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City of Lake Park
Regular Council Meeting Minutes
June 03, 2025
6:00 pm

Members present were Mayor Jena Sandlin, Council Member Michelle Lane, Council Member Busby Courson, Council Member Oscar Griffith and Council Member Carl Spano

Staff Present: City Clerk Lisa Johnson, Deputy Clerk Christian Colson, Court Clerk Melissa Morey, Sergeant Matt Colson, Maintenance Supervisor Billy Jones, Maintenance Technician Eli Johnson, Fire Chief Matt Ryan, Police Officer Art Verdell

Others Present: City Attorney Drew Bennett

Mayor Jena Sandlin called the meeting to order.

Mayor Jena Sandlin led the invocation.

Mayor Jena Sandlin led the pledge.

Minutes: Mayor Sandlin called for the review and approval of the Minutes. Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to approve the Minutes of the May 6, 2025 Meeting. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed 4-0.

Mayor Sandlin called for Citizens who have concerns they would like to bring to the Council's attention. She reminded residents that the time was limited to three minutes and asked them to state their name, address and concern at the podium.

CITIZENS' CONCERNS:

- Danny Gainous/Golf Drive, Kate Moore/413 Long Pond Rd – Mr. Gainous introduced his granddaughter Kate Moore and explained that she is 16 years old; part of her graduation requirements include 25 volunteer hours in the community each summer. She still needs 15 hours with a local government related field, and would like to serve those hours with Lake Park City Hall. Mayor Sandlin expressed appreciation on behalf of the Council and asked her to call City Hall and speak to Mrs. Johnson.
- Oscar Griffith – 824 Sand Crane Circle – stated he has nothing against Mayor Sandlin personally and would appreciate if the Mayor would stop saying that to the public. He maintained that he does have a problem with the wrong things that she does, and which she believes she can do because she is the Mayor. Mr. Griffith asserted that he believes the Mayor has created a hostile environment at the City

of Lake Park and has begun to bully people, this hostile is within all departments, with citizens, and in the City Council. He referenced instances in Council meetings during Citizens Concerns the Mayor interrupting citizens and telling them that specific issues would not be discussed, instances in which the Mayor called maintenance personnel "the boys", referring to the contracted laborers as "the Mexicans", which he had himself stopped her from doing. He declared that the Mayor had on multiple occasions stated that she is the Mayor and could do what she wanted to do. He cited the previous Council meeting in which the Fire Chief was asking her a question when she interrupted him and basically bullied him by telling him to move on and get to his report. He charged her with an inability to conduct meetings, allowing citizens to interrupt when Council is in discussion and motions are on the floor, stating that she does not know Robert's Rules as evidenced by the last Council meeting. Mr. Griffith faulted the Mayor with bullying Council Member Courson and influencing him to change his vote at the previous meeting, stating that Mr. Courson is a seated Council Member elected by the citizens of Lake Park, GA. He stated that the Mayor had interrupted a vote, declaring that "he don't understand the question" and looking at Mr. Courson and shaking her head "no". He asserted that he had listened to the audio and that Council Member Spano had made it very clear, and it is clear on the video that she turned to the attorney and stated that Mr. Courson didn't understand. Mr. Griffith stated that at the previous meeting, Council Member Spano was allowed to read four pages on the issue and she did not interrupt him, but when he himself had the floor and was making a statement, she asked the City's attorney if she could stop him. When the attorney told her no, she continued to ask him until, in Mr. Griffith's opinion, the attorney said either "yes" or "I guess so". Mr. Griffith praised the Police Department and noted that the City has now lost it's Police Chief; he asked Council Members Courson and Lane when enough would be enough: ticket-fixing, taking the fire truck, and now the Mayor has the maintenance staff cutting the grass on her property at Tom's Pond. Mr. Griffith declared that Mayor Sandlin had destroyed the City of Lake Park, and she should do everyone a favor and resign.

