

**FLORENCE CITY COUNCIL WORK SESSION**  
**THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025 – 7:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M. AND 2:30P.M. – 6:00PM**  
**FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2025 – 7:30 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.**  
**THE GEORGE HOTEL**  
**615 FRONT STREET, GEORGETOWN, SC 29440**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mayor Lethonia Barnes, Mayor Pro Tempore George Jebaily, Councilman Chaquez T. McCall, Councilman Bryan A. Braddock, Councilwoman LaShonda NeSmith-Jackson and Councilman J. Lawrence Smith, II

**ALSO PRESENT**

Mr. Scotty Davis, City Manager; Mr. Luke Carter, City Attorney; Mrs. Casey Moore, Municipal Clerk; Mr. Clint Moore, Assistant City Manager of Development; Chief Allen Heidler, Florence Police Department; Chief Shannon Tanner, Florence Fire Department; Mrs. Jennifer Krawiec, Director of Human Resources; Mr. Jerry Dudley, Director of Utility Operations; Mr. Josh Whittington, Director of Utility Operations; Mr. Michael Hemingway, Director of Utility Planning and Economic Development; Mrs. Victoria Nash, Director of Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism; Mrs. Amanda Pope, Director of Marketing/Communications and Municipal Services; Mr. Adam Swindler, Director of Public Works; Mr. Glenn Bodenheimer, Interim Finance Director and Ms. Patrice Rankin, Administrative Coordinator

Notices of this regular meeting of City Council were provided to the media and individuals requesting a copy of the agenda informing them of the date, location and time of the meeting.

**THURSDAY, JANUARY 9, 2025**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Barnes called the Thursday, January 9, 2025 Work Session of Florence City Council to order at 7:35 a.m.

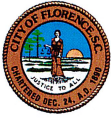
[Pro tem Jebaily via telephone.]

**INVOCATION**

Mayor Barnes gave the invocation for the meeting. The pledge of allegiance to the American Flag followed the invocation.

**WORK SESSION**

Mr. Scotty Davis, City Manager, opened the session by asking Council to share one thing they like about Florence, aside from its population, and one thing they do not like.



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Like:

- Culture
- Proximity/location
- Downtown
- Diversity
- Affordability/opportunity
- Connectivity

Do not like:

- Water system
- Limited vision/culture
- Limited mindset
- Limited opportunities for younger generations

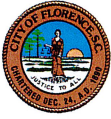
Mr. Davis said the purpose of this exercise is to acknowledge the areas the city is doing well and areas the city is lacking and put funds towards both.

Mr. Davis moved into a discussion on the budget. He said his budget philosophy is that staff has an unwavering commitment to ensuring the city is delivering high-quality services and is responsive to the needs and concerns of our residents. How do we do this?

1. Develop operational budgets within projected available revenues.
2. Focus on goals of Comprehensive Plan:
  - Growth Capacity
  - Land Use and Development
  - Housing and Neighborhoods
  - Transportation
  - Economic Development
  - Recreation and Amenities
3. Invest strategically in employees by providing adequate pay, benefits, training, technology resources, support, etc.
4. Balance reinvestment in the City's existing infrastructure and facilities with the creation of new opportunities for investing in the future of the City.
5. Maintain a minimum General Fund balance of at least 30% of the General Fund budget.
6. Maintain sufficient working capital in the utility funds.

Mr. Davis gave an overview of the meeting agenda:

1. FY 2026 Budget Influencers
2. FY 2023-24 Year End Financial Review
3. City Manager's Office/City Center Market
4. Human Resources
5. Police
6. Fire
  - Building Department
7. Public Works
  - Beautification and Facilities
  - Equipment Maintenance
  - Sanitation
8. Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism
9. Comprehensive Plan
10. Growth and Development
11. Community Services
12. Projects Update
13. Proposed Ordinances



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14. Water & Sewer Master Planning & Economic Development
15. Utilities Department
16. Presentation by First Tryon Financial Advisors
17. Discussions & Questions

**2026 Budget Influencers**

External factors influencing the budget are inflation, the labor market, improved borrowing costs, residential growth and revenue uncertainty. The average inflation rate for 2024 was 2.7%, down from 4.1% in 2023. The Florence County unemployment rate is 4.6% compared to the South Carolina unemployment rate of 4.8% and the United States unemployment rate of 4.2%. Federal interest rates are projected to reduce their rate two times in 2025. Current federal rates average 4.5%-4.75% with projections of 4.8% in 2024 and 3.8% in 2025.

Mr. Glenn Bodenheimer, Interim Finance Director, went over Fiscal Year 2024-25 revenue and expenditure assumptions. It is assumed that property tax revenue will remain stable. The city will need to continue to “backstop” the TIF bonds with water and sewer funds. Building permit revenue is down 9.6% from this time last year; however, it is too early to determine if this will continue but expectations are revenues will remain relatively flat. Business license revenue is down 22.5%, but it is too early to determine if this trend will continue. Hospitality revenue is down 2.4%. Water revenue is up 9.8% and should continue to stay around this due to the rate increases. Sewer revenue is up 6.9%. Water and sewer rates will increase by 10% for inside city limit customers and outside customers for the Fiscal Year 2026. Operational and capital costs will continue to rise as a result of wage inflation, fuel price fluctuations, materials and supply cost increases and insurance premium increases.

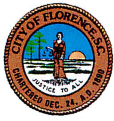
**FY 2023-24 Year End Review**

Highlights of the FY 2024 Annual Comprehensive Financial Plan:

- For the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2024, the City’s General Fund reported a combined fund balance of \$26,253,729, an increase \$1,661,249.
- At year end, the City’s Governmental Funds reported a total outstanding bonds and notes payable obligations of \$81,464,867 compared to \$85,159,199 last year, a decrease of 4.5%.
- For the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 2024, the Water and Sewer Fund reported a total fund balance of \$158,807,769 an increase of \$8,360,243. The unrestricted net position increased \$19,217,373 from \$25,742,059 to \$44,959,432. The increase is due to a \$16,219,611 decrease in net invested in capital assets with the \$32M bond issuance.
- The Water and Sewer Fund reported an outstanding bond and notes payable of \$131,650,550 an increase of \$25,570,335 compared to \$106,080,215 last year.

