
Minutes of the Special Meeting of the City Commission of the City of Auburndale held February 11, 2026, at 5:30 p.m. in the Commission Room of City Hall, after having been properly advertised, with the following members present: Mayor Alex Cam, Vice Mayor Jordan Helms, Commissioners: Travis Avery, Sean Levy, and Crystal Tijerina. Also, present were: Interim City Manager Amy Palmer, City Attorney Frederick J. Murphy Jr., and City Clerk Brandon Henry.

Mayor Alex Cam declared a quorum present, and the Meeting was opened with a salute to the flag.

1. DISCUSS INTERVIEW PANEL FORMAT AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interim City Manager Amy Palmer introduced former City Manager Bobby Green.

Former City Manager Bobby Green presented an overview of the interview process. He said the first 30 minutes of this meeting will be to generate the questions the Commission wants to ask of the candidates.

Mayor Cam said his first question will be to ask what made the candidate want to apply to be the City Manager of Auburndale. His second question is what would their first 100 days look like, and what goals would they hope to achieve?

Vice Mayor Helms said his first question will be to ask what will the candidates' philosophy and strategy be for managing development and balancing economic and commercial opportunities versus residential – and to include what the candidate knows of the growth in Auburndale with relative examples. His second question is to ask the candidate about a past large scale utility project they have worked on of similar scope or scale to current projects in Auburndale, and to provide the actions they took involved in that project.

Commissioner Avery said his first question is to describe a time when the candidate identified structural or operational gaps in an organization they led - what steps did they take to assess and implement changes such as reallocating resources, reorganizing teams or adjusting staffing levels? And how did they manage the impact on employee morale and organizational performance? His second question is to ask how would they leverage emerging technologies and communication platforms to inform and engage new citizens effectively? What other innovative approaches to community engagement would they pursue to help newcomers feel integrated into the fabric of our city and preserve its welcoming circumstances?

Commissioner Levy said his first question was going to be to ask what their first hundred days in office would look like? What is their vision for our city's next five, 10 years? How would they make sure that new development does not erode what we already have and maintain our quality of life? His second question is to ask how would they approach the next annual budget and long-term financial planning to support quality services, parks and recreation improvements and new facilities while protecting affordability for our residents?

Commissioner Tijerina said her first question is have they managed a situation where enforcement action escalated into litigation or negative public opinion? How did they handle it and what did they learn? Her second question is to describe a time when honesty may have been uncomfortable but necessary.

Mr. Green commended the Commission regarding their questions.

Commissioner Tijerina asked if she could have some time to read through the background and media check materials collected on the candidates.

Interim City Manager Palmer summarized the background and media check materials.

The Commission reviewed the materials.

2. JEFF BROWN, 6:00 P.M.

Mr. Green introduced Jeff Brown.

Jeff Brown introduced himself.

The City Commission introduced themselves.

Mayor Cam asked Mr. Brown why he applied for this position.

Mr. Brown said the only three city manager jobs he would ever consider were the City of Winter Haven, because he grew up there, the City of Auburndale, and the City of Cincinnati, since he was born there. He said he never expected to have the opportunity to apply for any of them. He said that the City of Auburndale represents a chance for him to return to Polk County, to a place he knows, loves, and visits regularly. He said it is the city where he began his career more than thirty years ago. He stated that the things he learned in Auburndale have stayed with him throughout his career. He said he has sent teams of employees to Auburndale to see how things are done "the Auburndale way" to understand the standard he expects. He said that Auburndale has always represented excellence in the services it provides. He said he wants to return and finish his career in Auburndale.

Vice Mayor Helms asked if he were selected as a city manager here, what would his philosophy and strategy be for managing development and balancing economic and commercial opportunities versus residential – and to provide examples.

Mr. Brown said that the challenges in Auburndale are similar to those faced by other cities across the state. He said that communities want to have growth, but they also want to maintain their character. He stated that from the City's perspective, it is important to review the land development codes to see whether what is being produced matches the City's vision. If it does not, he said the direction needs to go back to staff to indicate that the results are not what the city wants and to determine how to adjust the codes. He said that this often involves identifying comparable places and asking staff to research other cities to see what they have in their codes that produces the kind of development the community wants. He added that community input is equally important, noting that if the community prefers a particular type of development, the question becomes how to achieve it. He stated that when he was the city clerk, the City discussed developing certain standards, and he recalled traveling across Central Florida to take pictures of developments to provide to Interim City Manager Palmer and Community Development Director Julie Womble as examples of what different standards produced. He said he did something similar in Haines City to a small extent, though not as much as he or staff would have preferred. He said the goal was to protect green spaces that needed protection while still allowing flexibility for developers, and to find a balance between what the city wants and what is needed.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Brown to describe a time when he identified structural or operational gaps in an organization he led, what steps he took to assess and implement changes such as reallocating resources, reorganizing teams, or adjusting staffing levels. And how did he manage the impact on employee morale and organizational performance?

Mr. Brown stated that about a year after he arrived in Daytona Beach, he inherited an employee who managed all *Bike Week* and *Biketoberfest* applications from property owners. He said the applications had previously gone either to the Chamber of Commerce or the Convention and Visitors Bureau, depending on the event. After going through one cycle of that process, he said he sat down with the employee and explained that the system needed improvement because it was disorganized and entirely paper-based. He said they needed to determine whether the process could be moved to a digital format to make it easier. He said that their goal was to review applications as they came in, rather than receiving a large stack of paperwork from an association and having to review 50 property owners' applications within about three weeks. He said they worked with the IT department and created an online application that allows property owners to submit their information in about 30 minutes during their first submission and upload required documents, depending on whether they are the owner or leasing the

property. He said the paperwork is reviewed within three days. If complete, it is sent to the rest of the review team, including fire, transportation, police, and public works. He said comments from those departments are then sent back through the system and immediately emailed to the applicant. He stated that the previous system required circulating paper or making copies to send to various departments, which took significantly longer. Mr. Brown said the new system cut the review time in half. He stated that with some ordinance changes, he could likely reduce the timeline by an additional 45 days. He added that the digital process is easier for applicants and staff and has made the entire system smoother. He said that when applicants return the next year, their submission time is reduced to about five minutes because the system saves their prior information. He stated that they only need to upload a few updated documents, pay the fee, and they are finished. He said this replaced the previous process in which applicants had to fill out paper forms twice a year for every event, and now the process takes under five minutes.

Commissioner Levy asked for Mr. Brown's vision for the city's next five to 10 years and how would he ensure that new development, whether it be residential, commercial, district-related, enhances rather than erodes our quality of life?

Mr. Brown said that in his view of the next five to ten years, the City should be able to look back and see that it is fiscally stable and has infrastructure in place to accommodate growth. He said the neighborhoods that will hopefully develop should be strong and integrated within the community. He stated that industrial development should also be part of the community, not simply by placing a facility in the city but by being engaged, such as sponsoring a baseball team or hosting events like a father-daughter dance at the event center. He said businesses should be involved, not just paying taxes. He said that when considering downtown development, the question is how new development integrates with the existing building pattern. He noted that the area on the other side of the park is available for development, and whatever is built there should match the character of the area. He said the goal is not to allow a generic block building that could be found in any strip center, but to determine what standards should be in place to ensure new development fits the core of downtown. He said that the city should avoid proposals that do not fit, such as a ten-story office building downtown, and instead consider something more compatible, such as three stories, with possible flexibility in layout if more space is needed. Mr. Brown said these are the types of issues that the city manager and staff should identify and communicate to the commission, explaining what is needed to make the city's vision achievable.

Commissioner Tijerina asked have you ever managed a situation where enforcement action escalated into litigation or negative public opinion? How did you handle it and what did you learn?

Mr. Brown asked for clarification regarding her question.

Commissioner Tijerina provided clarification.