- Ronnie Sauls – 1100 W Marion Ave – stated that Council made it clear years ago that as long as the City used the property at Tom's Pond, they would take care of cutting the grass. He maintained that Mayor Sandlin had never told anyone to cut the grass. Mr. Sauls and Mr. Griffith had a brief dispute before Mr. Sauls addressed Council Member Spano, stating that he should look at everything and not just listen to people, asserting that Mayor Sandlin had worked hard making the City look good and had done a good job. He stated that everyone makes mistakes, noting that the Lord's Prayer recited every month says forgive us as we forgive others, and that "we don't do that, we just keep bringing stuff up". He said he had lived in the community for 55 years and had never seen anything like it is now.
- Patricia Brown – 809 Main Street – stated her distress, asserting that each person had a right to express their opinions and say how they feel about things, and, with apologies, said she felt that Mr. Sauls came up attacking Mr. Griffith and it shouldn't be that way and no one is stopping it and it was just confusion in the meeting. She addressed Council Member Lane, noting that her grandmother had served as Mayor and was known to be an honorable and decent person, but she wouldn't have allowed this to happen. Mrs. Brown stated that the people had voted for them as Council Members to serve the people of Lake Park and they were arguing amongst themselves. Mrs. Brown addressed the Mayor, saying that if she did something wrong, she did something wrong; a wrong is a wrong and a right is a right, but people here want to cover up a wrong, and the wrong needs to be dealt with and everyone move on. She asserted that that wasn't happening, stating that people still want to cover it up, still want to protect each other and that it was all just a mess.

- Arthur Keckley – 315 4-H Club Rd – Expressed concern regarding some things he has heard through the grapevine on the Chief’s position, and cited several sections of the Charter: as saying that the Mayor shall be responsible for the preparation of a classification and position classification pay plan which shall be submitted to the Council for approval, and it is his knowledge was not submitted to all Council Members to approve to advertise the position of Police Chief; as saying that the City has the power and authority to protect the *safety*, health, *peace*, security, good order and morals of its inhabitants, emphasizing that the inhabitants are the residents; as saying that neither the Mayor nor any other member of the Council shall vote when they are personally interested, and referred to Tom’s Pond; as saying that the Mayor and any Council Member shall be subject to removal from office for any one and only one, of a list of causes, including incompetence, misfeasance or malfeasance in office, and willful violation of any express prohibition of the Charter. He charged the Mayor as having violated both of these named causes, reiterating that only one was needed for removal. He continued that the Bible emphasizes that true leadership is to be characterized by justice, righteousness and humility, while corrupt leaders are often described as selfish, abusive and blind to the needs of others. The Bible acknowledges that bad leaders exist and have a detrimental impact on society; he stated that the residents of Lake Park want to have elected representation that has integrity and honesty, asserting that these types of instances of “good ol’ boy” mentality only harm our community and make the community appear to be behind in times.
- Danny Gainous – 714 Long Pond Rd – stated that he has lived in Lake Park since 1984, and there had never been a place he loved as much. He stated that he didn’t know anything about what was going on before he came to bring his 16-year-old granddaughter to this meeting and is embarrassed and ashamed. Lake Park is a small country town and country folks usually get along really well, and he doesn’t know what is wrong with Lake Park, but he urged people to get on their knees and pray for guidance. He remarked that he could no longer leave home without seeing blue lights where police had someone pulled over, and feels harassed when he is asked “what is going on in Lake Park”. Mr. Gainous said that in communities, people are supposed to live together, love each other, and get along with each other, and he asked the Council to consider needs to come together and work to make Lake Park the community that it used to be.
- Carl Spano – Sand Crane Circle – stated he did not know of any agreements to cut private property at Tom’s Pond. As for agreements made in the past, if it’s not on paper, it didn’t happen. If the City wanted to establish an agreement to maintain the property in exchange for the use of the property, it needs to be put in writing, because otherwise, the City is illegally having maintenance staff mow private property, which amounts to embezzlement, because it is stealing taxpayer funds to cut private property. As far as forgiveness goes, he stated he already forgave the Mayor, for the ticket fixing issue, and the Mayor had said she would not do anything like that again, and then turned around and stole a fire truck to water plants in the median. He stated that he could only give forgiveness for so long, which was why he voted to remove the Mayor; because he no longer has faith in her word.
- Arthur Keckley – 315 4-H Club Rd – stated that ticket that was fixed came to light because the individual had gone around bragging that he had gotten it fixed, and now that the speed bumps are gone on 4-H Club Rd, the same resident is bragging that he got them picked up; he just felt Council should know that.

REPORTS OF OFFICERS/DEPARTMENT HEADS:

Fire Department: Fire Chief Matt Ryan

- Presented the activity report.

- Reported that he is doing a class in-house for two registered volunteers on Tuesday and Thursday nights, which will count toward their Thursday night meetings, since they are doing it in-house.
- Stated he is going on the 14th to pick up the fireworks and asked to rent a U-Haul truck. Council Member Spano made a motion to authorize Matt Ryan to rent a U-Haul truck to pick up fireworks, cost not to exceed \$350.00. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0.
- Council Member Spano thanked Chief Ryan for the Call log, and stated that the report was confusing and asked who LP-11 was. Chief Ryan responded that this is Colby Bryant, and he is no longer with the Fire Department.

