposes. So that would not give the same interest rate as a CIP.

Commissioner Pederson then said he liked the suggestions for the corridors. Whether it is façade landscape grants or home improvement grants. However, based on the money that we spent on Susan Street, is the entrance called William Street? **CM Minner** answered yes. **Commissioner Pederson** indicated that he would like to include that area in some beautification efforts for those homeowners because he drove it yesterday or the day before. **CM Minner** pointed out that the area falls under the Carver Heights CRA. **Commissioner Pederson** said he came off US 27 to the entrance of Susan Street. **CM Minner** agreed there may be a couple there, but we are splitting hairs on where that line hits, but if we took some money from the US Highway 441/27 CRA, and the Carver Heights CRA, we would capture William Street. **Commissioner Pederson** continued to say, we are spending all this money on Susan Street, and that entrance is not up to par. **Mayor Reisman** indicated that he would support the home grant program, and the facade landscape sign program. He knows the planning and zoning department has started sending people to these businesses. So if we informed them that they were in violation, and we were not going to penalize them, this is the money that we have available, and we could go from there. **CM Minner** added that one thing we could add to the facade sign landscape grant is that we need to increase its signage. We could also make dumpster screening part of that grant for those who might be non-conforming. **Mayor Reisman** said he loved that idea. **Commissioner Pederson** thanked him for that because he had received his share of phone calls on that one. He then wanted to know if the commission was okay with William Street since it was only about two blocks. **CM Minner** responded that if we grabbed money for a home, and we put it in the US Highway 441/27 CRA, we would have William Street covered. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to know if that would just be for William Street or did that include Penn Street? **CM Minner** said he would come back on that, but yes is the answer. **Mayor Reisman** asked the commission if they agreed with the city manager's recommendation of the facade signing landscape grants? **Commissioner Pederson** said the only comment he had was because it was said that a typical sign would cost between \$30,000 to \$50,000, and he said to make the grant \$40,000. He did not want to encourage people to spend more money than they had to. **CM Minner** indicated that he would tighten up the numbers and this would be something that staff would bring back to commission with a program where they would look at that in more detail, because they would need to amend the FSL grant in resolution form and that is where they would encumber that concept. So, based on this conversation, we will drill into that and bring back some concepts about how to expand that program. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to know if, in the past, was it ten and ten? **CM Minner** answered no. We started at 80% up to \$20,000. **Commissioner Pederson** pointed out that it had not been working and no one was taking advantage of it because it was so expensive. **Commissioner Burry** asked to go back to the CDC payment. Is that a statutory thing where it has to come out of that pool of money? **CM Minner** explained that it was not a statutory thing, and that is an important delineation because it was a court decree. It was a settlement, not a statutory thing, and that is important to delineate, because when the state legislature came out with the program to sunset all programs in the CRA except for debt, the payment to the CDC would be considered a program, not a debt. So, the action of the state legislature to sunset CRAs would supersede that court order. If the state legislature made a law that sunsets programming and/or existing programs but for debt, then that action would supersede the court order, and we would not have to make the payment. That is how he would interpret that. **Commissioner Burry** then said his real question referred to the funding. **CM Minner** said that funding was required because of a judicial mandate. We pay 50% of the increment no matter what the increment is. The judicial action is 50% of the increment, no matter what the increment is, and the city cannot sunset the increment to get out of paying it. **Commissioner Burry** added that we do not have control over how the CDC spends that money. However, the city already does home improvement grants, and it would certainly be within citizens' rights to request the CDC to do the same type of programming. He would encourage that because we are trying to do it. However, we are hamstrung because of funding. We give these funds to the CDC, so we are putting funds out there to that community. **Mayor Reisman** asked if the city could write a recommendation letter to the CDC asking that they use some of those funds for home grants? He knows we cannot make them, but could we ask? **CM Minner** replied yes. They could absolutely write a

letter and ask. **Commissioner Burry** pointed out that the home grant program has been so successful that it would be wonderful to do it on the east side as well. **Mayor Reisman** said they could include the number of people who have applied who are not eligible right now and ask to see if they would be open to funding that portion. **Commissioner Berry** said some residents that applied originally are still sitting on hold with the intention that it will come later on. **CM Minner** pointed out that Commissioner Connell asked if the state had made a decision on the CRAs and the answer to that was no. That legislation came in, and it has not really moved forward. There is an anticipation that at the next session that starts in January 2026, we will see more CRA estoppel legislation being considered as well as property taxes. Next year we may be crying about CRAs, general fund taxes, and electric rates as well. **Commissioner Berry** reiterated that there were some residents that have already applied that we could possibly consider on the east side because their applications are on hold. **CM Minner** asked if there were any other questions about this CRA. There were none.

Moving into special revenues, **CM Minner** said one disclaimer is that we are trying to condense the budget process in workshops, because we already talk about a lot of stuff, and we have a really good feeling about it. He wanted to fully disclose that we eliminated the discussion in the workshops on two funds, which were the capital improvement fund and the debt service fund. The reason we eliminated the funds is that they are replicatory accounting type funds. Any money that is spent from the general fund or the special revenue fund, whether it be direct capital improvement like the pay as you go, that money is shuffled over into the capital improvement fund. For example, if we built a new city hall out of discretionary sales tax, and we did it in cash, and it cost \$1 million, we would have a \$1 million expense in the DST fund, and we would transfer it over to the CIP fund, and we would have another \$1 million of expenses. If we built a new city hall using DST funds, but we did it with debt, then we would have a DST fund going to debt that would then go to capital improvement funds. Based on whether we do it in cash or with debt, it would go into these funds and that is the general fund general accounting principles for government. Gas tax and discretionary sales tax are the two biggest and the discretionary sales tax fund, other than the general fund, is where we talk about what to do with that half a million dollars that we have to make specific capital improvements. We bring in about \$5.5 million in DST funds and of that, about \$3.4 million is already charged to the credit card, and we cannot touch it. That covers the police station, city hall, and debt services that we have already done in the past. It includes shifting of funds to make things work. So, \$3.4 million, if we were at the federal level, that is a non-discretionary expense that cannot be touched. So, we get to talk about discretionary expenses and what we can spend and from that we have about \$2.5 million that we can spend. **BD McDaniel** clarified that we have \$3.5 million, but we are using some cash. **CM Minner** pointed out that we can play with about \$1.7 million that has not been spent and that is where we get to the \$5.5 million. We have about \$2.5 million extra to spend, and we have competing demands for all of it, but we have \$2.5 million to spend. Referring to a chart, he showed where they could spend it. Jumping to the bottom of the chart, he said he wanted to talk about gas money for roads because that one was easy. A big chunk of that comes in, and we transfer it over to the general fund. So, about \$1 million in gas tax comes in and that is the penny gas taxes and the different gas taxes that the county promulgates. We have agreements with the county about how that money is distributed back from the state to the county. Then the county has an automatic formula that benefits the political subdivisions and the statute says if they have a deal with the political subdivisions, they could do it that way. We have a deal with the political subdivision as most municipal corporations in the State of Florida do, and the deal is basically road miles and the population across the county divided up, and we get about \$1 million dollars from that. We are a giver nation in Lake County for gas tax and discretionary taxes, so the gas tax has about \$1 million coming in, and we peel off about \$800,000 of that, and it goes right into the general fund to pay for streetlights. We get gas tax money in, and it goes to the electric department. So, every time you drive down US 27 or Main Street or when you look in your neighborhood, and you have a light on that is the city's, gas tax money pays for that because it is an eligible expense. It then goes to fund potholes or those kinds of things. This year is the first year in a

while that we are kind of catching up on the general fund side. So, we are pulling a little bit of that back, and we are putting it into roads that need to be resurfaced. The roads and sidewalk repair is part of that eligible fund, and that is gas tax money. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know what we averaged on sidewalk repairs, historically, because he saw the \$50,000, but that number seemed light. **CM Minner** said he would get an answer for him about how many linear feet of sidewalk we repair a year.