Mr. Brown said that in a city he had previously worked there was an employee in the code enforcement office who held viewpoints that were not consistent with the organization's values regarding race and other matters. He stated that after an investigation, it was determined that the allegations were true, and the employee was terminated. He noted that the employee went through the process, and in Panama City the civil service board could review all terminations in a setting that is very similar to a court proceeding. He said the employee appealed to the civil service board with an attorney who is known for being very aggressive. He stated the city presented the facts that he could not have an employee who expressed those views or used that language serving as a code enforcement officer involving police powers in the community, because it would have exposed the city to further litigation, even in cases where there may have been legitimate code enforcement violations. He said that he did not believe it would benefit the city to keep the employee on staff. The civil service board upheld the termination. He said the employee attempted to sue the city, but the case was dismissed by a court in Tallahassee, though he could not recall which district it was.

Mayor Cam asked now that you are a finalist, if you did get offered the position of City Manager, what would your first 100 days look like? What are your goals and what would you hope to achieve?

Mr. Brown said that during the first hundred days, he would meet individually with each commissioner to begin building trust and establishing a working relationship. He said this would help both sides understand what they expect and what they want. He stated that he would then meet with all department heads, review their budgets, and discuss his expectations as he enters the organization. He said he would also meet with community stakeholders to learn what they envision for the city and ensure that all groups are aligned as much as possible. He noted that complete alignment is unlikely, but the goal is to bring everyone as close together as possible. He said he would then meet with all staff. He stated that if that required coming in at midnight to meet briefly with a police officer, he would do it, because leaders must go to their staff rather than expect staff to come to them. Mr. Brown said the next step would be to review ongoing capital projects, determine where each project is in its timeline, and identify the next checkpoints required to keep each project moving forward. He said he hoped that within the first hundred days, or approximately ninety to one hundred days, he would be able to work somewhat seamlessly. He acknowledged that some things would come up that would take time to learn, but based on his knowledge of the community and staff, he believed that timeframe would be sufficient.

Vice Mayor Helms asked Mr. Brown to talk about an infrastructure project he worked on of similar scope and scale as that of the City of Auburndale.

Mr. Brown said that in Frostproof, which had a much smaller budget, the city had to build a new wastewater treatment plant because the existing plant used antiquated technology. He said the Florida Department of Environmental Protection told the city it would not issue another operating permit. He stated that half the city was torn up while installing gravity and force main lines. He said he would not repeat that approach because it was a lesson learned and he would not tear up half of a town at once to install lines for a new plant. He said that in Panama City, the issue was different. The wastewater treatment plant was located entirely within an urbanized area, so the city had to build a new plant essentially within the same footprint. He said the city purchased a few adjacent homes and paid for relocation for those residents. He stated that the process involved building one component, tearing down another, and continuing around the property, beginning with the headworks. He said it was a long project that required at least weekly meetings. Back in the early days, lines were put in without putting them on a map. He said it is easier now with digitized systems. He added that if the city does not have digitized plans for a wastewater treatment plant, it should not attempt to build a new one on the same footprint as the old one. He said the Panama City project cost about 45 million dollars by the time it was completed, and that it occurred around 2011 or 2012. He stated that when he arrived in Haines City, there were also issues with effluent disposal sites, which he said he understood is also an issue in Auburndale that the Utilities Department is working on. He said the city had found a solution shortly before he left. He added that the city was also in the engineering and design phase for a new wastewater treatment plant at that time.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Brown how would he leverage emerging technologies and communication platforms to inform and engage new citizens effectively? Additionally, what other innovative approaches to community engagement would he pursue to help newcomers feel integrated in the fabric of the city and preserve its welcoming small-town identity?

Mr. Brown answered that cities must stay close to the leading edge of technology to remain competitive, though not necessarily on the costly cutting edge. He emphasized the importance of using all available social media platforms and providing a steady stream of quality content as part of public education and outreach. He described examples such as brief informational videos from the mayor or department directors on government functions or ongoing projects. He also referenced a "5:15 report" system he previously implemented, where department staff provide short, bullet-point updates that take 15 minutes to write and five minutes to read. These reports highlight major activities, challenges, and upcoming work while filtering out minor operational

details. Mr. Brown explained that he would consolidate these reports and forward them to the city manager, who could then share updates with elected officials and the community. He noted that this approach was expanded in Daytona Beach, where all departments now submit such updates, allowing the public and commission to easily track project status and city activities.

Commissioner Tijerina asked outside of the website, how would he disseminate that to the community?

Mr. Brown answered we actually have an email mailing list that you sign up for. Citizens can either opt in or opt out of a lot of different things. If they want boiling water notices, they can get those. Emergency management notices? They can be part of that. There is a whole laundry list that we have on our website for citizens to sign up on the email server. And one of them is the City Manager's update.

Commissioner Levy asked how would he approach the next annual budget and long term financial planning to support our quality services, our parks and recreation improvements, our new facilities, while protecting that affordability for our residents?

Mr. Brown explained that in preparing budgets, something he has done for more than 30 years, he focuses first on Commission priorities and the core needs of the organization. He emphasized distinguishing between needs and wants. Over time, he has worked with department heads to evaluate requests accordingly: if something is a true operational need, such as police needing new equipment, it is prioritized. Wants, however, are rarely funded. He described his approach to funding utility projects. He stated that staff should evaluate all available funding sources, including rate revenue, bonding, State Revolving Fund loans, and other external programs. For projects tied to economic development, federal grant programs may also cover part of the cost, reducing the burden on ratepayers. He said that utility funding must be approached from multiple angles, seeking as much outside or "free" funding as possible. He said that success often depends on understanding how to tailor grant applications, sometimes even adjusting key terms. He provided an example of working with the county to secure a grant for utility extensions to create a pad-ready site at the airport.

Commissioner Tijerina asked to describe a time when honesty may have been uncomfortable but necessary.

Mr. Brown described his final budget process in Panama City. He explained that the police chief requested twenty new officers, although data showed that only ten were actually needed. Mr. Brown said he was willing to fund ten positions along with the related capital needs such as vehicles, equipment, and other items. Funding all twenty would have created an annual budget shortfall of roughly one million dollars, and he knew there was no new property value coming online to offset that impact. When the commission reviewed the budget, they chose to include all twenty positions. Mr. Brown noted that managers often take the blame when financial problems arise, and coastal cities carry added risk due to hurricanes. He informed the commission that their actions would require the use of reserves again the following year to cover operating expenses. He explained that the situation was uncomfortable for both himself and the police chief, but he believed that honesty and transparency are essential expectations for a city manager. He stated that he never wanted to be accused of withholding information, so he always made the financial realities clear. In Panama City, the commission ultimately thanked him for the information but proceeded with their decision. Mr. Brown explained that when a city eventually faces the financial consequences of such choices, it is usually the manager who pays the price. He chose not to remain in that situation.

Mayor Cam asked if there was anything else Mr. Brown would like to share?

Mr. Brown said that he appreciated the opportunity to speak and believed he could bring valuable experience to the City of Auburndale. He said he looked forward to the possibility of working with the commission in the future. He added that he already has extensive local knowledge and professional relationships in Polk County. He explained that these connections would allow him to integrate quickly into the regional network of city managers

without a steep learning curve. Mr. Brown concluded by saying that he has brought honesty and ethical leadership to every position he has held and thanked the Commission for the opportunity.

3. JEREMY MARSHALL, 6:40 P.M.

Mr. Green introduced Jeremy Marshall.

Jeremy Marshall introduced himself.

The City Commission introduced themselves.

Mayor Cam asked Mr. Marshall why he applied for this position.

Mr. Marshall answered that he visits the area every other weekend to help his mother and stepfather, who have both recently had medical procedures. During these visits, he takes them to lunch, and they often choose Auburndale or the Winter Haven Regional Airport restaurant nearby. He stated that he is familiar with the area and that he likes it. He said that Auburndale is the size of city he is comfortable managing and the size he prefers, aside from natural growth. What most appealed to him was the stability of both the Commission and the City Manager position, which he found notable because the profession can be volatile. His research into Auburndale's stability made the position attractive to him. Mr. Marshall added that he prefers small town environments, having grown up in one, and that he is not interested in large cities. He stated that he is looking for a place to finish his career and make a long-term commitment. The City's financial stability and the stability of its leadership reinforced his interest in Auburndale.