The General Fund:

The following chart illustrates the General Fund Revenues in 2024 compared to 2023. Property tax revenue is up from 2023, while miscellaneous revenues and revenues from other funding sources are down from 2023.



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**General Fund Revenues**

<b>Revenues</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Property Tax	\$12,333,684	\$11,475,369	7.5%
Licenses, Permits, and Fees	18,358,492	16,771,965	9.5%
Intergovernmental	5,877,793	5,891,532	-0.2%
Charges for Services	3,657,066	3,526,939	3.7%
Fines and Forfeitures	178,180	262,372	-32.1%
Investment Earnings	1,072,640	597,329	79.6%
Miscellaneous	586,320	1,329,139	-55.9%
Other Funding Sources	392,392	422,563	-7.1%
Net Transfers	16,782,052	12,077,902	38.9%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$59,238,618</b>	<b>\$52,355,110</b>	<b>13.1%</b>

[Break: 8:42am – 2:50pm]

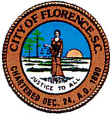
The City of Florence has a current operating millage of 64.1 and a debt service millage of 4.0. State law now regulates and limits the amount of millage that can be raised annually. There is a four year “carryback period” where you can accumulate the rate limitations. Currently the city still has room for about 1.0 mil increase from the carryback. If the rate increase is comparable to last year, the city could have up to an additional 3.0 mil increase. There was discussion on the city’s millage rate compared to other cities. Some cities make it a practice to raise their millage the maximum allowed amount each year, whereas Florence went several years without raising millage at all.

There was a discussion on property taxes among Council and staff.

The following chart illustrated the General Fund Expenditures in 2024 compared to 2023. Total expenditures have increased approximately 17%.

**General Fund Expenditures**

<b>Expenditures</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
General Government	\$ 10,414,904	\$ 9,022,988	15.4%
Public Safety	18,368,129	17,768,898	3.4%
Public Works	7,950,334	7,933,708	0.2%
Culture and Recreation	4,856,921	3,858,043	25.9%
Community Development	392,201	380,650	-
Debt Service: Principal	1,790,242	2,119,487	-15.5%
Debt Service: Interest	984,824	1,541,261	-36.1%
Capital Outlay	12,819,814	6,447,731	98.8%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$57,577,370</b>	<b>\$49,072,766</b>	<b>17.3%</b>



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Water and Sewer Fund:

The following chart illustrates the Water and Sewer Fund Revenues in 2024 compared to 2023. Total Revenues have increased approximately 14%.

**Water & Sewer Fund Revenues**

<b>Revenues</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Current Use Charges	\$42,511,041	\$40,496,498	5.0%
Service Fee	7,202	15,614	-53.9%
Miscellaneous	792,099	1,104,327	-28.3%
Water & Sewer Tap Fees	1,209,086	1,114,090	8.5%
Investment Earnings	2,495,572	1,066,719	133.9%
Other Miscellaneous Revenue	72,300	129,708	-44.3%
Intergovernmental	1,154,030	466,114	147.6%
Gain on Asset Disposal	243,708	2,782	8660.2%
Transfers In	4,142,580	1,933,464	114.3%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$52,627,619</b>	<b>\$46,329,316</b>	<b>13.6%</b>

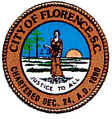
The following chart illustrates the Water and Sewer Fund Expenditures in 2024 compared to 2023. Total Expenditures have decreased approximately 22%.

**Water & Sewer Fund Expenditures**

<b>Expenses</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Personnel	\$ 6,341,870	\$ 6,341,316	0.0%
Employee Benefits	3,337,342	3,133,569	6.5%
Purchase Services	9,875,925	7,765,958	27.2%
Supplies and Materials	1,766,407	1,374,829	28.5%
Other Operating Expenses	2,798,067	3,529,059	-20.7%
Depreciation and Amortization	10,148,298	9,385,387	8.1%
Economic Development	2,259,906	15,841,568	-85.7%
Interest Expense	2,387,025	2,562,845	-6.9%
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$38,914,842</b>	<b>\$49,934,531</b>	<b>-22.1%</b>

Storm Water Utility Fund:

The following chart illustrates the Storm Water Utility Fund Revenues for 2024 compared to 2023. Revenues have increased approximately 7%.



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**Storm Water Fund Revenues**

<b>Revenues</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Storm Water Service Fee	\$ 1,637,489	\$ 1,633,062	0.3%
Miscellaneous	16,660	8,934	86.5%
Investment Earnings	287,353	245,048	17.3%
Intergovernmental	110,041	103,877	5.9%
Gain/(Loss) on Disposals	71,510	-	100.0%
Insurance Reimbursements	15,987	-	100.0%
<b>Total Revenues</b>	<b>\$ 2,139,040</b>	<b>\$ 1,990,921</b>	<b>7.4%</b>

The following chart illustrates the Storm Water Utility Fund Expenses for 2024 compared to 2023. Total expenses have decreased approximately 2.5%.

**Water & Sewer Fund Expenditures**

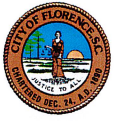
<b>Expenses</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>% Variance</b>
Personnel	\$ 295,013	\$340,025	-13.2%
Employee Benefits	145,509	164,042	-11.3%
Purchase Services	457,258	633,463	-27.8%
Supplies and Materials	20,630	13,149	56.9%
Other Operating Expenses	18,241	(66,029)	-127.6%
Depreciation and Amortization	330,955	224,743	47.3%
Interest Expense	104,439	111,606	-6.4%
Transfers Out	120,700	109,628	10.1%
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 1,492,746</b>	<b>\$ 1,530,627</b>	<b>-2.5%</b>

Outstanding Debt:

Mr. Bodenheimer went over current outstanding debt. He said it is important to know the current debt and what it means for the City of Florence. The City is analyzed by two rating agencies: Moody's and Standard and Poors. The City has a rating of Aa2 with Moody's and a rating of AA- with Standard and Poors, meaning the City is in very good standing. Mr. Bodenheimer went over the current outstanding governmental debt and utilities debt for the City and their maturity dates.