Commissioner Pederson said he heard a comment tonight about broken sidewalks, and he has received complaints about them in his neighborhood too, but that number does seem light. **CM Minner** pointed out that if they receive complaints they need to let him know because we try to tackle them as we go.

Continuing, **CM Minner** stated that discretionary sales tax will probably be the conversation of the hour. We talked about capital improvements and this is how staff organized it based on internal feedback, discussion and public meetings. Now, this is the witching hour from this point, moving into September on how they solidify where to spend that money. Nothing in the chart is set in stone, and he was sure they would get a lot of public input on how to spend some of these dollars. From a staff level, how we organized it for the commission's consideration was to first continue the downtown parking project. Last year we allocated about \$1.2 million, and we spent about \$150,000 on it for design. We currently have \$1 million that we have not spent, and we are anticipating that this project may be above that number. However, the number one priority is to continue to shift money to that project so we do not run out of money. He anticipates having the initial draft of the parking concept by the end of next week. It will be presented to the commission shortly. We will start to dissect it and split it up and do what we do with capital projects. His hope is that in the first part of 2026 we will get it out to bid, so by the summer of 2026 construction will begin. Some of that will go hand in hand with what we are doing with the gas department. That is project number one on the list. If we put \$1.5 million into that fund, we would have \$2.7 million for parking or other things related to parking in the downtown. He firmly recommended that they keep it in that pot. Hopefully, we are under that, and then we will have an option to put money back into the pot for other projects or put other money back into downtown, because we are not seeing any money available for downtown in the Downtown CRA because of how we have rearranged wires over there. **Commissioner Pederson** said for the benefit of the audience, we budgeted \$2.5 million for downtown parking in 2020, and it has been siphoned off every year. That is why he has been so vocal on this issue. **CM Minner** agreed. We had a large allocation that we never got to, then covid came and money was shifted around to do different things, and we never got back to it. **Commissioner Connell** inquired if they would get this conceptual plan next week before we spend any more money on this? **CM Minner** replied that the only money that we spent on this was on design. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to verify that we would not spend any more until we have the conceptual plan. **CM Minner** commented that he could not say that because we might have design bills we have to pay. So, he would say we will spend money on design, but we will not spend any on construction until it comes before the commission. **Commissioner Pederson** added that it would not go out to bid before it comes back to the commission. **Commissioner Connell** questioned the design he was referring to. Would that conceptual design come to them next week? **CM Minner** remarked that he hoped to have that by the end of next week. However, he did not want to say we would not spend any money on it, because if we paid the engineer then he would have to use some of that money. **Commissioner Connell** said the \$150,000 he assumed covered the whole conceptual design. **CM Minner** agreed. The only money we will be spending on this until it comes before the commission to approve the conceptual design is design. The contract we have with GIA goes through concept up to bidding, and we have our design numbers in the hopper. **Commissioner Connell** said if it goes to bid it will be construction. **CM Minner** answered yes. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to know how much more that would cost before we get to revisit it. **CM Minner** said we have \$1 million plus whatever they decide to put in the pot for 2026. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to confirm that he said we would go ahead and spend \$1 million dollars before we approve the design. **CM Minner** said no. There would not be any more money spent on this project except for professional services out of the \$150,000 that was allocated for GIA. That was suggestion number one.

Suggestion number two is probably the biggest concept from the recreation board and feedback from the commission and talk around town is that there is a desire for pickleball courts. We had this discussion last year, and at that time we chose not to move forward with it. However, it does continue to be a major demand. Pickleball is the number one sport or leisure activity that folks seem to want to do these days. He could not remember what stopped them from doing it last year other than other priorities and finding a place. As we moved this fiscal year, we looked to see where the best place was, and what we could do because we did not want to go out and purchase a place. He recommended that the best place was to create a new project called the Palmetto and Second Street project. Referring to a map, he pointed out the red circles and said that was the property the city owns. We own an open space between Mr. Sokol's lounge, where the public works, used to have a storage facility. It is near the Lakefront TV station and the shuffleboard/tennis courts. Pointing to the map, he showed a strip of land that CSX owns, and the city looked into acquiring that parcel, but dealing with the railroads has been more difficult than dealing with the federal government. We also believe there could be some UST issues associated with this site. Around this site there is availability for redevelopment. However, the issue becomes pickleball, shuffleboard, tennis and a concept that has been around since Dr. Marbut reports on ways to help the homeless and teens, which is the Forward Paths concept, which provides housing for teens. Mrs. Burry is the director of Forward Paths, and she has worked with other communities in Lake County. She has talked with us ad nauseam over the past five to six years about where a place could be, and we really have not found a place that works.

To tee this conversation up for discussion and consideration, we have four items that could potentially all fit, in one fashion or another here. However, the question du jour is what we have had on the desk for some time now, and that is to fix or not fix the tennis courts and the shuffleboard courts. Up until the last two regular meetings, the shuffleboard courts were seen as not actively used and not actively used by a lot of city residents, and they have fallen into disrepair. We also have the same issues with the tennis courts. We had the tennis court slated for resurfacing about five years ago, and we got to a bid level where the bid went out, and the construction contract came to the city commission and the city commission rejected it. The recommendation that staff would provide to the city commission would be that they need to consider whether to demolish and remove the shuffleboard and tennis courts because they are not a primary use for the region. If we do that, we will have a small but loud pocket of residents discontent with the demolition of those courts. The tennis courts are even a smaller pocket that is directly related to the high school. Case in point, we recently demolished the tennis courts at Susan Street without a peep, so tennis is losing its popularity. With the concept of losing the shuffleboard and tennis courts, this area could be open for several different things. Pickleball courts could go where the tennis courts are, or pickleball courts could go where the old public works shelter used to be or both. Forward Paths is more complicated because to make that program work the requirement is for a two-acre lot. He believes the shuffleboard court complex is about 1.7 acres, so it is not quite as big as Forward Paths is seeking, but it is in a location that serves all the purposes. If we move forward and put Forward Paths in this area, it really needs to go where the shuffleboard courts are. Then shuffle pickleball, tennis and the shuffleboard courts in other areas. However, there are a lot of derivatives. The next part of the recommendation is that if we do not demolish the shuffleboards and tennis, then we need to invest in fixing them. It is either keep them and make them useful or get rid of them. There are a couple of things that we need to consider because there now becomes a number of derivatives on that. If we were to marry a concept with Forward Paths, it needs to be in this section, but if we want to keep shuffleboard courts, we could move shuffleboard courts up off Second Street. We could come over to the tennis courts and make a combo tennis court with pickleball where we have a facility that is lined up for both. For discussion purposes, the rule of thumb is that one tennis court has two pickleball courts, so we could marry those. There are a bunch of different ways we could do this, and he likes and dislikes the marriage concept of pickleball and tennis at the same time. He likes the marriage concept because it works, and it would save us money

