

City Commission Meeting
July 8, 2025
6:00 p.m.

ELECTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:

Adrian Petrila, Mayor (attending remotely)
Karen Marriott, Vice Mayor, Commissioner, District 1
Lisa Robinson, Commissioner, District 2
Jon Maldonado, Commissioner, District 4
Betty Rzewnicki, Commissioner, District 3 was absent.

STAFF PRESENT:

Ralf Brookes, City Attorney	Laura Canary, Community Development Director
Frances Robustelli, City Manager	Jim Kilpatrick, Fire Chief
Renee Rose, City Clerk	Devon Schmidt, Finance Director
Brandon Berry, Senior Planner	Camden Mills, Public Services Director

Vice Mayor Marriott called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Vice Mayor Marriott welcomed new Commissioner for District 4, Jon Maldonado.

1. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Commissioner Robinson requested to add a discussion about Ordinance 2024-19 regarding the look-back period.

Motion: **Commissioner Maldonado moved, Commissioner Robinson seconded, and the motion carried 4-0 to approve the July 8, 2025 City Commission Agenda as amended.**

2. PRESENTATIONS

a. Hurricane Recovery and Preparedness Efforts

Laura Canary, Community Development Director, provided an update on hurricane recovery efforts and preparedness planning, beginning with an overview of permit processing, noting that as of June 22, 4,720 applications had been submitted, averaging 299 per day. The presentation is made part of the meeting record. Her team recently met their goal of issuing 60 permits daily, and inspections are averaging just over 100 per day. She shared current permit statistics, including issued, in review, and closed applications. She then shifted to resources and communication efforts. Ongoing changes to policies and procedures have created the need for consistent, clear communication. Staff are working with the communications manager to overhaul how information is presented to the public, ensuring it is accurate and up to date. Community members were encouraged to continue reporting outdated or confusing information. She focused on the labor rate sheet originally provided as a guide for estimating construction costs. This sheet was causing confusion because it listed labor wages rather than what consumers typically pay for services. Due to the misunderstanding, the sheet was temporarily removed and is being revised with a disclaimer for clarity.

There was an in-depth discussion on the confusion surrounding the use of a labor rate sheet intended to help estimate project costs for FEMA-related applications. Commissioner Robinson read from the FEMA SID Desk Reference, noting that FEMA instructs applicants to estimate the value of owner or volunteer labor using applicable minimum wage scales based on the skill and type of work and asked how this directive differs from simply using a labor rate list. Ms. Canary clarified that the problem wasn't necessarily with the wage ranges listed on the sheet but rather how those numbers were being interpreted and used. Many applicants were using just the hourly labor rate to estimate total costs, without including other factors like overhead, prep work, or additional phases of the job. Although FEMA guidelines don't require overhead and profit calculations for owner-builders, unlike contractors, staff still found that many estimates using the labor sheet didn't fully represent the total scope of work. This was evident when applicants submitted labor costs without materials or left out tasks like demolition, even though those were listed separately in the FEMA packets. It was noted that the labor rate sheet may have unintentionally caused confusion by presenting data without sufficient explanation. Because of that,

the sheet was pulled, but staff plans to reissue it with a clear disclaimer emphasizing that it's meant to guide labor estimates only, not total project cost, and that other line items still need to be calculated separately.

Ms. Canary continued, sharing that staff is developing a list of typical inspections to help owner-builders better understand what to expect during their projects, as some inspections have caught people off guard. They're also creating two comprehensive packets, one for demolitions and one for home elevations, that will consolidate all necessary documentation in one place to reduce confusion. These efforts are based on feedback from inspectors, volunteers, community members, and internal team experiences. Staff are also working with the business analyst to evaluate and improve internal workflows, particularly how permits are received, processed, and assigned. They're also focusing on leveraging technology, including tools like Forerunner, to increase efficiency and enhance overall operations.