**City Manager's Office**

Mrs. Amanda Pope, Director of Marketing, Communications, and Municipal Services, provided an update on the City's partnership with Citibot for Cypress, also known as "Cy." The City is in the second year of a three-year contract with Citibot. While City staff are highly enthusiastic about Cy, they aim to increase text alert sign-ups. Funds have been allocated for additional marketing and implementation efforts this year. As of December 30, 2024, 3,404 residents have engaged with Cy, resulting in 6,645 total communications and 1,503 text alert sign-ups.



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Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson inquired about the nature of texts received through Cy. Mrs. Pope clarified that the figures represent the number of residents who have signed up for text alerts rather than the content of messages. She further explained that residents are not automatically enrolled in text alerts when they sign up for Cy; they must opt in manually. Residents can ask questions through Cy without receiving text alerts. Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson also asked which department receives the most communications through Cy. Mrs. Pope stated that inquiries span various general topics rather than being specific to any one department. Mr. Davis asked about promotional efforts for Cypress. Mrs. Pope detailed outreach initiatives, including community engagement at city centers, local organizations, social media campaigns, the Leatherman Senior Center, Florence After 5, and other local events. She noted that promotional efforts are ongoing.

Additionally, Mrs. Pope provided an update on the recodification process of the City's Code of Ordinances. This comprehensive legal review ensures the City's code remains up-to-date, lawful, and enforceable. A contract with CivicPlus was signed in December 2024, and their legal team is currently conducting the review, which is expected to take six to ten months. The recodification process will span approximately 15-24 months, with an estimated cost of \$75,000.

Mrs. Pope also highlighted recent marketing and promotional initiatives from the City Manager's Office, including the Florence in Focus video series, public awareness campaigns, an interactive water management portal, two sessions of City University, the launch of the Stronger Together campaign, and an ongoing city website redesign.

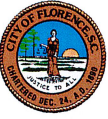
Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson asked about the next session of City University, to which Mrs. Pope responded that it would begin around March 17th, with applications opening in February. Mr. Davis requested insights into the success of City University and Mrs. Pope shared positive feedback from participants, emphasizing how the program increases awareness of city operations and has inspired some graduates to become community advocates. Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson expressed interest in establishing a Youth City University session.

Mrs. Pope provided an update on the City Center Farmers Market and Commercial Kitchen. At the last budget session, \$35,000 was allocated for additional parking. The City purchased an adjacent property, adding 18 new parking spaces. The Farmers Market features local farmers, food producers, and artisans, hosting events such as Jam Fest, Farm to School, the Holiday Gift Market, Bee City Takeover, and the Cultural Garden Celebration. The Commercial Kitchen operates as a shared, commissary-style facility certified by the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control. Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson inquired about rental costs, and Mrs. Pope explained that pricing is tiered based on usage, with hourly rates of \$9, \$12, or \$15. All users must meet necessary requirements, including insurance and ServSafe certification.

Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson also inquired on whether market revenue is sufficient to sustain the Commercial Kitchen. Mr. Davis responded that full self-sufficiency is unlikely, as competing with the private sector is not the City's goal.

Mrs. Pope provided an update on Baba and Pop's, the current tenant of the market space. She then outlined facility needs, including a market entrance sign, a permanent shed, and Farmers Market Software Management. The estimated cost for these improvements range from \$98,500 to \$102,000. Councilman McCall inquired whether these were new requests or carried over from previous years. Mrs. Pope confirmed that the entrance sign and permanent shed were requested in prior years.

[Pro tem Jebaily arrived at 3:20pm.]



**Human Resources**

Mrs. Jennifer Krawiec, Human Resources Director, emphasized that employees are the most important part of the organization. She stated that Human Resources is committed to recruiting, retaining, and investing in employees while competing with government and private sector jobs, as well as other geographic locations.

Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson inquired about the availability of soft skills training for employees. Mrs. Krawiec responded that communication and customer service training programs are offered. She also shared that the starting wage for several full-time employees working 2,080 hours per year has been increased to \$15.50 or more per hour. Mr. Davis noted that staff considered the livable wage when determining this increase. Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson asked whether the wage increase applies to entry-level positions, Mr. Davis confirmed that it does and provided a brief explanation of the qualifications for these roles.

Mrs. Krawiec also provided an overview of compensation strategies, highlighting the importance of annual cost-of-living and merit increases to maintain competitive starting salaries and prevent salary compression. In response to Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson’s inquiry about how the city’s salaries compare to those of other municipalities, Mrs. Krawiec explained that salaries are reviewed annually against the Municipal Association of South Carolina’s Compensation Survey. Additionally, salaries for specific positions are assessed throughout the year as needed.

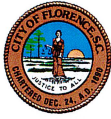
<b>Calendar Year</b>	<b>Inflation Rate</b>	<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>COL Increase</b>	<b>Merit Increase</b>
2016	1.3%	2016-17	2.0%	2.0% and 4.0%
2017	2.1%	2017-18	1.0%	2.0% & 4.0%
2018	2.4%	2018-19	1.0%	2.0% & Bonus
2019	1.8%	2019-20	2.0%	2.0%
2020	1.2%	2020-21	2.0%	2.0% & 4.0%
2021	4.7%	2021-22	2.0%	2.0% & Bonus
2022	8.0%	2022-23	2.0%	2.0% & Bonus
2023	4.1%	2023-24	8.0%	0.0%
2024	2.7%	2024-25	4.0%	2.0% & Bonus

Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson inquired on the City’s lowest salary and Mrs. Krawiec said the lowest is currently \$8.00 per hour for some part time positions and the lowest full-time position is \$12.48 per hour.

Mrs. Krawiec discussed compensation challenges the City faces. Regarding the Police Department, this year’s 6% cost of living increase allowed the compensation for non-certified and certified officers to be more competitive with surrounding agencies.

The City offers benefit opportunities to include PEBA health insurance, state retirement, an onsite nurse practitioner, and paid retiree insurance. Health insurance is a significant cost to the City. Nationally, health insurance premiums continue to rise; however, employee costs remain low with little to no increases for employee premium contributions. There was a discussion on employee benefits and health insurance premiums among Council and staff.