while we knock two birds off with one stone, but as a sports enthusiast, when he goes to the driving range, he does not want to play golf on the driving range because the driving range is for practicing. The same goes with tennis. When we all use multipurpose facilities, they can be nice, but they are not as nice when you go out to play pickleball. You do not want to look at tennis lines and the same goes for pickleball. He suggested that the funds have the ability to give, for lack of better words, the Cadillac option. However, he understands that it comes with competing demands, and it comes with money. He knows we will get some public input on that, but that would be the staff's recommendation about how to spend that \$2.5 million. Jumping ahead, and before we get into the discussion of the priorities, we also need to look at the other two smaller priorities. Now that we have derivatives, there are two other major maintenance items that are eligible for DST funding. One is to change out the gymnasium floor, which was talked about on Monday and the price tag on that is \$200,000. We also need to change the carpet out at the library, which costs \$350,000. There is a lot of carpet there along with a lot of things that would have to be moved, but we really need to tackle those two items. We could do the carpet at the library, replace the gym floor, plus pickleball, and all that other stuff all wrapped up with what we have got. We also have half a million in the general fund that we could pass back and forth.

Commissioner Burry questioned whether the half million in the general fund was if we stayed at the current millage rate? **CM Minner** answered yes, but we also need to look at what did not make the cut for FY 26. The first one, the historical society, came to the commission twice during the public comments to retrofit, upgrade and refurbish the historical museum on Sixth Street. The amount they provided was \$1 million. Both he and the public works director believe that to be a good budget number. On the smaller side, the library has asked for an attractive canopy shade for the courtyard and the recreation director has asked for one to be put over the pumping system at the HO Dabney aquatic facility. They would also like to add two shade structures in Sleepy Hollow. These are the top items that he wanted to show them that did not make the cut. So back to the issue du jour with how to tackle the Palmetto Sports Complex concept. Real quick, he wanted to jump ahead to debt service. He showed a slide of where the city was at with debt. Going back to capital projects, that is really the last concept to discuss this evening.

Commissioner Berry commented that Forward Paths should be acknowledged, and we should realize that this is for young people aging out of foster care. It gives them a start in life with expected direction while preparing them to be fit for society, meaning responsibility. That is a plus and that location would be more conducive because of the downtown area while being close to the school. It is also close to the police department. Young people are turned out on their own for the first time while trying to be responsible and the suggestion of combining pickleball and tennis would be a plus. They would just have to share and coordinate. Plus, it could be another job opportunity for somebody to reserve the courts.

Commissioner Connell said he was good with the concept of Forward Paths, but he does not think this is a good-fit location. He really likes the concept of keeping the tennis and shuffleboard. We should resurface those and put the pickleball behind the TV station and make that a mini-recreational complex. He is all good with Forward Paths concept. He read through the brochure, and it was a very worthwhile cause. However, he did not think it was a good fit for this particular location. He has spoken to the city manager, as everyone probably has, but we have two or three other locations in the city that he would be more than willing to consider donating to them for this program. One location was behind the Resource Center, and another one was near the Tuskegee area and the third location would be the old Dabney swimming pool site. He would be open to any of those three locations for this program. He did not think this program would work in this particular location because we would have to readjust everything. We are looking at losing the shuffleboard courts and not having the pickleball courts constructed. It is a great concept to put all three of the recreational uses in one area and put Forward Paths in one of the other locations. He would be open to donating that property. However, this particular property is not a good fit for this. **Commissioner Berry** asked when he said it was not a good fit. What did he mean by that? Is it

because they would close the sports arenas? **Commissioner Connell** stated it is disrupting the concept. We were trying to put together a small recreational complex to include tennis, shuffleboard, and pickleball, and it would all be located in the central area of downtown. It is a great concept for a recreational area, and we have two of them already there. All we would need to do is resurface the court and add the pickleball courts. From that standpoint, no, this is not a good location to put all these tiny homes while losing one of our sports complexes along with a proposed sports concept. He believes the sports complex would be a great addition to the downtown. It would draw and bring people to the downtown area, which is what he has heard this commission say for years. The goal was to increase the foot traffic downtown and that is what this sports complex would do. It would increase the foot traffic in the downtown. **Commissioner Berry** said she would agree with that. However, she believes kids need to be around other kids, and we already have Beacon here. Forward Paths has put in a lot of hard work trying to deal with mental health and other issues with children. She did not think District One, Carver Heights, would be conducive to putting young people out on their own in that area. **Commissioner Connell** stated there are other areas in the city where Forward Paths could go. He was told that these three pieces were the properties that we had that Forward Paths could use. If we were to come across something in the future, he would be open to looking at it, but this is not a good fit for this program. The recreational complex is great, and it would be great for the downtown. It would create foot traffic. People would come and play, and then they could walk downtown to have a drink, lunch, dinner, or whatever. He is all good with Forward Paths, but not at this location. **Commissioner Berry** said there were residential areas on the side streets, so it is not just a recreational area. It is still a very contained neighborhood. It is at the back of the railroad track. We have John's location on one end the TV Center, Dixie, the Venetian Center, and Canal Street. That is conducive for walking paths for kids because they will not have cars, and they will be able to get on a bus route to go wherever they are scheduled to work. She believes this area would be perfect because it mends with the students. **Commissioner Connell** pointed out that it would be located right across the street from a bar. **Commissioner Berry** inquired where the bar was located. **Commissioner Connell** stated it was called the Warehouse. **Commissioner Berry** said it would also be near the police station. **Mayor Reisman** mentioned that having them downtown allows for walking distance to potential jobs. He knows CSX has been more amenable lately, especially with the county when it comes to trails, so can we approach them again? There are a lot of shuffleboards there. Even though he was not a shuffleboard player, do they need that big of a space and do they need that many courts? Also, we need to reach out to CSX because maybe we could accommodate everything in that area. He was not in favor of the dual-purpose pickleball and tennis courts, because that defeats the whole purpose. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to piggyback off the comment on CSX. He did not want to start a hornet's nest on this with CSX, but if we have suspicion of contamination, we have a duty as a city to take it head on. He does not want to get crazy about this, and they may have to help pay for it, but they do have liability. At this point, we did not even know, so he did not want to get too bogged down about this. **CM Minner** stated no, and he does not want everybody who lives in that multi-use corridor to think that there are contaminations across the street. **Commissioner Pederson** mentioned that he heard rumbling about there being an underground storage tank. **CM Minner** said he would say no. It is not the city's responsibility to fix that because it is a private sector issue, but there are government plans like Brownfield and those types of things where we can get that and lead the private sector to remedy contaminations from the past. We do need to continue talking to CSX, and he did not think the initial phase one would be very expensive, but we are doing those things. Also, the L-shaped property that we have is usable, but for this fiscal year we need to set some priorities, even if they are unpopular, and start moving forward with a plan that uses this prime property that accomplishes many of the goals that we have talked about for really relatively not a lot of money. **Commissioner Burry** said with the CSX property, Forward Paths had already tried to talk to CSX about purchasing that property. CSX will not let you test the property for contaminants before purchasing. This property, according to Jerry Galbreath, who is somebody who grew up here who has been around a long time, said there were three above-ground diesel fuel tanks because the railroad tracks used to run through there. So, they will