Ms. Canary moved on to demolition statistics. As of June 22, there have been 121 demolition permit applications, with 63 issued and 12 completed, meaning 12 structures have been fully demolished. When excluding a few outliers, the average time to process a demolition permit is about 38 days. While this is slightly above the target of under 30 days, she explained that demolitions take longer due to required pre-inspections, which add time to the process. These pre-inspections are specific to certain permit types, including demolitions, turbidity screenings, and pool site preparations. Another factor affecting the timeline is how iWorQ calculates processing time. The system starts the clock when an application is first submitted, even if it's incomplete. Since applicants were encouraged early on to submit permits before all documents were ready, the system reflects a longer processing duration than what the team experiences in practice. This makes it appear that permits take longer than they actually do once all documentation is in and the review can begin.

There was discussion about demolition permits. It was asked whether the required pre-demolition site inspections are scheduled as promptly as other inspections, specifically if they're typically done the next day, but it wasn't confirmed. There was also a conversation about whether there are internal goals to speed up the demolition permit process, potentially to 14 or 20 days. While reducing processing time is a priority, Ms. Canary emphasized that a major issue has been the back-and-forth communication due to incomplete submissions. To address this, staff are exploring process changes with the business analyst, including assigning a single reviewer to each permit from start to finish. This would improve communication, create ownership, and lead to greater efficiency, even if the process might take slightly longer at first. Staff had previously set a benchmark of issuing 60 permits a day and have met that, the current focus is shifting. They're seeing more active construction and elevation projects and want to better assess how many elevation applications will actually move forward. Once that's clearer, they will establish more specific benchmarks and timelines for completing those types of permits.

Ms. Canary continued with training. Staff across departments are continuing to complete NIMS and ICS training individually, and damage assessment training was conducted in coordination with Pinellas County. The county will now also be using Forerunner, which will streamline data sharing and make it easier to consolidate information in one platform. A tabletop emergency exercise held on June 16 with department directors and EOC personnel proved valuable, especially for newer staff, by clarifying assignments, discussing individual and citywide emergency plans, and promoting better coordination. The building official recently attended the Florida Floodplain Managers Conference and brought back useful insights. Many communities are finalizing their Substantial Damage Administrative Procedures (SDAP) for the first time, and Forerunner is emerging as a preferred tool for managing damage assessments. Its adoption across jurisdictions is expected to support more consistent, data-driven decision-making. Staff have completed a draft of the city's SDAP, which outlines standard operating procedures for damage assessment, defines roles and responsibilities, and establishes a core assessment team made up of five two-person crews, mainly from Community Development. The plan also defines key terms such as "fair market cost" and "fair market value," and integrates the Forerunner system to centralize data and improve overall efficiency in the damage assessment process.

Further discussion centered around clarifying definitions and improving tools and resources for damage assessments. It was asked whose definitions were being used for key terms like "fair market value"—FEMA's, the county's, or another source—since these can vary and impact assessments. Ms. Canary explained that they are using the formula employed by the Pinellas County Property Appraiser: 85% of the just value of the structure alone. Since the Substantial Damage Administrative Procedures (SDAP) is still in draft form, there is flexibility to revise it based on feedback. There were also questions about Forerunner's capabilities, specifically whether it can generate an ACV like the previous SDE estimator used by Tidal Basin. Ms. Canary confirmed that Forerunner does calculate values based on damage and can be used as one of several assessment tools. A concern was raised that many people previously paid for independent ACVs when a similar value could have been produced through the estimator, so there's hope that Forerunner will be more effectively utilized going forward as a reliable metric. The idea of forming a volunteer group to assist with damage assessments in high-volume situations was proposed. The main concern noted was liability, particularly if volunteers were to enter private property. The concept could be explored further, with legal counsel and if liability waivers were put in place.