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Year	Employer Increases	City of Florence Load Factor
2015	4.5%	1
2016	0.80%	1
2017	3.30%	1
2018	7.4%	1.05
2019	0%	1.13
2020	0%	1
2021	0%	1
2022	0.80%	1
2023	18.10%	1
2024	3.70%	1
2025	11.80%	1

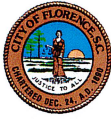
Mrs. Krawiec said some concepts to consider moving forward to assist with recruitment and retention include a higher cost-of-living increase effective January 1, 2026 and merit increase effective July 1, 2026; expanding the Employee Wellness Clinic to include retirees; and job sharing for retirees. There was a discussion on cost of living and merit increases among Council and staff.

**Police Department**

Mr. Allen Heidler, Chief of Police, discussed the current and upcoming needs of the Police Department, which include three marked patrol cars, DFR- Drone First Responder Program and RTCC- Real Time Crime Center with FLOCK OS. The best method for cycling vehicles is to purchase 3-5 vehicles per year which will allow a turnover of at least twelve vehicles every four years and will cycle reliable units into the spare fleet. The Police Department has been able to have a better fleet due to previous budget approvals of \$300,00 from City Council and \$420,000 from State Delegation. The cost of vehicles has significantly increased since 2019 and the cost to upfit a vehicle is expected to increase as well. Currently, the approximate cost for an upfit per patrol marked vehicle is \$18,000-\$20,000. Each vehicle will cost approximately \$48,000-\$50,000, for a total cost of approximately \$83,000 per vehicle when including the upfit cost. Chief Heidler said the vehicle request for 2025 is three vehicles. If ordered early in the fiscal year, it is expected that these vehicles will cost approximately \$250,000 and will be delivered early 2026.

Chief Heidler said the DFR- Drone First Responder Program allows a Florence Police Department drone to be deployed immediately after receiving an emergency call for service and then autonomously fly to the incident location without assistance from an operator. The drone can be used to respond to non-emergency calls within 30 to 90 seconds, as well as gather intelligence and respond to alerts and threats. The drone will be housed on the roof of the City Center and would be able to rapidly deploy by someone from inside the real time crime center or workstation. The cost for the first-year equipment and software is \$64,000 and a recurring yearly software subscription of \$49,000. Councilwoman NeSmith-Jackson asked if the drone would be able to deliver emergency medical supplies to the incident location. Chief Heidler responded yes, however, it would have to be manipulated by an operator and the added weight of supplies would add to the drone's response time.

Chief Heidler spoke on the RTCC- Real Time Crime Center with FLOCK OS. This program allows the Police Department to integrate multiple software platforms into a single sign on program which offers real-time intelligence. Staff assigned to the RTCC will be able to gather information in real time from multiple sources such as FLOCK cameras, drone footage, building diagrams and more. The RTCC program will work alongside the DFR software and the two will be utilized hand in hand for operational information and investigations. The first-year equipment and software is \$32,000 and the recurring yearly



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software subscription is \$16,000. Councilman Braddock inquired on the impact of the FLOCK camera system for law enforcement staff. Chief Heidler said the department has had huge success from the FLOCK camera system. The effectiveness of the camera system has aided with solving several crimes. There was a discussion regarding FLOCK cameras and its success throughout different municipalities statewide.

Pro tem Jebaily asked for the status of Camp Carraway. Chief Heidler said several officers are on board and are planning to host the camp this summer for 15-20 youth ages 12-18.

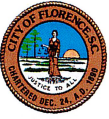
### Fire Department

Mr. Shannon Tanner, Fire Chief, discussed the current and upcoming needs of the Fire Department. He began with an overview of the current status of the Fire Department. Chief Tanner said the Fire Department is currently running seven companies comprised of six Engine Companies and one Ladder Company, responding out of six stations. The Fire Department responded to 4,166 calls, which is a 10% increase from last year. In order to maintain the current ISO rating of 1, Fire Department response must be in five minutes 90% of the time for the first due engine and nine minutes 90% of the time for the second due engine and first due ladder.

Chief Tanner discussed fire apparatus replacement. He expressed his gratitude for the Fire Department receiving new engines from approved budget requests and state appropriation funding. One of the new engines was placed into service this week and the other will be received within the next month. Chief Tanner also announced that the Fire Department is receiving a new ladder truck, which will be delivered in July. Currently, the Fire Department needs to replace one first out pumper that has 6,442 engine hours and an odometer reading of 257,688 based on estimated 40 mph. One additional pumper will need to be purchased for Fire Station #4 to ensure a ladder company is operated on the west side of the city. The Fire Department receives approximately 4,200 emergency calls a year, with 900 of those calls being answered by Fire Station #4. Chief Tanner spoke on the importance of refurbishing the current first due engines and ladder until new apparatus arrives. Refurbishment cost of engines is approximately \$40,000 per truck and ladders cost are approximately \$50,000.

Chief Tanner also discussed staff vehicle replacement. Chief Tanner requested to replace three vehicles this budget and three next budget year. Currently there are seven vehicles ranging in age from 11-15 years old. Vehicle prices range from \$45,000 to \$50,000 and have a delivery time from 90 to 365 days.

Chief Tanner spoke of Fire Department facilities and growth. Currently there are two fire stations (Fire Station #2- Marion Street and Fire Station #3- Edisto Drive) that are 50 years old or older and in need of upfitting and repairs. Due to annexation and continued growth, Chief Tanner discussed the need to add an additional Engine Company on the west side of the City at Fire Station #4, an additional Battalion Chief, relocate/remodel Fire Station #1 and an additional Fire Station on the southeast side of the City. Chief Tanner shared that the Fire Department has applied for a federal grant to replace the current units of self-contained breathing apparatus. The department's units are nearing the end of life date (must be discarded after 15 years) and are non-compliant to current NFPA standards. A 15% matching grant, totaling \$98,000 must be submitted. If the grant is not awarded, the Fire Department has one more year to apply before they will have to purchase the units without grant assistance. Chief Tanner also shared that compliant fire helmets will need to be purchased. The helmet replacement will be phased in over the next two years, at a cost of \$25,000 per year to replace all outdated helmets.



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There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding electric vehicles pertaining to fire trucks, sanitation trucks and police vehicles. Electric vehicles are more expensive and require facilities such as fire stations to be upfitted to accommodate the vehicles.