not let you test it. Forward Paths could not spend donated money to purchase something in the hopes that there would be no contaminations. **Commissioner Pederson** said again that he did not want to get bogged down on this issue. He was trying to go somewhere with it, and maybe we could talk to the city attorney. All he was trying to say is, as a municipality, if we have knowledge of contaminations it is our duty to fix it. **CM Minner** mentioned that he was squeezing a little bit here because we are really talking without proper information. It is all speculation because we do not know and DEP is extremely good at identifying where they suspect underground storage issues are, and this site has not been identified by DEP. So, to sum up that conversation, that strip does not belong to us, it belongs to the railroad. Working with the railroads is difficult, and we have been talking to them over the past nine months.

Commissioner Pederson said he did not intend to get bogged down on that, he just wanted to throw it out there, piggybacking off of Commissioner Burry's comment. **Commissioner Burry** said, just to clear up for the audience, for everybody, we threw Forward Paths out there because everyone is aware of what it is, but for the public, Forward Paths is an organization that primarily deals with kids aging out of foster care. They are turning eighteen, and they are being told they have to go because they are currently in a home where sixteen-year-old foster kids are, and they cannot have both in the same home. These kids come to this program primarily with a backpack. They do not have cars nor are there any luxuries. They also deal with homeless unaccompanied youths. Many of these youths come to them through the guidance counselors at the local high schools. They figure out who is out on their own, and they end up at Forward Paths. Last year, they were working with kids from six different high schools in Lake County. There were eight seniors in their program that turned eighteen, and they were thrown out. They housed those kids, worked with them and six graduated from high school. One of them received their GED and one of them decided he wanted to go it alone. It does not have a 100% success rate, but it is an opportunity to participate in the program. They have to get a job, and they have to go to school. Now, the school could be Lake Sumter or Lake Tech. There is a facility in Eustis, and he urged everyone to drive up US 19 to the Methodist Church where the road splits in Eustis, because just behind the church is where this community is and it has ten tiny homes. It is called Cottages on Grove Street. It gives an idea of what this would look like. This is only providing an opportunity for our youth that otherwise statistics say fifty percent of them or more will end up in jail in two years if we do nothing. He is a big advocate, and obviously Mrs. Burry is his wife. She is the executive president of Forward Paths, and we do not receive any funding or money from the public. We get nothing as far as money, so there is no conflict of interest. So that is the program and that is what it does. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to clarify a comment because she wanted to make sure that she was clear when she said District One, the areas that were named, Tuskegee and Beecher, are somewhat troubled areas, but we are making great strides in working with the police and there have been improvements. However, when she said it was not conducive, meaning we were gradually getting there. We are growing and seeing changes. People are making comments because we have better control. They do not have the policing that she has been requesting, but until we were able she did not think that area would be conducive to this program and that is why she said not in those areas. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to confirm that she said these areas were unsafe to live in. **Commissioner Berry** said that she did not say they were unsafe, she said they were unsafe for students fostering out of foster care. **Commissioner Connell** stated these are eighteen to twenty-year-olds. Is that area unsafe for them? **Commissioner Berry** said that area has a higher crime rate compared to the other side of town. If he was not sure what she was talking about, he was welcome to ride through at any point. She was proud of her area, but they still have a lot of growing to do and they are making strides. We are doing much better, but she knows if we put this there it would set that area back. **Commissioner Connell** remarked that he did not have any issues or concerns about Forward Paths because it sounds like a very good program, but why should we give property away to Forward Paths while taking these people's amenities away? **Commissioner Berry** remarked that she wanted to include everything and the third recommendation was to combine. She was not trying to take amenities away from anyone. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to know why they could not put Forward Paths somewhere else. Why do we have to infringe on the citizens' amenities? They have been using these courts for years.

Why would we require them to readjust? Also, we would not be able to expand to include pickleball if we brought in Forward Paths. So, why not wait until another piece of property comes up, because he would be more than happy to look at another site for Forward Paths. Why can't Forward Paths buy a piece of property? He does not know why we would disrupt everybody who uses that facility now to put Forward Paths there. **Commissioner Berry** mentioned that she was not asking to disrupt it exclusively.

Commissioner Connel wanted to know how it would not disrupt everyone who uses the shuffleboard courts. **Commissioner Berry** stated that she wanted to give them an environment that was safe.

Commissioner Connell questioned if she really thought they could put Forward Paths, the shuffleboard courts, tennis courts, and pickleball courts all in that area? **Commissioner Berry** replied that it was an option. **Commissioner Connell** stated that he did not believe that to be a good, viable or realistic option.

Commissioner Pederson mentioned that he started with the CSX property only because Commissioner Berry was talking about it. However, he supports Forward Paths, and he wants to support them with this venture. He knows they have been looking for a site for a long time. He picked on Mrs. Berry when she built the first one in Eustis. He asked her why it was not in Leesburg, and she responded by saying that was because she did not have a site. If we can find another site, that would be great. However, right now, this is the best and only option. He does not want to close the door on any other ideas when it comes to tennis and pickleball. He could live with leaving two tennis courts and tearing out two to make four pickleball courts. If we need more down the road, we can add them. However, that was just one idea.

With Forward Paths, he wished they could fit them up to the top. He did not want to give up on that, and if push came to shove he would get behind them on the shuffleboard site. He said he did not take that lightly, and he was not quite sure, but he had best be careful about what he says. In summary, he wanted to accommodate Forward Paths because it is a great organization. They have been looking for a home in Leesburg for a long time. He wants to do his best to help them, but we do have a long way to go on this one. He does want to work with them, and yes, it may be disruptive. He could compromise on the tennis, pickleball and shuffleboard courts. Maybe we could do a smaller amount, but that may not make people happy. We do not even know what it would cost to redo them, because it is a big site. It is a 1.7-acre site. He drove it yesterday so it would not be cheap to redo the shuffleboard courts. Right now, it is not a very impressive complex. **Commissioner Connell** stated the courts look like that because the city has not put any money into them in decades. **Commissioner Pederson** agreed. He was pretty disappointed when he drove by it yesterday. **Commissioner Connell** pointed out that he had done some research, and this sport was coming back. It is becoming a more popular sport, and it is not just a senior sport, because the youth are getting involved with shuffleboard too. We need to take this into consideration before just doing away with the shuffleboards or doing away with half our tennis courts. The Leesburg High School relies on those tennis courts, so we have to take all of this into consideration. Again, he was not making light of it, but this is not a great location, and we should not have to lose our recreational facilities to put this there.