Camden Mills, Public Services Director, shared a comprehensive update on the efforts of the operations team in preparation for the storm season. Efforts include restoring and maintaining the city's wastewater system, with all damaged lift station pumps now repaired or replaced and both pumps operational at all 21 stations. Long-term system improvements are also being planned. The stormwater system is undergoing pipe inspections, cleanings, and maintenance of outfalls, manholes, check valves, and baffle structures. A citywide inspection and televising project is planned for fiscal year 2026. Out of 35 tidal check valves, 19 have been inspected and cleaned, with several identified for replacement. All 30 baffle structures have also been cleaned. Maintenance is ongoing at the city's nine stormwater ponds, which are inspected monthly to ensure they are functioning properly. The city's parks and facilities are undergoing vegetation trimming to prevent storm debris hazards. Street sweeping continues citywide on a monthly basis to reduce debris in stormwater systems. The city is closing out its state permit for the Egan Park staging site for debris management. Soil testing results have been approved, and the city will solicit bids for topsoil removal, irrigation repair, and sod replacement. Approval has also been obtained to use Hurley Park in Pass-a-Grille as a future debris staging area, with the possibility of exploring county-owned land for additional capacity. He reminded residents that free, self-service sandbag filling is available at Egan Park, and they can contact public services if supplies are low.

Commissioner Robinson thanked Mr. Mills and his staff for responding quickly to a stormwater issue on a Sunday. Further discussion included the scale of the city's stormwater infrastructure, which includes about 18 miles of underground pipe. So far, only 10–20% of that system has been cleaned, focusing primarily on outfalls. There were concerns about the slow pace of maintenance, with storm season approaching, and there is a need for a formal maintenance plan and potential funding options to accelerate pipe cleaning and prevent future flooding issues.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Deb Schechner, 710 Boca Ciega Isle Dr., raised concern that the city has approved major developments without required concurrency reviews to ensure infrastructure can support them and urged the city to follow its own code and comprehensive plan going forward.

4. CONSENT

- a. Approval of the June 17, 2025 and the June 18, 2025 City Commission Strategic Planning Workshop Minutes and the June 24, 2025 City Commission Meeting Minutes
- b. Authorize a Contract Amendment with Robert Half
- c. ~~Approve a Purchase Order Amendment with Joe Payne, Inc. in the amount of \$350,000 for Building and Permitting Services~~

Commissioner Robinson requested to remove item c from the Consent Agenda for discussion.

Motion: Commissioner Robinson moved, Commissioner Maldonado seconded, and the motion carried 4-0 to approve the July 8, 2025, City Commission Consent Agenda as amended.

- c. Approve a Purchase Order Amendment with Joe Payne, Inc. in the amount of \$350,000 for Building and Permitting Services

Commissioner Robinson questioned the cost of a large piggyback contract and asked whether the city is paying \$350,000 or \$600,000 per year, as the different figures were mentioned in previous documents. City Manager Robustelli said the contract took effect in August 2022 and they don't pay an annual fee; it's on a per hour fee. Hourly rates vary based on role/title. Ms. Canary said the rates are still based on a 2021-2022 schedule. There was concern raised about the cost, as the city is paying nearly three times what it would cost to hire staff directly. The increased use of contracted services began before recent storms, but demand spiked during recovery efforts, prompting a \$600,000 funding request in December. The city has issued an RFP for community development personnel services and is hopeful to make a selection soon. The goal is to reduce dependence on contracted help by hiring a building official and deputy building official as full-time city employees. In the future, contracted services will only be used for additional needs during peak times. It was suggested to consider hiring a headhunter, as the long-term savings could justify the investment.

Motion: Commissioner Maldonado moved, Vice Mayor Marriott seconded, and the motion carried 4-0 to approve Consent Item c: approve a Purchase Order Amendment with Joe Payne, Inc. in the amount of \$350,000 for Building and Permitting Services.