Vice Mayor Helms asked if he were selected as a City Manager here, what would his philosophy and strategy be for managing development and balancing economic and commercial opportunities versus residential – and to provide examples.

Mr. Marshall said that Auburndale has a special charm, which was one of the reasons he applied. He explained that the city is projected to experience significant growth, and he believes it is important to manage that growth while preserving the community's character. Based on his research, he noted that residents do not want large warehouse development. He said that balancing community needs with actual growth is delicate. He noted the importance of green space and expressed strong support for parks and recreation. He discussed how a city manager must ensure the city is prepared for growth. As an example from High Springs, he said that when the sewer plant reached 65 percent capacity, the city began planning for upgrades. High Springs built a second plant that he said was about 95 percent grant funded, which doubled the system's capacity. The city is expecting about 1,700 new homes, and he explained that he needed to ensure the infrastructure could support that development before it moved forward. He also described issues with water pressure in High Springs as more residents were added to the system. After noticing lower flow rates during hydrant testing, he designed a drinking water project estimated at about 20 million dollars. The plan includes looping the water system, adding a new overhead tower to help with pressure, and constructing a new well to increase capacity. He said he secured 9.5 million dollars in initial grant funding to begin the project. Mr. Marshall noted that growth also relates to job opportunities and economic development. Drawing on his experience with a Regional Economic Development Council in New York, he said that employers often ask about schools and green space when considering a location. He said that cities must look at all elements of growth and plan responsibly and proactively so that infrastructure is not overstressed and residents' needs are met while the city continues to grow.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Marshall to describe a time when he identified structural or operational gaps in an organization he led, what steps he took to assess and implement changes such as reallocating resources, reorganizing teams, or adjusting staffing levels. And how did he manage the impact on employee morale and organizational performance?

Mr. Marshall said he conducted a full analysis of High Springs and determined that the city faced a significant budget deficit. He stated that he reviewed areas for possible cuts, starting with the decision to eliminate an assistant city manager position that was vacant. He said the city was too small for that role and that if cuts were necessary, he wanted to do it to hurt him too. He said the city also discovered it was overstaffed in the fire department and reduced staffing from five to four without changing operations. This reduction was done through attrition after identifying employees who were ready to retire and one who accepted a voluntary layoff. Mr. Marshall said the commission sets the direction, but he is a strong advocate for the staff because he believes the commission cannot be successful without them. He stated that morale was low when he arrived in High Springs, so he made efforts to be present and supportive. He said he spends time each day visiting different departments and stays aware of what employees are experiencing. He gave examples of staff dealing with serious family situations and said he ensures they have flexibility when needed. Regarding reallocations and spending, Mr. Marshall said he is very protective of taxpayer dollars and conservative in budgeting. He said that when he arrived, the city had a spending problem. For example, the fire department had a heavy rescue truck that was far larger than needed and difficult to maneuver on city streets. He said he sold that truck and used the proceeds to design a medium rescue vehicle that fit the community's needs and saved money. He also said that department directors were driving fully equipped, luxury-style trucks, which he felt did not present the right image for public service. He replaced them with standard F-150 XL models, which he said were more appropriate and still met operational needs. Staff understood the reasoning and agreed that the previous vehicles created negative public perception. He concluded by stating that he evaluates how to meet staff needs while also being a responsible steward of taxpayer funds.

Commissioner Levy asked how would he approach the next annual budget and long-term financial planning to support our quality services, our parks and recreation improvements, our new facilities, while protecting that affordability for our residents?

Mr. Marshall said he will be a resident of Auburndale and stated that he supports the residency requirement. He noted that if he were to propose raising the millage rate, it would affect him as well. He said that the city's low millage rate and low property taxes were appealing to him. He stated that his budget process begins with meeting department heads early in the year, even though the budget is not due until September. He said these early conversations help identify program needs, staffing needs, and departmental changes. He then develops a proposal for what is required to operate the city, along with items tied to legislative intent or commission direction. Mr. Marshall gave an example of a hypothetical new program and said that if the commission wanted to create something similar, his responsibility would be to work with staff to develop a plan and determine how it could be funded. He stated that although the commission might identify priorities, it is his job to figure out the funding and communicate that information to the commission and staff. He said he meets with staff throughout the year to review budget performance, monitor spending, and identify trends. He stated that transparency is one of the most important qualities he brings to the position. According to him, transparency can create both good and difficult conversations, but it ensures that when the commission receives a budget for approval, they understand what is in it and how it aligns with their intent. He said his goal is to ensure the needs of the staff and the city are met while proactively planning for future needs.

Commissioner Tijerina asked Mr. Marshall if he has managed a situation where he enforced or executed an action or project, that escalated into litigation or unpopular public opinion. How did he handle it, and what did he learn? She said she reworded her original question due to the last applicant needing clarification on what she was asking.

Mr. Marshall said he had many examples to choose from and described a situation involving his public works director. He stated that during his first week on the job, the director resigned three times. According to Mr. Marshall, the director wanted to be the city manager but had not applied for the position and was upset that he

had not been asked to take over. On the third resignation, Mr. Marshall accepted it. He said the director had low morale and little respect from his staff. He stated that some supporters of the director were upset and demanded investigations, but he could not release information because it was a personnel matter that eventually went into litigation. The director sued for wrongful termination, even though he had resigned. Mr. Marshall said that during depositions he provided the resignation letter and that the director had voluntarily withdrawn. He noted that the public initially believed the new city manager had removed the public works director during the first week, which created a negative perception. Once the facts became known, he said public concerns eased. Mr. Marshall stated that he manages day-to-day operations but is not an attorney. He said he researches statutes and interprets them, and when he is unsure, his first call is to the city attorney. He stated that even if he disagrees with the attorney's interpretation, he follows her guidance because that is her responsibility. He added that he does not consider himself more knowledgeable than his department heads in their respective fields. He said he does not tell the police chief how to run the department but provides standards, accountability, and guidelines, and applies the same approach to the legal department.

Mayor Cam asked now that you are a finalist, if you did get offered the position of City Manager, what would your first 100 days look like? What are your goals and what would you hope to achieve?

Mr. Marshall stated that the first thing he would do is meet one-on-one with each commissioner. He said his communication with the commission would be frequent and that commissioners would hear from him at least once every two weeks. If he had not heard from a commissioner within that time, he said he would contact them before each meeting to confirm they had reviewed the agenda and to ask whether they needed additional information. He stated that he holds one-on-one meetings every two weeks and adjusts to the commissioners' schedules. He said he is available at all hours and also meets regularly with staff. He said he conducts department head meetings to ensure they understand commission expectations and public needs. He also meets with his executive team to confirm that the organization is prepared and aligned with city priorities. He stated that these practices help build trust. Regarding public engagement, Mr. Marshall said he would be active and visible during his first hundred days. He said he attends events when invited and enjoys public speaking. He stated that he blocks off an hour each day on his calendar for citizens who request to speak with the city manager. If the hour is not filled, he uses the time to visit staff. Mr. Marshall said that during his first hundred days he would review the budget, the capital improvement plan, and the city charter, and would learn how Auburndale operates. He stated that he would not arrive with the intention of changing things quickly and that he does not operate by assuming that previous experience elsewhere automatically applies. He said he does not plan to change anything in the first six months and wants to continue the positive direction he has heard about, working with both staff and the commission.

Vice Mayor Helms asked Mr. Marshall to talk about an infrastructure project he worked on of similar scope and scale as that of the City of Auburndale.