Chief Tanner discussed the current Building Department status. Over the last three years, the Building Department has experienced an overall increase of 42% in inspections. If this increase continues, the City will need to hire additional inspectors to keep up with the increase. Chief Tanner spoke in favor of the City charging re-inspection fees. There was a discussion regarding the inspection process and fees among Council and staff.

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Councilman Smith made a motion to enter into Executive Session for a discussion on a personnel matter related to the City Manager's contract and Councilman McCall seconded the motion. Council voted unanimously (6-0) to enter into Executive Session at 6:00pm.

Council resumed open session at 6:30pm. Mayor Barnes said no action is needed.

### **ADJOURN**

Without objection, the January 9, 2025 Retreat Work Session of City Council was adjourned at 6:30p.m.

## **FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 2025**

### **CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Barnes called the Friday, January 10, 2025 Work Retreat Session of Florence City Council to order at 7:30 a.m.

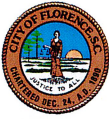
### **INVOCATION**

Mayor Barnes gave the invocation for the meeting. The pledge of allegiance to the American Flag followed the invocation.

### **Public Works Department**

Mr. Adam Swindler, Public Works Director, said Beautification and Facilities (including the animal shelter), Equipment Maintenance, and Sanitation are the three divisions of the Public Works Department. Mr. Swindler then provided an overview of future Public Works needs. Current Beautification and Facilities Division needs include five additional employees; various capital equipment such as forklift, motor grader, backhoe, skid-steer, tree trucks, brush chipper, fleet pickups, and fleet mowers; and new housing/space for offices, equipment storage, and sign shop operations. Mr. Swindler also discussed necessary facility repairs for the animal shelter. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the operations of the animal shelter.

Current Equipment Maintenance Division needs include three additional employees; an updated/new facility and amenities to meet current and future service/repair needs; capital equipment; and other items such as a Fleet Maintenance Management Software (approximately \$12,000), Vehicle AC Recharge System/Reclaim Machine (approximately \$8,000), and a Gas/Diesel Underground Tank Replacement (switch to above ground tanks- approximately \$150,000 per tank).



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Mr. Swindler spoke on the Sanitation Division next. Sanitation collects approximately 14,450 residential units per week or approximately 2890 units per day. For every 500 units added, an additional route/truck is needed. Mr. Swindler discussed the transfer fee increases over the last 7 years. The recycling fee has seen a significant increase and is now \$165.10 per ton while approximately 25% of the City’s residents participate in recycling. For fiscal year 2024, recycling cost approximately \$590,000. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding yard waste collection and recycling. Below is chart detailing the transfer fee increase over the last seven years.

**Transfer Fee Increase over Time (Last 7 Fiscal Years)**

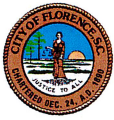
FY Start	-	FY End	Garbage Fee	Increase	Recycling Fee	Increase
July 2018	-	June 2019	\$45.39	\$0.84	\$78.48	\$2.58
<b>Processing Fee Increase</b>					\$138.48	<b>\$60.00</b>
July 2019	-	June 2020	\$48.07	\$2.68	\$140.11	\$31.63
July 2020	-	June 2021	\$48.18	\$0.11	\$140.43	\$0.32
July 2021	-	June 2022	\$51.12	\$2.94	\$151.85	\$11.42
July 2022	-	June 2023	\$55.55	\$4.43	\$159.06	\$7.21
July 2023	-	June 2024	\$60.09	\$4.54	\$165.10	\$6.04
July 2024	-	June 2025	\$65.71	\$5.62	\$165.10	---

Mr. Swindler presented needs for the Sanitation Division to include new facilities and additional trucks. Mr. Swindler discussed aging offices and buildings at the Public Works Department site. New facilities needed include offices, meeting and training rooms, lockers and bathrooms and showers. Depending on annexation numbers, it is forecast that two residential rear loader trucks will be necessary at a cost of approximately \$700,000. If the City continues the recycling program, an additional commercial front loader truck will be necessary at a cost of approximately \$400,000. Prices for sanitation trucks are expected to increase. Currently, a commercial front loader is \$400,000, a basic residential rear loader is \$275,000, an upgraded residential rear loader is \$315,000, a grapple loader is \$200,000 and a lift gate truck for roll cart delivery is \$65,000. Mr. Swindler reviewed some issues sanitation faces with residents piling boxes, furniture, bags, et cetera at the curb for pick up. Mr. Davis spoke on landlord evictions. In South Carolina State Code, a landlord is able to set the evicted tenant’s belongings on the curb. The City then must collect the items, but only after forty-eight hours has passed. Mr. Davis said state law does not require the landlord to notify the City when they’ve placed items out, so the forty-eight hours begins once the City is notified either by a resident or a sanitation worker.

**Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism**

Mrs. Victoria Nash, Director of Parks, Recreation and Sports Tourism said Coastal Carolina University will conduct a parks and recreation needs assessment for the City of Florence Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism Department. The assessment will cost \$1,500, which will assist with transporting students roundtrip from Coastal Carolina University to Florence and to assist with any resources needed for the assessment.

Mr. Clint Moore, Assistant City Manager of Development, provided an update on the Levy Park expansion project. The subrecipient agreements with the state and federal government have been signed.



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City staff is now ready to bid out the project and once a bid has been awarded to an engineering firm, it will take 10-12 months for the engineering phase to be completed. After the engineering phase is complete, the project will be bid out for construction. Mr. Moore said public meetings will be held to receive input from the community and stakeholders. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the Levy Park expansion project.

Mrs. Nash provided an update on the Freedom Florence Football Complex. Initially, the football complex was proposed to be located at the Florence Sports Complex, but due to land costs, city staff is looking to relocate the football complex to Freedom Florence. This complex will include turf fields that will be able to host sports such as football, soccer, and lacrosse with a gravel parking on the back side. City staff will have to look into access from Freedom Boulevard to the parking lot at the complex. The estimated cost for the football complex is \$6,994,799.