Commissioner Pederson remarked that he did understand that, and he did respect that concern.

Commissioner Berry suggested without taking away or disrupting, but why not consider the Griffin Road Teen Center for tennis courts and shuffleboard? Are there areas over there to use? **CM Minner** said that was a good idea. **Commissioner Berry** continued to say that the area is used as a sports complex, and it is right off of US 27/441. **Mayor Reisman** inquired if there was any room over there to do that.

CM Minner remarked that when she said Teen Center he was thinking about the Resource Center. The Resource Center would be a good spot. The Teen Center is tough because that space is tight, and the wetlands are on the other side of the parking lot. However, the Resource Center would be a good place for tennis courts and shuffleboard courts. **Commissioner Connell** questioned why it would be

appropriate to put the recreational facilities there, but not Forward Paths. **Commissioner Berry** said she suggested the Teen Center because that was a sports arena already, and they also have basketball courts there.

Commissioner Connell pointed out that they were not talking about the Teen Center. They were just talking about the Resource Center. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know how much the tennis

court would cost. **CM Minner** said if they wanted him to specifically advocate for them, he would tell them what he thinks they should do, but that was not his place. So, when Commissioner Berry brought up

the Teen Center, he went straight to the Resource Center. So, his suggestion would be to put tennis and shuffleboard at the Resource Center, which would open up the Palmetto area for Forward Paths and pickleball. **Commissioner Connell** commented that was why he made the point, because we are saying the Resource Center is not safe for Forward Paths, but it is safe enough for a recreational sports center. That to him does not make sense. **Commissioner Berry** said she was talking about eighteen-year-olds who are not adults. **Commissioner Connell** pointed out that eighteen-year-olds are actually adults, so why don't we just give up half of the ski beach because we do not have any facilities down there. There are no recreational facilities there, so why not give them the back half of Ski Beach? **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know how much the tennis courts are used. He was aware that the high schools said they needed four. **Mayor Reisman** stated First Academy and the high school use the courts. **Commissioner Berry** said she wanted to accommodate everyone. **Mayor Reisman** opened the floor to allow for public comments.

Rick Tallman of 655 Abdella Way, The Villages said he was there on behalf of the Leesburg Shuffleboard Club. There was a question about how much the tennis courts were used. They also asked about how much the shuffleboard courts were used and there was a comment made that said they were not used very much. However, those courts are played on twice a week, every week, all year long. In addition to that, there are tournaments and state tournaments that come to play there. We draw people from around the state. He was not sure if they were aware of the Florida Shuffleboard Association and Florida is the origination of shuffleboard as a competitive sport. The Florida Shuffleboard Association consists of seven districts and Leesburg is in the northern district. Currently, on their schedule are three state pro tournaments that will be held here at the Leesburg facility along with three regular northern district tournaments. There are a total of thirty-four FSA tournaments held in the northern district and twenty-two of those are played in Leesburg. They are not all held at the Leesburg Club because they also play at Hawthorne, Mid-Florida, and Holiday RV. When they look at all the recreational activities for youths, the city has some incredible facilities that have been put in and some that are being put in. He applauded the city for that because they are excellent. He agreed that the shuffleboard courts do not look that great because he drives past them, and it is disappointing because they have not been kept up. However, the shuffleboard members have been doing everything they can to beautify that area. They even went out and cleaned up that area after the hurricane, which they did all on their own. Over the years, they have not asked the city for much of anything, but he would encourage the commission not to forget about the seniors because they need recreational facilities too. How many things are out there for seniors to do? Most seniors do not play pickleball. They do play in The Villages, but if they ask orthopedic surgeons and doctors, most of their business comes from pickleball and softball players. They do not get many patients from shuffleboard. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know how many members they had. **Mr. Tallman** replied that they have about seventy members. There are a number of members who are state professionals and Hall of Famers. The members go all the way down to amateurs. **Commissioner Burry** wanted to clarify that he said he was from The Villages. **Mr. Tallman** answered yes. **Commissioner Burry** then said he must be located within one of the community development districts, and he wanted to know if they had shuffleboard courts there. **Mr. Tallman** responded yes; they have shuffleboard courts all over in The Villages. However, the problem with The Villages is that they do not build more than four shuffleboard courts in one location, so they cannot hold any state tournaments there because they have to have enough courts in order to play state tournaments. **Commissioner Burry** wanted to know if they built more than four pickleball at any one location, or did he know how that worked? **Mr. Tallman** responded no. They have four pickleball courts at each location and there may be a couple of tennis courts. The Villages do not build big complexes. That has been talked about a number of times and a number of villagers have approached them asking them to put more courts in so they could hold state tournaments there, but The Villages did not show any interest in doing that. **Commissioner Burry** wanted to know if there were a lot of members from The Villages who come to Leesburg. **Mr. Tallman** replied that there were quite a few of them that come. There are a number of Leesburg residents

and seasonal residents that live in the area who come during the winter months. **Mayor Reisman** asked if they had a member directory. **Mr. Tallman** answered yes. **Mayor Reisman** wanted to know if he would provide that to the city manager, so he could disseminate it to the commission. He hoped it would include the addresses of the members. **Mr. Tallman** responded yes.

Amanda McLea, president of the Rotary Club and Board Chair for the Center for the Arts, said they definitely have a task on their hands for both organizations. She sees the residents of Leesburg needing their lifestyle because we have a lot of older folks that are retired here, and they need places to do things. With Forward Paths, that is an organization that the City definitely needs to support. We already have pickleball courts at Pear Park, so can we put the tennis court at the Susan Street Complex or one of the other complexes? If we have all of these tournaments coming through town, that would be a good source of revenue for the City. She was pretty sure that the tournaments that come to Sleepy Hollow would have to pay for those facilities as well. She sees both sides of the coin, so she did not envy the commission's position, but as a person who works with young people and the elderly, the city has a responsibility to both. Forward Paths are doing great things, and they support them in their Rotary Club and, whether he is married to the president or not, she is doing great things and producing productive citizens for this community. Downtown is good because they would be able to get to places and access transportation since these kids do not have cars. She has firsthand knowledge of Leesburg High School and there are more homeless children in that high school than they realize. It is the responsibility of this commission to help that organization.

Bethany Burge-Bosbous of 1510 Park Drive said she was on the electric commission. She pointed out that she owns a business on Dixie Avenue. When she comes to work every day, she comes down Second Street, so she drives right by the pickleball and tennis courts to pull into her parking lot. She had no intention of speaking today, but she does see several people at least twice a week, and she has seen that for over four years. They are right, they do maintain those courts all by themselves. They are out there cleaning things up so they can get ready for their stuff, and she also sees the tennis courts being used. She is in her office sometimes until ten or eleven o'clock at night. Her husband will call and ask when she is coming home, and she thinks it is only nine o'clock at night, but it is ten or eleven o'clock at night and they are still playing tennis. So, those courts are being used, and yes, they do need to be fixed. She also thinks Forward Paths is great, but she does not think that is the right location for them. They are right next to Beacon and those kids do not need any more drama, and it would be right next to a bar. The Warehouse is right there. She drives a Harley, so she knows it is Harley people in the bars, so that is not really the best location for kids. She did not envy the commission's position, because there is a lot that needs to happen and if they could redo the courts, that would be great for the folks that come and play tennis, because they do need to be redone. They are in bad repair and the driveway to them is yucky. She did not think this was the right spot for Forward Paths.