Mr. Marshall said that on his first day in High Springs, the sewer project had just begun. He stated that he regularly met with the engineers and the construction team to ensure the project was progressing. He said there were three main concerns he focused on for infrastructure projects: whether the project was on budget, on time, and built to the required standard. He noted that government projects sometimes require flexibility on timelines due to supply delays, but he did not allow the budget to change. He also stated that sewer projects must meet DEP and EPA regulations. For their system, nitrogen levels needed to be reduced to below 3. He said they had been at 12 before the project and were currently operating at 1.5, meeting the standard and staying within the budget, even though the project took longer. He said his general approach to projects is to identify the need, work with his team to find a solution, and then seek funding. He stated that the drinking water project in High Springs was an example of this process. He said he enjoys writing grants and views them as a puzzle, with the goal of matching the funding source to the project's needs. He stated that his objective is to secure outside funding whenever

possible. Regarding the drinking water project, he said the issue was declining water pressure, especially at fire hydrants. The solution was to loop the water system. He said the project required determining the cost and identifying who would pay for it. In his first round of funding, he said he secured 9.5 million dollars, which was about half of the needed amount, and he has three years to obtain the remaining funds.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Marshall how would he leverage emerging technologies and communication platforms to inform and engage new citizens effectively? Additionally, what other innovative approaches to community engagement would he pursue to help newcomers feel integrated in the fabric of the city and preserve its welcoming small-town identity?

Mr. Marshall said that getting information to the public requires strong communication methods. He stated that in emergencies, the city should have a system that can send alerts, such as text messages, to notify residents about road closures or incidents. He said he would work with the communications manager to review the city's communication plan and determine how to deliver both real-time information and other important updates. He noted that not everyone uses Facebook, but social media can still be a useful tool. He gave an example from High Springs, where some commissioners discussed cutting the fire department as part of budget discussions. He said that only a small number of residents typically attended meetings, but he believed the issue affected the whole community. Although he does not like being on video, he recorded a public service announcement with the fire department explaining what was being discussed and encouraging residents to attend the next meeting if they cared about the issue. He stated that the community responded in large numbers, and the city had to move the meeting to the community center. Mr. Marshall said he also holds budget workshops earlier in the process, before the required statutory workshops. He said this helps commissioners understand what is being proposed and also helps educate the public so they can provide input or raise concerns. He described helping start "Leadership Ontario," a citizens academy in Ontario County. He said participants met weekly or every other week for ten sessions, during which city staff explained their departments. Examples included police presentations, reviewing call loads, and demonstrating equipment. He said the program also covered finance and concluded with information about advisory boards, such as planning and zoning boards. He stated that the program helped increase applications for board vacancies. Mr. Marshall said he looks for creative ways to increase community engagement. He mentioned a youth council project in which he participated in a dunk booth fundraiser while wearing a tutu to help raise scholarship money. He stated that he is willing to do what is necessary to get information to the public.

Commissioner Levy asked for Mr. Marshall's vision for the city's next five to 10 years and how would he ensure that new development, whether it be residential, commercial, district-related, enhances rather than erodes our quality of life?

Mr. Marshall said that during his first hundred days he would review the city's comprehensive plan more thoroughly. He stated that the comprehensive plan outlines how the city intends to grow and what it will look like in the future. He noted that in High Springs, once the comprehensive plan was updated, state law required an update to the land development code. He said the city conducted a complete rewrite because the existing code no longer matched the plan. He stated that he would review Auburndale's plan to understand how growth is outlined, what regulations are included, and how zoning protects the city's character. He said zoning is important because it prevents incompatible land uses, such as a warehouse in the middle of a residential area. He said he would work with the community, the commission, and boards such as the planning and zoning boards to ensure they understand the plan and how to meet its goals. Mr. Marshall said comprehensive plans should be updated every five years. He stated that citizen input is required in some cases and that even if it were not required, he would still seek it. He said residents may want fewer houses, fewer warehouses, or more green space, and the city must look at how those preferences can be addressed. He said Auburndale has considerable green space and that preserving it is important. He stated that during his time on an economic development council,

he learned that employers often ask about parks and recreation because they want amenities for employees. He said the city must balance growth with maintaining its character. He stated that current residents should not bear the cost of incoming growth. He said infrastructure expansions, such as sewer plant upgrades, should be funded through impact fees paid by new development. He stated that growth should pay for itself. He added that while he has family in the area, he does not want current residents, including his own mother, to pay for facilities needed for future newcomers. He said new residents contribute through increased tax value and impact fees.

Commissioner Tijerina asked to describe a time when honesty may have been uncomfortable but necessary.

Mr. Marshall said that at his last budget workshop, the city faced a significant budget deficit that required substantial action. He stated that previous workshops had been brief and mostly routine, but the city was moving in the wrong direction by depleting reserves and taking on recurring costs it could not sustain. He said he presented the commission with three options: eliminating the fire department, reducing staffing, or raising the millage rate. He said he left the decision to the commission because it was a major issue that would affect city services. He stated that this was the situation that led him to create a public service announcement regarding the potential fire department cuts, which resulted in a large turnout from the community. He said he was transparent about the budget, even though it created uncomfortable conversations. He stated that transparency is important to him, and that his military background taught him not to rely on comfort. He said he will not hide information from the commission or the public, because they cannot solve problems they do not know about. Mr. Marshall described another situation involving an \$890,000 sewer bill related to work completed three years earlier. He said the previous finance director had not encumbered the funds, and the bill appeared unexpectedly. He stated that although he could have paid it using contingency funds without anyone knowing, he believed that would have been wrong. Instead, he met with his department heads to determine what had happened and how to prevent similar issues, and then brought the matter to the commission. He said both the commission and the citizens were upset, but they understood the process once it was explained.

Commissioner Tijerina asked how did the commission respond to being put in the hot seat? Where did they land?

Mr. Marshall said the situation became even more challenging because the issue was discovered two days before a contested election. He stated that before releasing information to the public, he ensured he had complete and accurate details. He said he asked the vendor for additional time so he could research the matter and gather all the facts. He stated that his decision-making process is based on three criteria. First, whether the action is legal, moral, and ethical. If it does not meet those standards, the decision is no. Second, whether the action benefits the city internally or externally. Third, whether he would likely have the support of at least three commissioners based on the information available at the time. He said that if a decision does not need to be made immediately, he gathers as much data as possible so the commission receives the same information he has. Mr. Marshall stated that if circumstances change later, he may learn that a different decision would have been better, but he makes decisions based on the data available at the time. He said the sewer bill was ultimately paid from contingency funds because the previous city manager had obligated the project. Regarding the earlier fire department discussion, he said the commission decided to raise the millage rate by a quarter mill and reduce staffing to four.

Mayor Cam asked if there was anything else Mr. Marshall would like to share?

Mr. Marshall said he wanted the commission to understand that he would be fully invested in the community. He stated that he would be more than a city manager and would also be an active citizen. He noted that city managers often stay only two to three years, but that is not what he is seeking. He said he wants to live in Auburndale, buy a house, and care for his parents. He stated that his wife is his best friend and described her as very sweet. He said his children and future grandchildren would also live in the area. He stated that he is looking

for a long-term commitment and that Auburndale is the perfect city for him. He said the city's size, stability, and finances all appeal to him. He concluded by stating that he would like to come to Auburndale and finish his career.

4. BEN ZISKAL, 7:20 P.M.

Mr. Green introduced Ben Ziskal.

Ben Ziskal introduced himself.

The City Commission introduced themselves.

Mayor Cam asked Mr. Ziskal why he applied for this position.