Police Department: Sergeant Matt Colson

- Presented the activity report
- Stated that the 4-H Club Rd study is complete and available for review
- Stated that two wanted persons had been arrested, one of them a convicted felon

Maintenance/Public Works Department: Eli Johnson, Billy Jones

- Presented the activity report.
- Stated there are no needs for the Department, other than what has already been requested.
- Council Member Spano asked how long it had taken to hang flags on the light poles and expressed concern that there is inadequate lighting for the American Flag. Mr. Johnson responded that it had taken about 6 hours to hang the flags.
- In response to questions asked the previous month regarding the tractor and bush hog, Mr. Johnson reported that both are 4-wheel drive and that the 47 HP was recommended for the Department's use. The 47 HP has a cost of \$34,895 and the 35 HP costs \$27,395. The 35 HP is a Kioti.

Administration: City Clerk Lisa Johnson

- Presented the Administration report.
- Reported that GEFA (Georgia Environmental Finance Authority) had opened a funding opportunity for water infrastructure; these funds are available from the State of Georgia's portion of ARPA which has not been allocated. Carter & Sloope, the City's Engineers have submitted an application for this funding, and their proposal has been included in the packet. One of the requirements for the funding is that the project needs to tie into a previous OPB project; since the City's OPB project was to complete a CDBG that had to be amended due to increased costs and not all of what was cut was completed, we meet this requirement. There is no obligation on the City's part to accept the funding, this is basically a request to see what GEFA could do to help us cover the cost. Some things that are included in the project are to finish completing the cast-iron lines, to eliminate more of the dead-ends in the system which cause pressure problems and occasionally brown water.
- Reported that when she met with the Engineer about some of the issues with water, they had spoken specifically about pressure problems. As the possibility of a booster pump correcting the issues had been discussed previously, this question was asked and Mr. Sloope advised that the problem with a booster pump is that it would increase pressure ahead of the pump, but might significantly decrease the pressure behind it. The basic problem is that the elevated tank is not high enough for the coverage of the current system, which is gravity fed. Looping together some of the dead ends will help, although it is unknown exactly how much. They will be investigating alternatives to correct the problem.
- Reported that the final proposed numbers for the SPLOST IX referendum are in the packet; the original requests had exceeded the amount projected to be received by approximately \$500,000.

When the budgets and requests were reviewed and compared with projects from SPLOST VIII, it was discovered that some projects overlap. The final numbers are based on the City's ability to complete the projects in SPLOST VIII and SPLOST IX with the dollar amount remaining in SPLOST VIII plus the projected amount in SPLOST IX. The only item that has been removed was for Parks and Recreation, since there is enough remaining in SPLOST VIII to cover the estimate to complete the project put forth. Any available money that was freed up was moved into Water projects. This item is on the Agenda later for approval.

- Reported that the storage units are rented, and maintenance is preparing to move items from the blue house. She asked Mrs. Wilbers and Mrs. Hogan, who were present at the meeting, if they could help identify which of the decorations used for Fourth of July, Christmas, and Memorial Day were still in use and which could be disposed of.
- Reminded everyone that Hurricane Season began June 1 and NOAA is predicting another busy season. Lowndes County and its cities are collaborating on preparedness for the season, including unified messaging to help eliminate some of the confusion. Lowndes County EMA will be holding a NIMS Course, which is a class on the roles and responsibilities of different levels of emergency response. This information was forwarded to Council when received; currently, City Clerk Lisa Johnson, Sgt. Colson, Chief Ryan and Maintenance Eli Johnson are registered to attend. She reminded Council that in 2024, Mrs. Keckley had volunteered to assist with preparedness to meet the needs of citizens who may have particular hardships in the event of a storm, and she is planning to meet with Mrs. Keckley and Mrs. Wilbers, who served as EMA Liaison for Lake Park in the past, to begin planning for this.
- Reported that FEMA's thresholds for assistance has increased; for perspective, Lake Park would not have qualified for assistance with damage for Idalia, although the City would still have qualified for Helene. She stressed that this is another reason preparedness will be key in the future.
- Reported that there are some trainings coming up: GMA Convention is June 20-24 in Savannah, Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Morey will be in Fines and Fees training on June 13th in Douglas, NIMS training is on June 11 in Valdosta.