Phyllis Sokol-Wood of 2537 Buttonwood Run, The Villages, said when they talked about the number of members, their membership has been dropping because of the quality of the courts. Right now, they are also at a low spot because the snowbirds are not here. When they are here there are a lot more members. She would say that they were between the eighty-to-ninety member mark for senior citizens that play there. It is not only senior citizens, because at the last meeting, her grandson got up and talked, and he is only fifteen years old. They have young people, middle-aged people, and seniors. They went out for bids, and they heard one of the bids was \$22,000 to do the resurfacing. If this is going to be an actual project, they want people to play, and they want it to be a facility that people come to. We not only need it resurfaced, we need shelter from the sun. There was a makeshift metal roof that had rusted, and it fell apart. It was only over eight courts. They need to be resurfaced, and they need a roof in order to make this a viable facility. When they host tournaments, they have upwards of one hundred people there. They use all twenty-four courts. They cannot be put in a facility that has six or eight courts because the whole

idea is that they are one of the main district shuffleboard courts in the northern district. They are one of the main ones that hold most of the tournaments.

Jacob Bonyng said he was the president of the board for the Forward Paths Foundation. Most of the youths in their program were born here, and they have lived here their whole life. They have been doing this for almost thirteen years now and the kids that graduate from this program stay here. Some have become police officers and some serve in the military. They become welders, mechanics and valuable members of the community. With the location, it was brought up that it would not be a good location, but in fact it is the perfect location, because of its proximity to schools and jobs. The kids that come here come with a backpack. They do not have cars or bicycles. They do not have the means to get to school and a lot of kids do go to high school. If this project was located by the Resource Center, it would be a food desert because there is nowhere for them to eat out there. There is nowhere for them to work out there and the whole point of this program is to teach them how to live independently. They have to have a job, and they have to be in school. They have to do both things to be in this program. There is already student housing all around the city because of Beacon College, and we are not looking at taking over the tennis courts. The site they were hoping to get and the original site they wanted was the top circle with the railroad, but due to restrictions with the railroad, it did not work out. They worked for over a year in hopes of using that site. However, the shuffleboard courts property is the perfect size to suit this community. Maybe the shuffleboard courts could be located somewhere else. Maybe those could be moved to the Resource Center. Honestly, he did not know if they needed that much acreage, but he was not an expert. He drove to that site and there is an old road that used to be between the shuffleboard courts and Dixie that had fallen into disrepair. It is empty acreage that is not being used.

Robert Alderman of 1113 Beach Street said he has been a citizen of Leesburg his entire life. He played at these tennis courts, and he believes this would be a bad location for the youths. However, he wanted to suggest another location that he saw vacant. It is the old Lee School site. He knows there will be villas there, but maybe there could be something done there with the youth. He was not sure, but he just wanted to make that suggestion. **Commissioner Pederson** said that it was privately owned, and it traded hands for over a million-dollar last time. **Mr. Alderman** wanted to know if Leesburg could talk to the owners to have that property considered? **Commissioner Burry** said that there was an approved apartment complex, but we are waiting for it to start. **Mr. Alderman** said he sees that but on the backside it is empty space. **Mayor Reisman** stated that development is using the entire property. **Mr. Alderman** commented that he just wanted to make a suggestion because that area was also close to the downtown, and it could also accommodate Forward Paths.

Sharon Wilde of 347 Hawthorne Boulevard said she moved to Leesburg two and a half years ago. She never knew what a shuffleboard court was until they bought a home in Hawthorne. They toured us and said these were world-class shuffleboard courts, and she said whoopy-doo. Since then, she has started playing, and it is an activity that seniors absolutely love. It has to be introduced, and it has to be brought back. People think pickleball is more exciting, but the older they get, the people who play pickleball now will not be able to play anymore, but now the city wants to take away the shuffleboard courts. So, where would they be moved to because they are active people, and they want to stay active? They do not want their courts taken away. They talked about moving the courts, but they could just resurface the courts and fix up the complex and that would only cost around \$30,000 to \$35,000. If they were to move the courts and put in new courts, that would cost over \$100,000 and that makes no sense. She loves the idea of having a big nice complex that would look great. It would be an added feature for people moving and coming to the City of Leesburg to see Venetian Gardens and a beautiful sports complex right across the street. It would be an added feature for the city and it would be a valued addition. Also, between Mid-Florida, Hawthorne, and the Leesburg courts, they bring in about fifteen hundred people each season between October and March. People come to play in tournaments. Those people buy food, gas, and they

visit the downtown area. They may even end up buying homes in the community. So, just because you drive by there and only see thirty or forty of us playing, you are not getting the big picture because shuffleboard courts also bring revenue into the area.

Denise Burry of 401 Sunnyside Drive, said she was the executive director for Forward Paths. They have worked and taken care of Lake County's homeless youths for the last twelve years, and they housed eleven of them. They hired a mental health counselor that works part-time, and they have a financial stability advisor and three full-time case managers. This past year, they had two young people enter the military, and they will be stationed in Japan. They both went to Leesburg High School. Eighteen of their youths completed either a GED or a youth program, which included an LPN and an associate's degree. They are proud of their youth and their successes. The reason they ended up building in Eustis was because the First United Methodist Church of Eustis donated two acres to them. It was a rough go at first and everybody wondered if that was the right location. However, she had been made aware that Eustis had nominated them for an award. Their hard work persevered, and the complex is beautiful. They have been successful in Eustis. They house twenty-four youths, and they work with the First United Methodist Church of Eustis, so they are coming to the city with a proven concept. Their youth are becoming assets to the community and they are filling jobs. Recently, at one of their lunches, she was being sarcastic and said they may want to be nice to their youth because they have put out quite a few CNAs, and they may be taking care of them one day. Then, a few weeks later her father-in-law entered the hospital and a younger girl asked him if he knew Ms. Denise and he told her that she was his daughter-in-law. She then told him that she was one of her youth. So, they do have skills, we build them, and when they are better, we are better. The statistics on these kids say they will become incarcerated, pregnant or die. They are trying to change that, but they need to have a place, plus they have been looking for the last ten years. This location came up very recently, and she was not quite expecting it. She went out and toured it. She looked at the surrounding area to see what was going on there. These kids have to be accessible to schools because about a third of these kids come from Leesburg. With all the kids that she works with, a third of them are from Leesburg. It is time that they address this. They are trying to do their very best, but we need the city to work with us. There has to be some negotiation, but they really need to build in this community and repeat what we did in Eustis. This is about priorities. They are talking about playing a sport, and she is talking about the lives of these kids. These kids come from homes where their parents are deceased, and they are aging out of foster care. She asked if anyone has ever thought about what it is like to try and rent something when there is no affordable housing in Lake County? How do you buy a car, get a job, or even get clothes?