Mrs. Nash provided an update on the Barnes Street Basketball Arena. This arena will be located across the street from the existing Pearl Moore Basketball Center. There are two properties adjacent to the Pearl Moore Basketball Center that the City is looking to purchase and use for a parking garage. The arena that could fit 1000-1500 spectators. The estimated cost is \$7 million.

Mr. Jerry Dudley, Planning Director, spoke on the Section 108 Loan Process, through Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, that would be used to fund the construction of the basketball arena. The city has previously used this loan to construct the Barnes Street Activity Center and the Levy Park Youth Center.

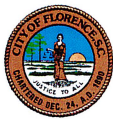
Mrs. Nash spoke on the Florence Tennis Center court expansion. The expansion will consist of eight new hard courts, two hydro grid clay courts, lighting for all ten courts, and restrooms for tennis patrons and visitors at the Florence Sports Complex. The city has allocated \$1 million for the expansion, but additional funding is required. Funding requests totaling \$2.5 million have been submitted to The Bruce and Lee Foundation (\$2 million) and the USTA Tennis Venue Services (\$500,000).

Mrs. Nash provided an update on the Dr. Iola Jones Park Amphitheater. Funding for the amphitheater has been secured and staff is in the early stages of initiating construction. There are currently two options for procurement: purchasing the amphitheater through one Sourcewell-approved playground company or through a separate Sourcewell-approved company while bidding out the contract work for the two-foot-tall concrete pad.

Mrs. Nash provided an update on the dog parks. The establishment of dog parks will bring benefits such as community enhancement, tourist appeal and community health and well-being. The potential locations for dog parks are McLeod Park and Levy Park. There will be a projected 3.5% price increase as of January 2025. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding dog parks.

Mrs. Nash spoke on the enhancements of Timrod Park to include a new playground and new pickleball courts. The restrooms will be renovated this year as well. City staff is focusing on events in the park and will be working on a plan to move forward with events. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding parking concerns at Timrod Park.

Mrs. Nash announced the city will host a 4<sup>th</sup> of July Fireworks Show at the Florence Soccer Complex this year. The estimated cost is approximately \$25,000 and will be covered through sponsorships from local stakeholders and businesses.



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Mrs. Nash spoke on the current needs of the department to include two additional parks groundkeepers and additional security cameras in community parks and sports complexes. Mrs. Nash also acknowledged that over \$5,000 has been received in memorial donations for a tribute to Col. Barry Wingard at Veterans Park. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding a memorial for Col. Wingard.

There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the Science South Facility. Mrs. Nash said city staff is looking to convert the Science South Facility into the South Florence Community Center. This facility will address the growing need for accessible recreational and educational spaces in the South Florence area.

Mrs. Nash said city staff recently stocked the ponds at the Florence Soccer Complex and Freedom Florence Complex with starter fish and would like to stock on a permanent basis to enhance recreational opportunities for the community. The estimated cost for fish stocking is \$8,000-\$12,000 and support materials is \$500-\$1,000.

Mrs. Nash spoke on the Jeffries Creek Playground Replacement. The replacement cost is estimated at \$70,000. The playground at Maple Park is in need of reconditioning. The estimated cost for reconditioning is \$19,300.

Mrs. Nash also proposed a practice disc golf course at Jebaily Park. The installation of a 3-hole disc golf course is approximately \$10,000-\$15,000 for baskets, signage and course design. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding proposed enhancements for Jebaily Park. There was discussion regarding properties surrounding city parks and enforcement of city ordinances.

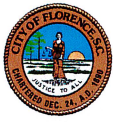
Mrs. Nash shared that there is a need to replace picnic shelters at Lester Park, Lucas Park, and Jebaily Park. The cost for new picnic shelters is approximately \$140,000. She acknowledged the lack of signage in the City's parks. Interpretive signage can be very educational for residents providing insights into the history, significance, and unique character of each location. Interpretive signs serve as outdoor graphic displays that enhance awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the environment.

Mrs. Nash spoke of the Blue Trail System and Florence Trail System. There is a need for improved signage and mapping (approximately \$20,000), safety and navigation enhancements (\$15,000), and environmental education and community engagement (\$15,000), for a total of \$50,000 to enhance the Trail Systems.

Mrs. Nash spoke on department projects for the next five to ten years. These projects will include resurfacing the Sports Complex track, installation of 500 seats at Field 1 at the Sports Complex, turfing the infields at Freedom Florence, installation of field lights at the Soccer Complex, constructing a new gymnastics facility, and repairing the Pye Branch Trail boardwalk.

**Comprehensive Plan**

Mr. Jerry Dudley, Planning Director, said the city's comprehensive plan is intended to guide future development, redevelopment, and community enhancement efforts over the next 10-20 years through 2041. Mr. Dudley spoke on growth capacity, land use and development, housing and neighborhoods, transportation and economic development, and recreation and amenities. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the city's comprehensive plan.



### Growth and Development

Mr. Jerry Dudley, Planning Director, spoke on the methods of annexation. South Carolina has three methods of annexation: 100% method in which 100 percent of residents in a defined area petition for annexation; 75% method in which 75 percent of residents in a defined area petition for annexation; or 25% method in which 25 percent of residents in a defined area petition for annexation, a public referendum must be held, and a majority vote will determine if the properties are annexed. Mr. Dudley also reviewed the annual cost comparison between city residents and county residents. The annual cost for city residents is \$3,346.34, compared to \$4,277.40 for county residents. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding annexations and the benefits for residents and businesses inside the city limits to include Police, Fire, Sanitation, Utilities, Public Work, and Administrative Services.

There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the city's franchise areas. Franchise areas are the areas that the city can provide services to. Mr. Dudley spoke on future considerations for city growth and development. Important concepts to consider with annexation, growth and development is the direction of residential growth; the direction of commercial growth; and impacts related to the extension of water and sewer infrastructure, sanitation services, fire services, police services, recreation, and streets and stormwater. There are common municipal strategies to assist with the cost for growth, such as impact fees and special purpose tax districts.

Mr. Dudley spoke on upcoming projects that will need to be addressed in the Unified Development Ordinance. These include an update to the sign ordinance, accessory dwelling units (ADU's) and a tree ordinance. Upcoming costs include the five-year update to the 2020 Comprehensive Plan, a Neighborhood Revitalization Plan, a Housing Study, and the Lucas Street Corridor.