Mr. Ziskal said that his interest in becoming a city manager is the culmination of his childhood, education, and professional career. He stated that he has aimed for the city manager's office since beginning his career as a professional planner. He noted that while he has spent the past four years with the county, the seventeen years before that were spent in city planning roles, including city planner, economic development director, development director, and CRA specialist. He said he has been seeking a place where he could move into the city manager role and raise his children in the same community, and that this opportunity fits that goal. He stated that he has lived in the city for four years and wants his children to grow up here and attend high school here. He said his experience in city planning and CRA work aligns with what the city is currently working through. He noted that the city recently updated its CRA plan and is in the process of updating its comprehensive plan, with the goal of continuing the vision established since the CRA was created thirty years ago and projecting the next thirty years. Mr. Ziskal said that his experience in Margate and Pinellas Park included creating downtown city centers and developing master plans with design guidelines. He stated that these plans helped create downtown areas that attracted residents and businesses and became activity centers for jobs as well as evening and weekend family activities. He said this experience aligns with the city's current goals, particularly with what is budgeted in the next biennial budget and the five-year capital improvement plan related to downtown development. He stated that this work aims to create a special place for the community, and he has the experience to support that effort. He said this opportunity combines his professional background, professional goals, and the hometown values he wants for his children.

Vice Mayor Helms asked if he were selected as a City Manager here, what would his philosophy and strategy be for managing development and balancing economic and commercial opportunities versus residential?

Mr. Ziskal said this is directly related to his profession. He stated that as the Land Development Director for Polk County, he regularly hears residents' concerns about growth. He noted that Polk County, like the City of Auburndale, is updating its comprehensive plan. To begin that process, he said the County worked with Polk Vision and conducted a countywide survey that included residents of all backgrounds. He stated that the top two concerns identified across the county were growth management and infrastructure. He stated that Polk County is large, with 2,007 square miles and 17 municipalities, and that the population is approaching one million. He said areas that once felt rural have become more urban, and some longtime residents are uncomfortable with that shift. He noted that property rights and state statutes limit how governments can regulate development, and balancing the needs of existing residents, future residents, infrastructure, and property rights is a continuing challenge. Mr. Ziskal said that much of the remaining developable land in the County is environmentally sensitive, which adds another layer of complexity. He stated that balancing the built environment with the natural environment is essential. He said he addresses these issues by being a public-facing official and staying engaged with the community. He noted that he is frequently at ball fields, basketball courts, church, and school events, and residents regularly share concerns with him because of his role. He stated that balancing growth also involves determining what types of development the community wants and identifying

strategies to attract that investment. He said economic development requires proactive efforts, not simply waiting for businesses to approach the city. He noted that as a certified economic developer, he has worked on business attraction and marketing campaigns. He said that without guidelines and incentives in place, cities become reactionary and may have to accept whatever development arrives. He stated that taking a proactive approach helps achieve better outcomes.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Ziskal to describe a time when he identified structural or operational gaps in an organization he led, what steps he took to assess and implement changes such as reallocating resources, reorganizing teams, or adjusting staffing levels. And how did he manage the impact on employee morale and organizational performance?

Mr. Ziskal said that although he has not had to lay off employees in his land development work in Florida, he has had to reallocate resources. He stated that staffing levels and workload in land development and building departments closely follow the building market. During the Great Recession, he said permits declined sharply and the building department had very little activity. He stated that the city evaluated staffing levels and internal processes, and instead of laying off employees, they ended contracts with some private providers to retain existing staff. He said they also avoided filling vacancies and used the slowdown as an opportunity to invest in technology. He stated that while he was in the City of Margate, they updated software, moved toward digital systems, implemented online permitting, and introduced online plan review. Mr. Ziskal said these changes positioned the department to handle increased demand when the market recovered without requiring a significant increase in staffing. He said that although activity slowed, it created an opportunity to improve technology and efficiency, allowing reduced staff to manage responsibilities through electronic processing.

Commissioner Levy asked for Mr. Ziskal's vision for the city's next five to 10 years and how would he ensure that new development, whether it be residential, commercial, district-related, enhances rather than erodes our quality of life?

Mr. Ziskal said the downtown city center has significant opportunities. He stated that the city has already made major investments in the park and plans to invest in the splash pad and tennis facility. He said these public amenities contribute to the community's character. He added that several private properties also present opportunities that could help strengthen the historic downtown and enhance the sense of community. He stated that with the construction of the new civic center, there are plans to repurpose or possibly demolish the old civic center to activate that side of the park. He also noted opportunities involving the abandoned hotel and the vacant site where Ike's Hot Dogs once operated. He said that leveraging CRA funds to incentivize redevelopment of these private properties is a key step in activating the downtown area. Mr. Ziskal stated that another part of the CRA plan, the US 92 corridor, has not received as much attention. He said some development and redevelopment is happening there, but the area has a very different feel from the historic downtown. He stated that US 92 feels like a highway area, while downtown has a distinct sense of place. He said that bridging these two areas requires economic development strategies that create synergy between them so residents do not experience them as separate or disconnected. He said that the downtown area is a unique asset, noting that there are few places like it in Polk County or in the state. He stated that opportunities on the private side could help strengthen the community's identity and contribute to the sense of place the city wants to create.

Commissioner Tijerina asked Mr. Ziskal if he has managed a situation where he enforced or executed an action or project, that escalated into litigation or unpopular public opinion. How did he handle it, and what did he learn?

Mr. Ziskal said he had two examples to share, one that he was involved in and another that he initiated, both involving criminal activity in South Florida. He stated that in the first example, a city commissioner who also served on the CRA board was a bar owner renting space in a shopping center. According to Mr. Ziskal, the

commissioner received an envelope of cash in exchange for helping secure votes for a façade grant for the landlord. He said that during his time in that city, it was uncommon for him to meet directly with commissioners, but in this case he was called into the commissioner's office along with the property owner. He stated that he was asked several questions about the variance and grant processes, including leading questions about bypassing or altering steps. He said he stayed firm in following the established process. He later learned that the landlord was an FBI informant and was wearing a wire during the meeting. He said that the meeting and the cash envelope led to the commissioner's arrest and charges, and he and other city staff testified in court. The commissioner was ultimately sentenced to ten years in jail. Mr. Ziskal said he uses this example to teach staff the importance of doing the right thing and not bending processes when it would break the law. He said the second example also resulted in jail time. While overseeing state and federal housing grants in the city of Margate, he began receiving complaints that rehabilitation work on homes was being done poorly. He stated that although the grants manager repeatedly defended the contractors, her behavior became erratic, and the volume of complaints indicated something was wrong. He reviewed bid documents and saw that three contractors were being used almost exclusively, with bids rotating so that each received work. Mr. Ziskal said he brought this to the city manager and contacted the local police department. An audit and investigation found that the grants manager was tampering with bids and awarding work to contractors in exchange for work done on her own home. He stated that the investigation resulted in her arrest and a one-year jail sentence, and the contractors involved were prevented from doing business with the city again. He said that although the situation generated negative publicity, reporting it was the right thing to do.

Mayor Cam asked now that you are a finalist, if you did get offered the position of City Manager, what would your first 100 days look like? What are your goals and what would you hope to achieve?

Mr. Ziskal said that his recent work at the county level gives him familiarity with many organizations operating in the region. He stated that his first 100 days would focus on settling into city operations and meeting the individuals involved in city business, including the Chamber of Commerce, city staff, and business partners he may not know from his county role. He also said he would reconnect with regional partners such as the CFDC, Polk Vision, and the school board to discuss their plans in the community and how to continue working together. He stated that, depending on the start date, his first 100 days would likely fall during budget season. He said that if he began in April, the first 100 days would cover April, May, and June, which aligns with the period when the city begins budget discussions. He said he would work with the commission to prepare the budget for adoption. Mr. Ziskal also stated that one of the most important tasks would be meeting with each commissioner individually to understand their goals. He said each commissioner has different reasons for serving and different objectives for the city. He noted that his role as city manager would be to collaborate and help align those visions. He said he would schedule time with each commissioner to discuss their one-year, three-year, and five-year priorities so he could help develop a strategic plan for the commission and staff to move forward together.

Vice Mayor Helms asked Mr. Ziskal to talk about an infrastructure project he worked on of similar scope and scale as that of the City of Auburndale.