Financial Reports: City Clerk Lisa Johnson

- Presented the Financial report and asked if there were any questions.
- Council Member Spano asked for the status on the Audit; Mrs. Johnson reported that the accountants are still working on them but have assured her that they will meet the June 30 deadline. Department Head meetings to begin the process for the FY26 Budget will be scheduled in July, and the budget needs to be reviewed for needed amendments. She also asked Council Members for any questions or thoughts regarding the FY26 budget, so those could be made part of the planning process.
- Council Member Spano made a motion to approve the Financial Reports as stated through April 30. Council Member Lane seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Unfinished Business

- Justin Sandlin gave an update on the Fourth of July Event, reporting that everyone is moving along and staying within budget; he expressed appreciation to the Maintenance staff for their hard work and help. Mr. Sandlin asked Mr. Spano if he would share specifications for the lighting of the flags and shared that he would make sure there was proper and adequate lighting. He reported that he would be meeting with City staff later in the week to make sure that everything was ready. The parade permit has been submitted for approval, which has not yet been received.
- SPLOST IX: City Clerk Lisa Johnson read the projects and amounts to be included on the referendum. She noted that having spoken with City Attorney Bennett, there are some minor changes to verbiage.

Council Member Carl Spano noted that since Parks and Recreation still has money remaining in the SPLOST VIII budget that exceeds the amount requested for SPLOST IX, that category has been struck from the SPLOST IX project list. Council Member Spano made a motion to approve the SPLOST IX project list with noted verbiage changes. Council Member Oscar Griffith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

- Tractor/Bush Hog – Council Member Busby Courson asked that this be tabled pending more research on the models presented.

New Business

- Additional Contract Labor – City Clerk Lisa Johnson reported that staff is requesting the Contract Laborers be approved for three additional days, if needed, for clearing out the blue building in anticipation of demolition, considering the current workload and preparations for the Fourth Event. Council Member Busby Courson approved three additional days for the Contract Laborers if needed. Council Member Michelle Lane seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.
- Ethics Committee appointment – Council Member Carl Spano made a motion to appoint Arthur Keckley to the Ethics Committee to fill the seat vacated by the resignation of Ms. Tina Sirmans. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.
- *Gloria Luke asked if the signs being posted in the median had been sold, and where the proceeds were going. Council Member Spano explained that they had been sold to help fund City events, specifically the Fourth of July Event, but it would also help keep money available for other events such as Christmas.

Mayor Sandlin called for a motion to enter Executive Session for Minutes Review and to discuss Personnel. Council Member Spano seconded, with an amendment add real estate. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. Council entered into Executive Session at 7:00 pm.

Council Member Michelle Lane made a motion to reenter regular session. Council Member Spano seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. Council reconvened Regular Session at 7:42 pm.

Council Member Busby Courson made a motion to accept discussed changes to the real estate issue and proceed with survey, title search and property purchase. Council Member Spano seconded the motion. The motion passed 3-1, with Council Member Lane opposed.

Council Member Spano made a motion to appoint Sgt. Matthew Colson Interim Police Chief, with commensurate salary, with applications to be accepted until July 31 and a final appointment to be determined. Council Member Oscar Griffith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0. The position of Police Chief will be posted with a closing date of July 31.

Council Member Spano made a motion to appoint Drew Bennett as permanent City Attorney. Council Member Oscar Griffith seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Council Member Spano stated that he would like to appoint Eli Johnson as the Public Works Manager, and questioned what pay should be offered. Council Member Courson stated that he thought the City should begin by including Mr. Johnson in meetings with the Engineers and allowed a training time. Member Spano responded that he believed that while Mr. Johnson technically worked under the supervision of Mr. Jones, the challenge would be in Mr. Jones making the time available for him to attend administrative duties. Council discussed the difference between Maintenance and Public Works, and the possible separation of the two. Council Member Courson noted that Johnson was hired with the intent of his becoming the Maintenance Supervisor and that it was originally Mr. Jones' suggestion that he would be working toward his own retirement while he trained someone for the Supervisor's position. It was agreed that there should be more

discussion and advance notice to Mr. Jones before a promotion happened and, in the meantime, Mr. Johnson would be given time for administrative responsibilities. The topic was tabled pending conversations with Mr. Jones and Mr. Johnson. Council Member Spano made a motion to advertise for a full-time Maintenance position to replace contract laborers. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0.

Council discussed a request from Billy Jones to buy out vacation pay. Council discussed the need for employees to take vacation, and agreed that Mr. Jones needed to take his vacation rather than have the time purchased.

Council Member Carl Spano made a motion to adjourn. Council Member Busby Courson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0 and the meeting was adjourned.

The next regular meeting will be on July 1, 2025, at 6:00 pm.


Jena Sandlin, Mayor


Lisa Johnson, City Clerk

7-1-25
Date

July 1, 2025
Date

Seal