5. ACTION ITEMS

a. Resolution 2025-18: Pause in Enforcement of Modular Public Safety Building Setbacks

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF ST. PETE BEACH FINDING INTENT; PROVIDING FOR A PAUSE IN THE ENFORCEMENT OF SETBACK REQUIREMENTS FOR TEMPORARY MODULAR PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDINGS IN ZONING DISTRICTS THAT AUTHORIZE PUBLIC SERVICE USES; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY, SCRIVENER'S ERRORS, CONSTRUCTION AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE AND EXPIRATION DATE.

Brandon Berry, Senior Planner, said this addresses the installation of a modular building on the Suntan Art Center property, just south of the Don Cesar. This is an immediate public safety need. Due to existing site conditions, the building cannot currently meet the required setbacks. The request is to temporarily waive these setback requirements until Fire Station 22 is rebuilt. This waiver would allow flexibility for replacing the modular building or adding other necessary structures in the future. The resolution grants the city manager the authority to issue these waivers as needed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No members of the public came forward.

Motion: Commissioner Robinson moved, seconded by Vice Mayor Marriott and the motion carried 4-0 to approve Resolution 2025-18.

6. ORDINANCES

a. Final Reading of Ordinance 2025-10: Amendments to Land Development Code DIVISION 26 – SIGN ORDINANCE

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF ST. PETE BEACH, FLORIDA FOR THE PURPOSE OF ADOPTING AMENDMENTS TO LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE DIVISION 26 SECTIONS 26-1 THROUGH 26-42 ENTITLED SIGN ORDINANCE TO ENSURE CONTENT-NEUTRAL SIGN DEFINITIONS, STANDARDS,

REGULATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS, AND ADOPTING AMENDMENTS TO THE REQUIREMENTS FOR PERMITTING, ENFORCEMENT, AND MAINTENANCE FOR NEW, EXISTING AND NONCONFORMING SIGNS IN ALL ZONING DISTRICTS; PROVIDING FOR CODIFICATION; CONFLICTS; SEVERABILITY; CORRECTION OF SCRIVENER'S ERROR; CONSTRUCTION; PUBLICATION; AND AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Brandon Berry, Senior Planner, summarized changes from first reading based on Commissioner comments. The presentation is made part of the meeting record. The ordinance had been properly advertised and no public comments had been received. Changes included lowering the height and square footage of signage to reflect the highest allowed within newly adjusted zoning groupings. Originally, there were four zoning groups; now there are five, as the Resort Facilities Medium district was separated due to its higher signage standards. In commercial and Gulf Blvd resort areas, sign allowances remain between 50 to 100 sq ft. and up to 12 ft. in height, depending on business frontage. In downtown and lower intensity mixed-use districts, sign size has been reduced to 40 sq ft. and a maximum height of 8 ft.. Pole signs have been removed as a permitted type, but a variance can still be requested in cases of hardship. The time allowed for compliance with sign maintenance in non-emergency situations has been extended from two to ten days, while emergency situations still require action within two days. Temporary election signage was revised to limit the number of signs to the number of items on the ballot, aligning with current code. Further changes include setting a maximum sign structure area at 200 sq ft. or 200% of the sign face area, allowing space for architectural elements like bases and supports—but not the communicative part of the sign. Monument signs were also removed as permitted types along Pass-a-Grille Way between 7th and 9th Ave, to stay consistent with existing code. The depreciation compliance threshold was restored to 50% in line with Senate Bill 180. Language concerning emergency signage waivers was updated from “pre-storm” to “pre-damage” to account for various kinds of emergencies beyond hurricanes. Visual examples were provided to distinguish between sign area (the communicative content) and sign structure (the physical frame and support). Recently approved signs, such as those at Bellwether Beach Resort and Remax, would still be compliant under the revised ordinance. It was clarified that emergency signage provisions apply only under a declared citywide state of emergency, not for isolated incidents at individual properties. If such individual relief is desired, the ordinance language would need to be amended accordingly.