Mr. Ziskal said he would reference his work in the City of Margate and its CRA. He stated that Margate, founded in 1955, was originally an agricultural community west of Fort Lauderdale and Pompano Beach. He explained that the city developed linearly along State Road 7 and did not have a defined downtown. He noted that if someone were asked to meet "downtown," they would not know where that was. He stated that the city hall sits at State Road 7 and Margate Boulevard, an area shaped by an S-curve in the road. As part of creating a city center, he said the city completed significant property acquisition and land assemblage. Over several years, he stated that they acquired 36 contiguous acres at the intersection. This involved purchasing properties one at a time, ultimately totaling between 50 and 60 million dollars. Mr. Ziskal said that after assembling the land, the city worked with a consultant to issue an RFP for a master developer to build a mixed-use downtown. He stated that

it took three to four years to prepare the master plan, issue the RFP, select a developer, and gain commission approval. He said the effort transformed an area made up of multiple property owners, substandard shopping centers, and an aging flea market and drive-in theater into land owned by the CRA and positioned for redevelopment. He stated that the scale, cost, and timeframe required a long-term vision to bring the project together.

Commissioner Avery asked Mr. Ziskal how would he leverage emerging technologies and communication platforms to inform and engage new citizens effectively? Additionally, what other innovative approaches to community engagement would he pursue to help newcomers feel integrated in the fabric of the city and preserve its welcoming small-town identity?

Mr. Ziskal said that technology is changing faster than ever and that people expect information more quickly. He stated that while many functions can now be done instantly from a phone, government is often not as transparent or readily accessible. He said that having a robust website that helps residents understand available services and provides proactive updates about city activities is important for building trust. He stated that online presence is also critical for economic development. He said that site selectors complete most of their research before visiting a location, and they look closely at a city's web presence, media coverage, and information available online. He stated that presenting the city in a positive and accurate way helps position it for business attraction. Mr. Ziskal said that newcomers benefit from a strong relationship between the city and the Chamber of Commerce. He noted that while people often search online for restaurants or services, the Chamber still plays an important role as a community resource and liaison. He stated that some people may not realize the Chamber still exists, and partnering with it remains valuable. He said that community engagement also requires being present in person. As a land development director and former economic and planning director, he stated that he frequently speaks at homeowners association meetings, Chamber of Commerce events, Realtor groups, environmental groups, and other community gatherings. During the county's comprehensive plan update, he said he spoke to such groups to explain the process and gather input. He explained that the county also created a website for the comprehensive plan project, which included an online survey and an open-ended idea wall for residents to share thoughts on growth and infrastructure. He stated that every planning staff member included a link to the website in their email signatures for a year. Mr. Ziskal said that leveraging technology and not being afraid of it is essential. He stated that pushing information directly to residents through online platforms allows the city to reach people where they are, rather than relying on them to come to city hall for information.

Commissioner Levy asked how would he approach the next annual budget and long-term financial planning to support our quality services, our parks and recreation improvements, our new facilities, while protecting that affordability for our residents?

Mr. Ziskal said that economic development involves public investment in services and encouraging private investment that increases tax revenue. He stated that no one in the county would claim to have better parks and recreation facilities than Auburndale. He said that, through his experience attending youth sports with his children, he believes the city's facilities are among the best and serve as a crown jewel for Polk County. He noted that the city attracts significant tourism through Rusmatt baseball events and the soccer complex at Lake Myrtle, which he said are unmatched in central Florida. He stated that high school soccer championships, college baseball teams, and international archery competitions have all brought visitors to Auburndale. He said that the city's investment in public facilities has created a strong reputation that is now attracting private investment. He mentioned that sports tourism and marketing representatives are interested in having a hotel in Auburndale because visitors currently stay in other nearby cities. He stated that recent housing growth also contributes to business interest. He said that conversations with the CFDC show increased interest in advanced manufacturing jobs and that one of Auburndale's advantages is its rail-served industrial land. He gave an example from a Leadership Polk visit, where a local brewery described making Venezuelan beer using hops shipped from Canada

by rail. He said this demonstrates international trade occurring within the city. Mr. Ziskal stated that recognizing and leveraging these assets, and working with the CFDC to highlight them, is an effective way to increase private investment. He said that the city commission and prior commissions have invested heavily in community assets, making the city what it is today. He added that continuing those investments while attracting private development can help offset costs. He noted that although parks and recreation facilities require substantial upkeep and do not generate equivalent tax revenue, their economic development impact is unmatched in the county.

Commissioner Levy asked how does he handle the actual process of laying out a budget?

Mr. Ziskal said the process would begin with developing a strategic plan that identifies the Commission's individual and collective goals. He stated that the City already has long range planning documents, noting that the Comprehensive Plan outlines a 25-year vision and the CRA Plan extends to 2052. He said that having a long-range strategic plan and breaking it into a five-year Capital Improvement Plan helps determine what short-term steps are needed to reach long-term goals. He added that his experience as both a planner and a logistics planner in the military has shaped his approach to organizing steps and moving from one point to another. He stated that state statute requires a Comprehensive Plan so that the City does not create annual budgets without considering long-term direction. He said that the one or two-year budget must align with the five-year CIP, which in turn supports the community's long-range plan. He said that using the Comprehensive Plan and the CRA Plan as a roadmap provides guidance on what the City should invest in and how to reach its goals.

Commissioner Tijerina asked to describe a time when honesty may have been uncomfortable but necessary.

Mr. Ziskal said that public trust in this position depends not only on conduct, but also on transparency with the commission and staff. He was asked to describe a time when honesty may have been uncomfortable but necessary. He said that situations like that occur every time he deals with a land development project. He stated that land development projects are one of the easiest ways to fill up the chamber, aside from raising taxes, because a controversial project will draw a large crowd. He said he has had many frank conversations with different sides of an argument, and that transparency, an open door, and a collaborative personality and approach are essential to succeeding in urban planning and land development. He said that being part of a youth sports organization, being a father, being a veteran, and being the Land Development Director for Polk County all create an image he must uphold. He stated that when he is out in the community, he knows he represents the United States Air Force every time he leaves his house. He said that if someone knows he is a veteran, his conduct reflects either a good veteran or a bad veteran. He said that how he acts at home shapes how his children believe a father should act. He added that he is a coach and cannot go to Publix without someone calling him Coach Ben, and that his conduct on the field, in a restaurant, or at Publix is always seen by the youth in the community. He said he does not take being a veteran, a coach, or a public official lightly. He stated that the reputation of a land development director or a city manager is based on conduct. He also said that being open to the public for meetings and not hiding in an office is essential to the position. Building rapport with the community, including business leaders, residents, and civic groups, and being accessible, willing to talk, willing to meet, and being present in public settings is exactly what a city manager needs to do. He said he is well versed in that and very comfortable with it.

Commissioner Tijerina asked Mr. Ziskal to give one specific situation where he actually addressed it and how he had to handle that one specific controversial case.

Mr. Ziskal said that a recent case handled by Auburndale provided a clear example. He said that the county had approved a land use change at the corner of Berkeley and Braddock. As a county official, he has a directive from his board and a vision based on what that board established. He stated that the city commission and staff opposed the change. As a resident, he also received feedback from his community about their views on the issue.

He said he was able to have frank conversations about it. He said he had a frank conversation with one of the commissioners on the dais, discussing how the county viewed the project, understanding the city's opposition, and explaining the county's position and why the county was recommending it. He stated that when he went into the chambers, county staff presented the county position. He said he knew that position was not favorable among residents or within the city where he lives, but that by separating his roles as a resident and as a county official, he was able to have an honest conversation and present the information with integrity.

Mayor Cam asked if there was anything else Mr. Ziskal would like to share?