Lauren Ritchie, a board member of Forward Paths, said she wanted to ask a question. She did not think this was an either-or situation, but that is how it is playing out here. She did not think that if they ended up in that spot that the shuffleboard people would be thrown out of Leesburg totally. **Mayor Reisman** stated that would be a decision that the commission would have to make and that is why they were having these discussions. **Ms. Ritchie** wanted to know if there was a chance that they could lose all their courts. **Mayor Reisman** said yes, there is a chance, but obviously they do not want to see that happen. **Ms. Ritchie** encouraged the commission to keep the shuffleboard courts for them, just not at this location. They are not saying this is not an appropriate spot for them, but it is more appropriate for the lives of young people. This is an excellent spot for this development. It is close to everything and these kids are required to have jobs. That is not an option and they do not have transportation. They would be closer to businesses because they have to have a job. When she says it is not appropriate, that is a code word. It is a code word for they do not want homeless young people where the rest of our folks can see them. The case is, when we give them a home, they are not homeless. However, there are rules to be followed and they have to follow them. The police are not out there every two minutes in Eustis, and she does not see that happening in Leesburg either. These are citizens who have been dealt the worst, the absolute worst hand of cards you can imagine. When it comes to deciding who gets to use a piece of

property, respectfully, it is important for seniors to have a place, but comparing this to a game, these kids are sleeping in the back of their cars. They have pregnant girls who come to them because they are sleeping in the backseat of their cars. If she had to make a choice, she can tell you where her choice would land. She asked that everyone go to Eustis to see what they were doing there. She would personally take them through, and show them around.

Deborah Lizden of 176 South Lake Drive in Mid-Florida Lakes said this was more than a game. There are people that have lost their husbands and wives. This is where they go for community. We all take care of each other, so it is way more than just a game. She found that comment very offensive, and she could not believe that was what they actually thought. No one wants these kids on the streets. They want all the kids helped. However, they do not want to be the disposable community to make that happen. They worked all their lives and they paid their taxes. Some of the members were in the service, and some were police officers, so they have done it all. This is where they want to go to enjoy the final part of their lives. They feel for these kids, but they are getting tired of being disposable people. She hoped that they would look for another place to put these kids because they do care about them. Again, this is more than just a game for these people; this is their life. Just keep that in mind. **Mayor Reisman** said that no one was implying that they were disposable people.

Steve Clark of 109 South Lake Drive, Leesburg, said he moved to Florida three years ago and a lot of that was due to his CLPD and because it had worsened to the point where kayaking, rock climbing and everything else that he loved was no longer a possibility. So, as you can imagine, depression crept in until he found shuffleboard. This is an awesome sport. In the last three years, he has gone from an amateur to this year, he is starting as a pro. He is also a certified director for tournaments. One thing that the commission does not know about which they need to know in order to make an informed decision about what to do with the courts and how they can relocate or build somewhere else, is the district and the FSA require that they host tournaments and their Leesburg Club is a pro-heavy club. They have international champions, Hall of Famers, red jackets, white jackets, and some of the best players in the world. In order to host tournaments, they have to have sixteen playable courts and right now they have twenty-four courts. He was not saying they wanted to get rid of the courts, but there cannot be any less than sixteen courts to host a pro tournament in Florida. Amateur clubs can have twelve playable courts. They were quoted a number by a licensed contractor, and they said it would cost \$250,000 easily to build a shuffleboard complex to today's codes. What they have out there off Palmetto Street was not built to any kind of code. It would cost a lot more to build them back than it would to just repair, resurface, and fix them. However, please keep in mind that they need at least sixteen courts to be able to do anything or their tournament days are over and that would be a crying shame. He loves this sport, and he could not be more supportive of Forward Paths as an educator because those kids do need some help. He was hoping that they could both coexist and find a solution so that everyone involved is taken care of.

Alan Donsfield of 3409 Nursery Place, The Villages thanked Commissioner Connell for his support. He greatly appreciated that. He was the Hall of Famer that they had been talking about and, while sitting in the crowd, he noticed there was some chuckling and all going on because people did not understand what this game was all about. He spent five to six days a week between ten and twelve years practicing to become the number one player in the world. He has played all over the State of Florida, North Carolina, and other states, so this is not a joke for him. This is a very serious game, and they take it very seriously. One day, the younger generation will grow older too, and they will be looking for something to do, and it may be shuffleboard. They are not going to be playing softball, football or pickleball because they will be wearing knee braces. Physical therapists love people who play those sports because they will be returning customers. They have players that come down from Canada and those people are all Hall of Famers, so they take the game very seriously too. Betmar and Zephyrhills are fully enclosed facilities, and he calls those facilities the Taj Mahal of the game, because they are fully enclosed with twenty-four courts. They

take care of their people and the Zephyrhills facility is owned by the membership. The members own all the property, so they take care of that facility themselves. The Hall of Fame is in Sebring for the FSA Hall of Fame. The National Hall of Fame is in Clearwater, and it has fifty-two courts and twenty-six of the courts are fully enclosed. They could go on and carry on and talk about the same things over and over again, but until they have actually gone out there and played the game they will not understand that this is more than just shoving a disc down a court. There is more strategy in this game than anything he has ever been involved in. He has been involved with competitive shooting, and he received invitations to try out for the United States shooting team where he would skeet shoot. He has played a lot of baseball and golf. He played at very high levels. However, this game requires strategy and a lot of thinking. You have to be able to use your head because it is a thinking game first.

Patrick Thomas of 5020 Griffin View Drive said he was a board member at Forward Paths. He sat for many years in the city manager's seat, so he was used to juggling the needs of the community and all the needs were worthwhile. As Mr. Minner pointed out almost all of them can potentially be accumulated with good design in this area of property. However, there was one need that he was most concerned about. An interesting piece of information that they may not have been aware of as they figure out how to meet the space needs that are there, which was mentioned, is that the high school needs those tennis courts. However, the high school has over three acres of perfectly empty property across from the nursing home at the rear of their property. It seemed to him that if that need needed to be met, that would be a great opportunity for the school board to furnish the land, and they could partner with the city for the construction of the courts. Fortunately, Forward Paths would not cost the city a penny. It seems that high-quality facilities in the other three categories can be constructed for the amount of money they are looking at.