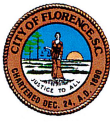
Mr. Dudley provided a housing and rental outlook. The estimated population by 2030 is 47,000 residents. The recent median sales price for a home in Florence is \$250,000, up from \$159,500 in 2019. The average household income is \$56,433. The current cost of a new build residential home is \$145 per square foot and current thirty-year fixed mortgage rate is 7.09%. The city's housing study is expected to be completed by Fall 2025.

### Community Services

Mr. Dudley gave an overview of the projects in progress to include rehabilitation, weatherization, demolition, new home construction, the Pine Street Master Plan, and the Habitat for Humanity home. Mr. Dudley also provided an overview of Building Florence Together, the city's nonprofit organization, and the City Center Building.

### Projects Update

Mr. Moore provided an update on stormwater projects in relation to the \$7 million stormwater bond. Projects completed include Sandhurst West, Tarleton Estates and Phase I of St. Anthony/College Park. Engineering has begun for Malden Drive. Malden Drive and Cannon Street is under review by the state, and the city is working with Florence County on Woodland Drive. Rebecca Street is currently on hold due to easement related issues. Multiple bids were received for the Pennsylvania Street project and all came in higher than the anticipated costs. Engineering is set to begin summer 2025 for Dargan and Elm Streets and the Cheves Street (underpass) projects. Engineering is set to begin winter 2025 for Wisteria Drive. Cedar and McQueen Street is under construction. The North Church and Oakland Avenue project has gone through three revisions and is awaiting approval from the South Carolina Department of



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Transportation. The Stormwater Master Plan is complete and will be brought before Council in the next few months.

Mr. Moore provided information regarding the Capital Projects Sales Tax III that was passed by referendum in November 2020. The City received \$40,000,000 from the County and a bond was issued in the summer of 2021. Approximately 170 total roadways and projects were included, and, to date, sixty roadways have been completed. Group 9, comprising fourteen streets, is scheduled to commence work at the beginning of this year. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the Penny Sales Tax.

[Break: 10:30 – 10:45]

Mr. Moore gave an overview of projects in progress, to include the Carolina Theater Renovation, Mural Plaza and the Rail Trail. The Carolina Theater renovation is expected to start the beginning of 2025 and be completed by early 2026. Ribbon cuttings will be scheduled in spring 2025 for the Mural Plaza and Rail Trail.

Mr. Moore provided an update on the Rental Uniform Property. This property covers fourteen acres and is approximately 95,590 total square feet. City staff had discussions with the owner and a realtor regarding the City acquiring the property. Current status of the property is as follows: Phase I ESA has been completed, all previous studies with environmental engineer Stantec have been reviewed, and the non-responsible party voluntary cleanup contract from South Carolina Department of Environmental Services has been received. Potential uses for this property include evidence storage; relocation of Public Works, Utilities, and/or other divisions; or a future Fire Station site. Cleanup costs associated with the property are unknown until the Brownfields Cleanup Analysis is complete. Other associated costs will include a roof repair, estimated at \$500,000; office space renovation, estimated at \$2,000,000; warehouse renovation, estimated at \$2,000,000; site work, estimated at \$250,000; and demolition of the Pet property, estimated at \$750,000. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the Rental Uniform Property.

### **Proposed Ordinances**

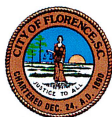
Mr. Moore reviewed several proposed ordinances that are on the agenda for the January 13<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting of City Council. The Unfit Dwelling Ordinance will provide a set of standards to determine if a building is unfit for human occupancy. The city's public official will make the determination on if a structure can be repaired or if it will need to be demolished.

The Vacant and Abandoned Residential, Commercial and Industrial Building Registration Ordinance requires all vacant and abandoned buildings to register with the city. Exceptions include buildings that are actively being marketed for sale or rent, government owned buildings, buildings that are actively pursued for demolition as ordered or properties that are vacant and/or abandoned but do not have any code violations. Owners may donate the property to the city as a remedy. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding the proposed ordinances.

### **Water & Sewer Master Planning & Economic Development**

Mr. Michael Hemingway, Utility Planning and Economic Development Director, discussed infrastructure upgrades for growth and regulatory compliance. The below chart illustrates the project and the current, estimated capital costs associated with the upgrades.





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Project/Upgrade	Cost
Surface Water Treatment Plant Expansion	\$ 250,000,000
Surface Water US EPA PFAS Regulatory Requirement	+/- 50,000,000
Wastewater Management Facility Expansion	350,000,000
Jeffries Creek Sewer Interceptor Upgrade	45,000,000
Middle Swamp Sewer Interceptor Upgrade	30,000,000
West Palmetto / Timmonsville Sewer Interceptor	20,000,000
Pye Brach Sewer	8,000,000
East Palmetto Sewer Interceptor	50,000,000
South Irby Sewer Interceptor (South of Alligator Road)	?
Police Cabin Pump Station	6,000,000
Four water tanks	20,000,000
30-inch water main extension – Freedom Boulevard to Alligator Road	15,000,000
30-inch water line along I-95 and I-20 and 1-million-gallon tank	2,000,000/mile of pipe + 3,500,000 tank
Construction of new sewer and water in eastern Florence to serve growth	?

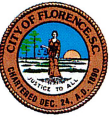
There was a discussion regarding infrastructure updates and regulatory compliance among Council and staff. There was also a discussion on the Per-and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) study.

Mr. Hemingway discussed the Jeffries Creek Sewer Interceptor project. It will take approximately two years for the project to be completed. The estimated cost for the project is \$45 million. Pro tem Jebaily asked if this project has already been funded. Mr. Hemingway responded yes; \$24 million was funded by the state, and the other \$20 million will come from a bond that will take effect later this year. Councilman Braddock inquired if this project will remove all of the sewer out of Jeffries Creek. Mr. Hemingway said no, the interceptor will only move sewer from the west side of town to the wastewater plant. Mr. Hemingway briefly provided an overview for additional projects to include: the East Palmetto Corridor Sanitary Sewer Capacity Upgrade, Surface Water Treatment Plant Expansion, and the Wastewater Management Facility Expansion.