Mr. Ziskal said this position is his dream job. He said he chose to live in the City of Auburndale and wants to live in a city where he can serve as the city manager of a place he loves. He said he hopes his children will one day remain in Auburndale and be Auburndale Bloodhounds. He added that he hopes his daughter will one day be playing in the regional semifinals for soccer, which is going on now, and said he hopes they are winning. He stated that his career goal has been to reach this office in a city he loves and where he wants to raise his children. He said his experience in the State of Florida, including his work as an economic developer and city planner in high growth areas, has prepared him for this role. He noted that Margate is in Broward County and Pinellas Park is in Pinellas County, and that he has worked in high growth, high stress environments throughout his career. He said he has focused on community redevelopment during his entire career. He stated that he has served his country and deployed to the desert, adding that he believes stress cannot get more significant than that. He said he has succeeded in those missions because he was entrusted to work on behalf of the military, and the missions were successful. He said he has also been entrusted by youth and their parents. He stated that he has coached 25 youth sports teams, 23 of which were in the City of Auburndale. He said parents entrusted him to teach their children sports, teach them right from wrong, encourage them to be competitive, and also ensure they have fun, and that he has succeeded at that. He said many parents have asked to be on his team again. He said this is the job he wants and asked the commission to trust him to lead the city into the future.

Former City Manager Bobby Green said this concludes the interviews.

Motion by Vice Mayor Helms, seconded by Commissioner Avery, to recess for five minutes. Upon vote, all ayes.

RECESS – 8:03 P.M.

RECONVENED – 8:13 P.M.

5. DISCUSS AND CONSIDER FINALIST FOR THE CITY MANAGER POSITION

Mr. Green outlined the City Manager recruitment process thus far. He said now would be the time for citizen comment.

Mayor Cam asked if there was public comment.

Dorothea Taylor Bogert, 129 Newbern Circle, said she wanted to say thank you. As a citizen and former commissioner, she does not envy the Commission's position. But she wanted to say thank you for being so diligent in the process, for their incredibly insightful questions that they asked, and for all that the Commission has done on behalf of the citizens to make this a smooth process. She also thanked Mr. Green for leading this. She said she has told many that we are in incredible hands with this new Commission, so she knows they are going to find the right answer for this.

Pastor Curtis Johnson, said he echoes the former Mayor. He said he appreciates what Bobby Green does.

Mayor Cam expressed gratitude to the finalists. This is one of the most, if not the most, important decisions the City Commission will make. When we consider the position the City is in today, such as the millions of dollars we need to spend on infrastructure, he said he feels it is imperative we hire an experienced City Manager. He said

his years on the Commission has allowed him to develop an even greater appreciation for Auburndale and its unique organizational culture. He said considering this, one finalist rose to the top with their experience while meeting preferred qualifications. He said his recommendation is to offer the position of City Manager to Jeff Brown.

Vice Mayor Helms said everything that Mayor Cam said is true. He said he thinks we had three great candidates. He does not want this to come off as not being in alignment with Mr. Brown being a top candidate. He thinks he did a fantastic job. Mr. Brown's resume is impeccable. He said he said that the last time we discussed the candidates. However, he is not comfortable making an offer tonight. He thinks our initial schedule had the Commission making that decision on the 16th, which would be our next meeting. He is not saying that he does not agree with the decision, but that he would prefer to have the next five days to think about this matter. He has six pages of notes. He would like the next five days to digest those notes, review the resumes one more time, and confirm his initial thoughts again against data before he makes any decision. So it is his position that he would like to hold off on offering the position to a candidate until Monday, the 16th.

Commissioner Avery said he respects Mayor Cam's willingness to go ahead and state that he already has made a decision on this. But he is very much like Vice Mayor Helms in this matter. We had three very well-qualified candidates, in his opinion. And much like Vice Mayor Helms, he cannot count how many notes he took tonight. And for him to try to digest that in a matter of three to five minutes would not be something he is willing to take on right now. So he would move to sit tight for a little bit until the next meeting and then express who he thinks would be the, or should be the next, City Manager for us.

Commissioner Levy said he is really torn between two of these gentlemen that came here tonight. One of them literally checks all of the boxes that we set out before we undertook this task. At the same time, there is another candidate who he thinks could be with us for a very long time. And he wants to weigh that a little more.

Commissioner Tijerina said she is in agreement with her fellow commissioners. This is probably the biggest decision we will ever make during our terms. And she has always been of the mindset that you do not make a big decision without sleeping on it first. Sometimes she thinks when you give yourself a little time to digest, the cream rises to the top kind of thing. And she wants to give herself an opportunity to really digest the thoughts that she has because, like Commissioner Levy, she does not know that she has a firm choice right now. She asked if the rest of the Commission would be willing to discuss some of the things that stood out to them tonight, give each other some things to take home and chew on?

There was consensus from the Commission to proceed with this discussion.

Mr. Green asked if it is okay for him to inform the three candidates that the Commission has decided to delay its decision to the next meeting.

There was consensus from the Commission for Mr. Green to proceed.

Mayor Cam said he came to his conclusion because he thinks Mr. Brown has a tremendous amount of experience. Mr. Brown is ready to be a city manager day one. When you look at the millions of dollars that we have to spend as a city on infrastructure, he thinks we need an experienced city manager. We heard from three candidates that are highly qualified professionals. They all did an excellent job.

Vice Mayor Helms said he seconds that opinion.

Commissioner Tijerina said when she looks at bullet points, Mr. Brown does check all the boxes. She really liked his example on social media transparency and how he has demonstrated in more than one city to pull them into 2026, and the demands of the community for us to give proactive social media updates. She appreciated that. She appreciates his breadth of experience and she does think that is a distinguishing factor from the other

candidates. She said he has had these roles and he has performed and he has been able to perform well, but he has done many roles and understands many facets of the city. She thinks that is very important for us to consider. She thinks the relationships that he has not only in Polk County but also at the State level is important for us to consider. She really also appreciated his answer regarding the budgeting and fiscal responsibility question. She does think we are so prideful of how we take that decision or the decisions we make in that realm so carefully. She likes his experience there and that he is going to be able to fully understand and manage and lead that in the spring, should he be the person selected.

Commissioner Levy said with Mr. Brown, with our criteria that we laid out - every box is checked. We wanted someone with manager experience, somebody with ethical behavior. We would not go wrong if he was ultimately our choice. He knows from his experience and one of the first things Mr. Brown said when he came in here, he would only leave where he is now for three jobs. And Auburndale was one of those three jobs. And that really speaks a lot for somebody with the amount of experience that man has. For him to respect our little town as much as he does, to be willing to come back here and lead us into the future, I think that speaks a lot for his character. He said he appreciates Mr. Brown's experience in all of the different functions that he has had in the past. He said Mr. Brown talked about different codes that he is familiar with and that gives me confidence that Mr. Brown knows his stuff and that when he takes over here, we are not going to have to worry about any kind of leadership. So a lot of positives with Mr. Brown.

Commissioner Avery said he really appreciated Mr. Brown's conversation about how he engages the community, how he understands the economic development side of it. Commissioner Avery said he was a little concerned with some of the technology answers and how we need to move into a technology area, Mr. Brown seemed a little bit lacking in that. But Mr. Brown also brings that community engagement piece, and he knows staff can help with that process as well. He did appreciate Mr. Brown as well as all the candidates indicating that they are invested in the community when they become part of the community. And that was very much expressed by him as well. Mr. Brown does have a lot of experience. And he can step right in and hit the ground running. And Mr. Brown does have a background and history here in Polk County as well.

Vice Mayor Helms said Mr. Brown said municipalities should not be on the leading edge of technology, but just behind the brink of technology. If we are not there, then we are falling behind. And avoiding that leading edge is crucial to avoid startup costs and experimental things and all that kind of stuff. So that actually stood out to him as a strength. Vice Mayor Helms said Mr. Brown realizes that we need to ensure that all of our processes are modernized. He said Mr. Brown talked about *Bike Week* and moving to a digitized process for efficiency, he loves this. Obviously, all of his experience. Everything about Mr. Brown stood out, and he appreciates it. The answer regarding uncomfortable honesty with his budget discussion in Panama City, which, in reviewing his resume, why did he leave Panama City? He said he appreciated that transparency. When is honesty hard? Well, how about right now? There are a lot of things that he really appreciated and liked about Mr. Brown. He has nothing negative to say about him in any way.