Mayor Reisman asked if there were any further public comments. There were none. He closed public comments. He then said between the discussion and public comments, the city manager had some homework to do. **Commissioner Connell** questioned the directions to do what? **Mayor Reisman** responded that it would be budget numbers and things like that. **Commissioner Connell** said there was a budget amount of \$1 million. **Mayor Reisman** stated that we do not know what the refurbishment costs would be or anything like that. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to know if that was the direction that they were going to go in. **Mayor Reisman** pointed out that was why they were having the discussion. **Commissioner Burry** wanted to make a motion that they do a quitclaim deed on that property. **CM Minner** pointed out that he could not make a motion because this was a workshop meeting. However, he could make a direction. **Commissioner Connell** stated if we were making motions, then he would not be done speaking. There were several statements made saying that this was a choice between the shuffleboard and housing youth. He did not see it that way. This is a recreational complex, and the shuffleboard court has been there since the 1970s. This is not a new concept, nor is it a raw piece of property. We are trying to make a decision whether to put shuffleboard courts on it or mini-houses. That is not the choice here. It is not raw property because it has been shuffleboard courts since the 1970s. He does not see a choice between choosing a game over life safety or what have you, because that is not the case and that was overplayed. Several things that came up were that it sounded like if there were some improvements to the courts, there are some real possibilities to have host tournaments here. He has sat here for years and had disagreements with the commission on spending money on recreational stuff, but the concept was and the consensus of the commission has been that it was money well spent on recreation because we are bringing people to the city, and therefore, they are going to be spending money. Well, that was the whole argument made with Susan Street. We are putting \$11 million into Susan Street, and he would assure you that 95% of the people that will be using that major complex at Susan Street will not be residents of Leesburg. We are bringing them to Leesburg and that was the whole concept. Well, this is the same deal. He heard that most people who use them are not from Leesburg. Well, isn't that what we want? Isn't that what we have heard from this commission for years? That these

recreational complexes are used as a motivator to bring people to the city to visit our restaurants, gas stations, convenience stores, hotels, what have you. With some money spent back in, we could be hosting major shuffleboard tournaments here. It brings people to the city. The program is great, just not at this location. It is not a choice between shuffleboard or Forward Paths because the shuffleboards have been there for fifty years. It is not just a piece of property that we are deciding or flipping a coin on whether to put shuffleboard courts here or a housing complex. The shuffleboard courts are already there.

Commissioner Pederson said that Forward Paths has been looking for a home for ten years and if this is the site, he would give it serious consideration. As far as shuffleboard, the compromise may be that we build a smaller amount somewhere. Maybe we do not have enough courts for tournaments, but we would have enough for people to enjoy the sport. He heard about some of the other facilities, and he was not sure if we could compete with some of those, but that may be the compromise. We provide shuffleboard courts, but do not provide enough for tournaments. **Mayor Reisman** asked if there were any other comments? **Commissioner Burry** said he would like to see the city deed the property to Forward Paths. He would like to see that facility built there. He wanted to remind everybody that they talk about people attending our downtown, coming to our downtown. When the shuffleboard courts are used, they are used from 6:30 o'clock in the morning till about 8 or 10 o'clock. He wanted to know if anything lasts into the evening? **Someone from the audience** stated they also play in the evenings. **Commissioner Burry** said he does not see people there after 10:00 in the morning. So, we are looking at a facility that brings people in from six to ten in the morning. How does that benefit the downtown? **Some people in the audience** disagreed with that comment and **Mayor Reisman** pointed out that they were under-commission comments, so there would be no public comments at that time. **Commissioner Burry** said the kids would be living there. They will be going to the downtown, and we are talking about twenty people that could be employed downtown that could be spending money downtown every day. The point was that they use it twice a week. They have seventy people twice a week coming to Leesburg. That is what was said. He was just using their numbers, seventy people twice a week versus twenty people every day. Just do the math. **Commissioner Connell** said he did not know this was a dollar and cent question, because that facility has been there forever. Would we be having this discussion if they wanted us to abandon and lose two ballfields at Sleepy Hollow because they decided that was the location they wanted? Well, no, we would not. So, why are we having the conversation here just because this is the location they said they wanted? We already have a use for this location, and it has been that way since the 1970s. He does not know why we are discussing this just because they deemed this was the location that they have to have that we have to completely change gears for something that has been going on for fifty years at this location. He could not believe that they were actually having this conversation and that it had gone on this long. They need to find a different location, and he will support it, just not here.

Commissioner Pederson said that Commissioner Burry could not make a motion tonight, but he can on Monday if he chooses at the normal city commission meeting. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to know what the time constraints were for Forward Paths having a location and things? **Commissioner Burry** said there was no time constraint. Currently, Forward Paths has about forty kids in housing. In Eustis, they have twenty properties that they own, and they have twenty some odd kids in rental properties in the Leesburg area. The quicker they find a home, the faster they can begin spending, and realizing equity instead of paying rent. **Commissioner Berry** wanted to know what the timeframe was if they were to resurface the courts because that was just presented two meetings ago. Is there a timeframe for that? The point she was trying to get to is that we are not in a place tonight to do anything, because they need to think this through. She did not know what else to suggest, but Commissioner Burry did have some direction he wanted to go in. We heard both sides. We heard the opinions of everyone and their importance. We waited and everyone stated what they felt was important, including herself. She did not discredit the sports and the enthusiasm of the players. However, we do need to come to a decision, but we will not do it tonight. **Commissioner Connell** asked about the zoning for this piece of property. **CM Minner** replied that he believed it was downtown, the central business district. **Commissioner Connell** wanted to confirm that it went out that far. **CM Minner** said he thinks so, but that was off the

top of his head so it would accommodate anything we were talking about. **Commissioner Pederson** said if not, it would be a public facility code because there is a code for city property, which he thinks was PF. **Commissioner Connell** said it would be utility or public. **Commissioner Pederson** said yes, it was a public facility because it is PF. **Commissioner Burry** stated that under his commission comments on Monday he would make his request. **Commissioner Pederson** wanted to know if it had to be put on the agenda, or could he make a motion under public comments? **CM Minner** stated that each commissioner has petitioned him one time or another to put something on the agenda, whether it be a resolution or a question. Commissioner Connell spoke to him directly without going to the commission and asked him to put a moratorium on the agenda. If Commissioner Burry wanted to get with him to put a quitclaim deed on the agenda, he would do that. He would say if Commissioner Burry saw him outside in the hall and asked him to put a quitclaim deed on the agenda for Monday, he would tell him it would not happen because he did not have the time. It is maybe a little bit of a gray line, and he does play pretty loosely with the commission on taking a singular direction. When they ask for something that they need done, and if it is within his authority, he gets it done. If it is something that needs collective decision-making individually, he has asked him to put it on the agenda he does. It seems that Commissioner Burry is going to be asking the commission to consider a quitclaim deed sooner rather than later. So, it is imminent and the timeframe for getting the budget together is that we have the rest of July and into August and the pieces will come together. He would gather some more budget numbers and if they were to ask or give directions for him to come up with some concepts, he would do that. **Commissioner Pederson** said he may have misunderstood the question because he was just curious if it had to go on the agenda or if he had the right to bring it up in roll call. **CM Minner** stated that everyone knows where Commissioner Burry is angling, and he answered that pretty directly, and he could bring it up under roll call. **Mayor Reisman** stated that he appreciated all the dialogue and, even though we might not always agree, we all have the best interests of the city at heart. The next city commission meeting will be held on Monday, July 28th at 5:30.

3. **ADJOURN:**

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES NEEDING ASSISTANCE TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THESE PROCEEDINGS SHOULD CONTACT THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT, ADA COORDINATOR, AT 728-9740, 48 HOURS IN ADVANCE OF THE MEETING.

F.S.S. 286.0105 "If a person decides to appeal any decision made by the Commission with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, they will need a record of the proceedings, and that for such purpose they may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based." The City of Leesburg does not provide this verbatim record.

With a motion by Commissioner Pederson and a second by Commissioner Berry, the meeting adjourned at 8:16 p.m.