The discussion started with vehicle signs and temporary signage rules. There was confusion about the definition and prohibition of vehicle signs. It was clarified that while the ordinance defines vehicle signs broadly, it only prohibits them under specific circumstances: if a vehicle is inoperable, has not moved in 72 hours, or is made unsafe due to signage. Concerns were raised that this could unfairly penalize residents who go on vacation or don't drive daily, if they have such signage. It was suggested to limit the 72-hour restriction to non-residential areas only, allowing more flexibility in residential districts. The discussion shifted to temporary and free expression signs. It was confirmed that free expression signs, now considered a type of temporary sign, do not have a time limit, unlike election or event signs, which do. This clarification aligned with the intent of allowing residents freedom of expression without arbitrary time restrictions. Sandwich board signs were another focus, particularly in relation to businesses located in shopping centers like Dolphin Village, where placing a sign directly in front of the business doesn't provide visibility. It was suggested to allow these signs anywhere on a property, with landlord approval, instead of limiting them to being directly in front of the specific business. Concerns were raised about clutter along major corridors like Gulf Blvd if that was allowed. A compromise discussed was to allow broader placement only under emergency conditions. The discussion turned to emergency signage exceptions, particularly in cases like the Dolphin Village fire. Currently, the ordinance allows special signage (like banners or sandwich boards) only under a declared citywide emergency. It was considered to expand this to include property-specific incidents deemed emergencies by the city manager, providing flexibility for businesses recovering from localized damage. Staff can add language to the ordinance to allow the city manager to approve temporary waivers without a formal variance process, mirroring how past temporary construction approvals were handled.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Deb Schechner, Boca Ciega Isle Dr., supports using murals to beautify the city and attract tourism, and didn't see it addressed in this and asked if existing non-compliant signs will be grandfathered in.

It was clarified that the sign code allows two- or three-dimensional artwork, including murals, as long as it doesn't promote a business or product. This was discussed earlier and is meant to include murals. It was confirmed that existing non-conforming signs can be grandfathered in, unless over 50% of the structure is changed.

Motion: Commissioner Robinson moved, seconded by Commissioner Maldonado and the motion carried 4-0 to continue the Ordinance to July 22, 2025 at 6pm.

7. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

a. Discussion of Ordinance 2024-19 regarding the look-back period

Commissioner Robinson said the ordinance outlines three categories of costs related to a project, specifying those incurred by contractors, but it's less clear about costs by homeowners. It includes items like insurance, overhead, and profit, which seem to fall under that category. She said it's important to clarify these distinctions—especially with the potential for another storm season approaching—to avoid confusion or disputes. She has discussed this with the City Attorney, but wanted to be transparent, and it relates to earlier conversations about how significant damage is calculated.

7. CITY CLERK, CITY MANAGER, CITY ATTORNEY, AND CITY COMMISSION REPORTS

City Clerk —Jon Maldonado and Mike Greiger qualified to run for the District 4 Commissioner seat. The special election will be held on November 4, 2025 at the Warren Webster for District 4 only.

Frances Robustelli, City Manager — thanked staff, especially Recreation Director Mandy Edmunds and Chief Kilpatrick, for managing the July 4th storms and successfully coordinating the fireworks, which the community enjoyed.

City Attorney Brookes — As of July 1st, new Florida laws took effect. A memo will be sent outlining those that impact St. Pete Beach.

Commissioner Maldonado — had no report

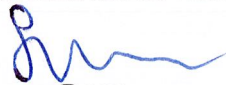
Commissioner Robinson — had no report

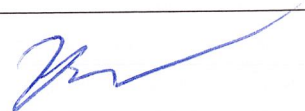
Vice Mayor Marriott — echoed thanks for the July 4th event, noting it was great despite the rain. The Beach Theatre's had a great soft opening, with two sold-out nights, generating excitement on Corey Avenue.

Mayor Petrila — had no report

Vice Mayor Marriott adjourned the meeting at 7:13

MINUTES APPROVED: JULY 22, 2025


RENEE ROSE
CITY CLERK


ADRIAN PETRILA
MAYOR