Mayor Cam asked if the Commission would like to discuss the other candidates.

There was consensus to discuss the other candidates.

Commissioner Tijerina quoted Mr. Marshall's answer that current citizens should not foot the bill for the growth. She said she appreciated that statement because she thinks that many of us as residents, we have that feeling that we see the cities growing. We know we need infrastructure. Does that change our millage rate? Does that change? How do we get assessments? She thinks that it was nice for him to acknowledge that elephant in the room. She appreciated him saying that because she thinks that is how a lot of citizens may feel right now. She said she liked Mr. Marshall's conversations about the water plants and how he was being creative and trying to look for innovative ways to address the infrastructure needs in the growing community where he was. She said

she did not feel like his answer to why he wanted to be here was a seller for her. When the very first thing you say about what you know about her city is wrong, even if it is a minor detail, that is going to upset the folks of Auburndale. She thinks that they are very proud of the town that we have, and they do not want there to be any confusion about it. Now, in terms of specific examples, Mr. Marshall gave the most specific answers of any of the three, and she found that commendable and transparent. His question about integrity and transparency she found to be very transparent. And she appreciates that because during our research, she thinks that we all know that is an issue right now and that those things are public record. She appreciated him being transparent. She appreciates the specific examples. She appreciates that Mr. Marshall had to make cuts that hurt not only himself but may not have been very popular. And she does think that she needs to know that when things are very tough, the city manager could step in and make a tough decision. So those are the notes she has on Mr. Marshall.

Commissioner Tijerina said regarding Ben Ziskal, he is the guy she wants to have dinner with. His executive presence was a stark contrast to the other two candidates. The passion he displayed was moving. And she showed up to this meeting in her mind thinking that she would more than likely not really consider him as a candidate if she is being 100% honest and transparent with her fellow commissioners. So, in the time that he was here, he definitely moved how she feels. She said she has concerns over the siloed experience Mr. Ziskal has. And does that translate to not only planning and development, which we have a very strong planning and development presence in Auburndale, with Interim City Manager Palmer having a background there as Assistant City Manager, and Community Development Director Julie Womble performs very well in that role. Commissioner Tijerina said she knows that he has relationships that the city could leverage that are very meaningful. She said she has concerns with him having twice to be prompted to be specific in his answers, but that is just a standout thing for her. He also had the clearest vision of where Auburndale is going. To her, that is very meaningful. And it moved her a lot. So those were her major notes.

Commissioner Levy said he will spend more time on Mr. Ziskal, because in his mind right now, his top two candidates are Mr. Brown and Mr. Ziskal. He was the most impressive up on this dais tonight, the way he presented himself and for his vision for Auburndale. He is also concerned about his experience largely focused on the land development, growth side. So how do you weigh a guy like Mr. Brown, who has all of these years of being in it every day, doing the job, versus a guy who is clearly passionate, loves Auburndale. He does not think we can go wrong. He could see Mr. Ziskal being here a very long time if we were to go that route.

Commissioner Avery said we are all fairly young. And we all see the vision and the movement of Auburndale well into the future with our kids and with our grandkids and the legacy that we want to leave behind in Auburndale. Although he appreciates Mr. Marshall's answers, he feels that Mr. Ziskal and Mr. Brown rose to the occasion, the cream rose to the top with the two of them. And that is what is making this a sleep-on-it decision for him as well, because he does see Mr. Ziskal being in this community for a long time and being able to affect that legacy change for the better of Auburndale that we all and you guys all want to see as well. Mr. Ziskal's statement and his pedigree on the CRA and how he laid that out and his vision for the US Highway 92 corridor matching with the downtown corridor and bridging those gaps speaks heavily to him. He said he has not lived in this community since the time he was born. But he has been here for what he thinks is a long time. And he has seen as we drive into Auburndale and he has seen what has been taking place and Mr. Ziskal laid out the same vision that he has seen Amy Palmer and Julie Womble and Bobby Green and the previous Commissions laying out for the past 26-28 years that he has been in Auburndale, and that speaks a lot to him. But much like the rest of the Commission also said, Jeff Brown has that history, and he has that time and he has the budgeting and the knowledge and the experience of working at that higher level. He said he thinks Mr. Ziskal can do that. But you have to carry a considerable weight when it comes to Mr. Brown's experience. Experience and in a sense of being transparent of where Mr. Brown was in Panama City and coming back. He said Mr. Brown knows Auburndale and you can tell that he wants the best for Auburndale as well.

Vice Mayor Helms said he wants to talk about Mr. Marshall for a minute. He said he wants to make sure that he clearly communicates why he would like to weigh this a little bit more. Mr. Marshall does check all the boxes as well. He does not have the length of experience that Mr. Brown has, but Mr. Marshall does have all of the skills, all of the requirements, all of the education, and all of the experience in Florida. So Mr. Marshall checks all the boxes in his mind as well. Vice Mayor Helms said he worked as a project management officer for many years, which is not someone that runs projects, but someone who is responsible for every project in the organization, just like a city manager would be. He said he always had a little thing on his wall with a triangle. It is the project management triangle. And when we got to question number seven, Mr. Marshall hit the exact project management triangle. Budget, time and quality. And that is all a project manager looks at. He said he does not run the project. He does not need to know the day to day. Where are we at on those three topics? He said as he looks at our city and the amount of money we are about to spend, he thought it was very insightful to see Mr. Marshall's mindset of taking a particular project and saying the thing with the triangle – which is you can have two, but you cannot have all three. And every specific instance has to be evaluated and ask which one of these three legs can I live without? So like in Mr. Marshall's specific example, it was a water project - he could not play around with quality and he could not play around with budget due to budget constraints. So Mr. Marshall was able to work with time to get a project done. Vice Mayor Helms said to him, that insightfulness, the understanding of how every project is different - and we are going to have a lot of them over the next five years, big ones - he thought that was a great answer. And it really kind of let him know that Mr. Marshall knows what he is doing when it comes to managing big things. And then with Mr. Ziskal, the one that stood out to him, and Mr. Ziskal mentioned it multiple times, that that there is always a roadmap. We have a Comprehensive Plan. We have a Capital Improvements Program. The decision is made for us. The decisions are made for us in almost every aspect, we just have to know them and do the right things. And that stood out to him. He said Mr. Ziskal understands what we are doing here. He said he is not right now advocating for any one of these candidates. He thinks they are all fantastic. He said he just wants to take next five days to make sure that he is doing the right thing.

Mayor Cam said that is completely understandable. Jeremy Marshall did check all the boxes for our preferred qualifications. He thinks Ben Ziskal did an excellent job. He thinks he is clearly an excellent professional. If he wants to be, he will be a fine city manager one day. He said he has no doubt about that. But when you listen to Jeff Brown speak, he said he has done 30+ budgets in his career. You talk about Mr. Brown's experience, and the roles Mr. Brown has had within the City of Auburndale - city manager experience. This is somebody that could come on day one, not only as a city manager, but as an Auburndale city manager. He said the culture in Auburndale is a real thing. Our three new commissioners just got back from their Institute for Elected Municipal Officials training. He and Vice Mayor Helms went through those trainings as well. And his greatest takeaway from his class was how special we actually have it here. And no disrespect to any other municipalities, the culture is special here. Mr. Brown understands the culture in Auburndale, the organizational culture. He said Mr. Brown has the city manager experience. So that is why he still picks Jeff Brown. He said he thinks he hit it out of the park with his resume and his interview. But again, we heard from three excellent professionals. He said he is grateful that they all showed interest in being the city manager of Auburndale.

Mayor Cam asked City Attorney Murphy if they need a motion to table this until the next meeting.

City Attorney Murphy said at this point, it is just placed on the agenda. He asked Interim City Manager Palmer if the agenda has been published.

Interim City Manager Palmer said it has not been published but they are printed and on the dais. We can add it as an additional item to the agenda and get any additional information the Commission needs.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing Minutes are true and correct.



Brandon Henry, City Clerk