Mr. Hemingway then discussed potential federal funding opportunities. Current funding requests include \$5 million for the Surface Water Treatment Plant Expansion and \$2.75 million for the Surface Water Treatment Plan Expansion. Through the Water Resources Development Act, the city requested \$50 million for the Wastewater Management Facility, \$50 million for the Water Distribution System, and \$70 million for the Sanitary Sewer Collection System. However, the bill is currently written to combine these three projects for a total of \$40 million in funding.

Mr. Hemingway briefly spoke on Impact Fees. The city is working with Willdan Group and First Tryon Financial Advisors to look at potential impact fee development. Impact fees could contribute to an additional \$17 million for the city. Impact fees would not only benefit water and sewer projects, but would also be beneficial for the Police Department, Fire Department, Sanitation Division and Parks, Recreation, and Sports Tourism Department. City staff is aiming to have impact fee development completed by March or April of this year.

[Break: 12:07 – 12:25]



**Utilities Department**

Mr. Josh Whittington, Utilities Director, spoke on the workforce of the Utilities Department. The Utilities Department is comprised of employees with technical expertise and specialized skills. Mr. Whittington said the City must compete with other government and private sector jobs as well as other geographic locations for employees in this field. Water and Wastewater Operators must obtain certification through the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and must have experience to become a competent operator. Additional employees will be needed to address the growth of the City and expansion of the City's utility facilities and systems. Mr. Whittington also proposed the addition of a water quality work group who would work to specifically to address water quality concerns.

Mr. Whittington spoke of the challenge of rising costs, capital expenses, and utility repairs beyond city staff's capability. There are higher upfront costs and the equipment is more specialized and technical and usually requires contractors to repair or program. Emergency repairs also present a challenge because it consumes a lot of the budget and the budget for these types of repairs is small. Emergency repairs include sewer repair, water line repair, lift station repair, pump repair, repair parts, et cetera. Solutions for some of these concerns include on-call contractors, preventative maintenance contracts and capital improvement projects.

Mr. Whittington discussed various specialized equipment needs to include an excavator along with a truck and flatbed to haul the excavator at a cost of \$500,00, a boring machine at a cost of \$200,000 and a sewer vac-truck at a cost of \$575,000 Additional equipment will be needed as the city's utility system grows.

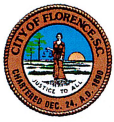
Mr. Whittington spoke on SCADA, a remote monitoring program that can remotely monitor, access, and control offsite locations. This program will assist with monitoring lift stations for failures and overflows, monitoring groundwater production and potential problems, alarming operators for a quick response and monitoring tank levels and water system pressures. There was a discussion regarding remote monitoring programs among Council and staff.

Mr. Whittington spoke on water quality and recent complaints. Most water quality complaints are due to iron in the water. Many of the city's groundwater plants and wells are in need of maintenance and repairs. The East Florence Water Treatment Plant was brought back online out of the operating budget. Four plants are scheduled for renovation utilizing grant funds to include the GE Water Treatment Plant, the River Road Water Treatment Plant, the Pine Street Water Treatment Plant, and the Oakdale Water Treatment Plant. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding water quality and compliance.

Mr. Whittington provided an overview on Distributions Operations, Wastewater Treatment, and Collections/Stormwater Operations. Considerations going forward include additional crews for valve work and/or leak repairs and special projects, re placement of critical equipment reaching maintenance milestones or at end of life, and maintenance of plants and equipment.

**Presentation by First Tryon Financial Advisors**

Amy Vitner with First Tryon Financial Advisors gave a presentation on the city's current debt. Ms. Vitner said First Tryon Financial Advisors has worked with the city for many years on capital planning and debt related items and funding for city projects. Ms. Vitner provided an overview on Hospitality Fund, Debt Service Capacity, Water and Sewer Fund, and comparison information relating to similar rated cities



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across the state. The city has a total of \$670 million worth of projects that will take place over a ten-year period.

Currently there are \$22.5 million worth of projects that have been considered to be funded through the Hospitality Fund. These projects include \$8 million for Freedom Florence Football Fields, \$7 million for Pearl Moore Basketball Center expansion, \$1 million for additional tennis courts at the Florence Tennis Center, \$1 million for Levy Park land acquisition, \$2.5 million for a Pickleball Facility, and \$3 million for an Aquatics Center. Out of the \$22.5 million, \$18 million is slotted for debt issuance while the remainder will need to be cash funded or supported by grant funding. Ms. Vitner said overall, the city has healthy coverage in this fund.

Ms. Vitner said the city currently levies 4 mills for the Debt Service Fund. Assuming a Fiscal Year 2024 value of a mill of approximately \$194,000 and 1% annual growth thereafter, the City will build up to 1 mill of capacity by Fiscal Year 2035. This fund has a limited near-term capacity without a millage increase. There was a discussion among Council and staff regarding millage and millage capacity.

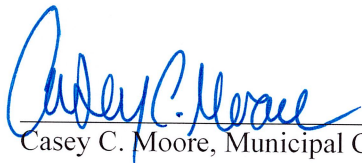
Ms. Vitner then discussed the existing Water and Sewer Fund debt. She said out of the \$670 million for projects, the city currently has an outstanding debt balance of approximately \$164 million. As of June 30, 2024, the maximum annual debt service on existing debt is approximately \$14 million. Due to a lot of projects being cash funded, approximately \$555 million is estimated to be debt funded over the next 10 years. To conclude, Ms. Vitner said this fund's capacity for larger near-term projects will be strained without a future rate increase.

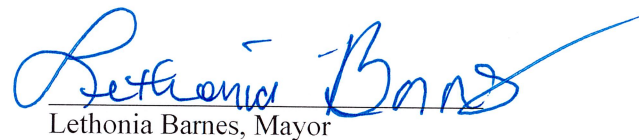
There was a discussion regarding the city's debt balance and how it compares to other municipalities among Council and staff.

**ADJOURN**

Without objection, the January 10, 2025 Retreat Work Session of City Council was adjourned at 1:49p.m.

Dated this 10<sup>th</sup> day of March 2025.

  
Casey C. Moore, Municipal Clerk

  
Lethonia Barnes, Mayor