

City of Port St. Lucie

City Council Workshop

Meeting Minutes

121 SW Port St. Lucie
Blvd.
Port St. Lucie, Florida
34984

Shannon M. Martin, Mayor

Jolien Caraballo, Vice Mayor, District IV
Stephanie Morgan, Councilwoman, District I
Dave Pickett, Councilman, District II
Anthony Bonna, Sr., Councilman, District III

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Friday, February 28, 2025

8:30 AM

Port St. Lucie Community Center

Winter Workshop Day 3

1. Meeting Called to Order

Day three of the Winter Workshop of the City Council of the City of Port St. Lucie was called to order by Mayor Martin at 9:05 AM on February 28, 2025, at the Port St. Lucie Community Center, 2195 SE Airoso Blvd, Port St. Lucie, FL 34984.

2. Roll Call

Council Members Present:

Mayor Martin

Councilwoman Morgan

Councilman Pickett

Councilman Bonna

Council Members not Present:

Vice Mayor Caraballo

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Martin led the assembly in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

4. Public to be Heard

1. Diane Goldberg, 6470 NW Volucia Drive, stated she provided Staff with a list of native plants for living shorelines, littoral zones, and retention ponds that will absorb any fertilizers or chemicals that could pollute the canals, St. Lucie River, and Indian River Lagoon. She requested funding for the retention ponds, as the plants would be more economical than the cost of cleanup. Ms. Goldberg also reminded everyone to support family-owned businesses.

5. Workshop Business**5.a Project Updates on Community Redevelopment Areas** [2025-183](#)

(Clerk's Note: Item 5.a was not heard on Day 3 of the Workshop.)

5.b Update from the St. Lucie County Economic Development [2025-184](#)

Council on Economic Development Incentive Packages

Jennifer Davis, CRA, introduced Pete Tesch, President of the Economic Development Council of St. Lucie County, who spoke to the Council on the community's growth and economic development opportunities and partnerships.

Wes McCurry, Sr. Vice President of the Economic Development Council, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Economic Development Incentive Survey with the goal of enhancing the City's competitive positioning for further economic development. He provided a brief overview and outlined the objectives, including the purpose of the survey, key focus areas, and strategic implications. He also discussed the economic incentive trends and insights, emerging strategies for economic growth, and enhancing competitiveness and accountability.

Mr. McCurry reviewed the key takeaways and next steps, such as competitive incentive programs, performance & compliance, and future-focused strategies. Mr. McCurry indicated they were considering adopting a point-based scoring system, aligning incentives with strategic economic goals, bolstering the County's job growth investment grant, and conducting regular policy reviews to adapt to market conditions.

Mr. McCurry concluded his presentation by commenting on Port St. Lucie's strong success in attracting a diversity of businesses and much needed jobs. He indicated that maintaining and refining the City's incentive based programs is essential to sustaining and expanding this success.

Mayor Martin asked what the City could do better. She stated she was for cutting bureaucracy and red tape to streamline packages, as long as accountability remains and the incentivized companies are providing the jobs as required. She expressed concerns about a one-size fits all package, as they may need to structure things differently at this point in time.

Councilman Pickett believed incentives were needed to attract businesses, but he was not in favor of a one-size fits all package. He suggested a stair-step incentive approach based on the number of jobs created by the business. Councilman Pickett stated he was for cutting the bureaucracy

and redundancy between the City and the County. He indicated they needed to fast track getting businesses here, because the City needs jobs. Councilman Pickett recommended that Council have a conversation regarding abatements.

Councilwoman Morgan expressed agreement with Council's comments. She stated she was against the continued extensions provided to some businesses and suggested that the abatements be done incrementally. She indicated the City is a desired location and has a lot to offer without providing freebies.

Councilman Bonna stated he agreed with Council's remarks, specifically in the area of reducing redundancy.

Mr. Tesch and Mr. McCurry stated they will hold future conversations and present several options or incentive packages, so Council can decide what best fits the community and the City's strategic direction moving forward.

5.c Council on Aging of St. Lucie, Inc. (COASL) Presentation

[2025-177](#)

Carmen Capezzuto, Neighborhood Services Director, stated Staff has been collecting data on how to best support the needs of seniors in their community as well as researching ways to expand existing programs and partnerships. He introduced Lacinda Mouton, Chief Operating Officer, and Jennifer Ross, Case Manager Director, from the Council on Aging of St. Lucie, Inc. Ms. Ross provided a PowerPoint presentation and reviewed the history of the Council on Aging. She discussed their programs and services, the senior population in Florida, and the St. Lucie County Demographics of those age 60 and older.

Ms. Ross explained the spending power of seniors and the programs provided under the Department of Elder Affairs via State and Federal funding. She noted that the Council on Aging supports the Florida Medicaid Long Term Care Program and provides assistance to veterans. She spoke to the grant matching process, program funding, and the future of the Adult Day Center.

Ms. Ross concluded her presentation by emphasizing the importance of seniors in their community, aging in place, and growing programs to support seniors and their caregivers. She reported that the following data indicates the number of individuals in the Port St. Lucie area who are wait listed for services and programs: 364 people in the 34953 zip code, 136 people in the 34982 zip code, 219 in the 34983 zip code, 79 people in the 24984 zip code, 142 people in the 34986 zip code, and 78 people in the 34987 zip code.

Mayor Martin inquired about the length of the screening process to get people into the programs. Ms. Ross indicated that it has taken a year or more, but those with the most needs are at the top of the list.

Mayor Martin asked if there were programs for individuals who are just over the lowest income level, to which Ms. Ross responded in the affirmative. She noted their federal programs are free of charge and explained the wait list is based on needs and not the ability to pay or lack of payment. Ms. Ross indicated that some programs have co-pays or participation fees that are based on the client's income.

Mayor Martin inquired about the Council on Aging's board participation and fundraising efforts. Ms. Ross stated they have a lot of board participation, an annual gala, as well as a public relations manager and outreach director who apply for grants, receive donations, and elicit support from the community or other agencies and entities.

Kate Parmelee, Deputy City Manager, indicated Staff will provide some recommendations and new strategies that will advance their goals and initiatives in supporting seniors, at Council's Strategic Planning workshop in May. Mr. Capezzuto added that Staff is currently analyzing the data collected at the Citizen Summit and will come back with some thoughtful ideas. Ms. Parmelee suggested hearing a presentation from the Area Agency on Aging, as a partnership may be beneficial when it comes to funding and grants.

Mayor Martin inquired if the Council on Aging had a Strategic Plan in place for acquiring additional space. Ms. Ross stated they did not have a specific plan in place at this time, but they were working with the Executive Board and upper management to determine how to move forward.

Councilman Pickett suggested getting information from the United Way to perhaps put the City, in partnership with the Council on Aging, in a better position to obtain grants. Mayor Martin stated she was interested in learning more on how they could best partner together and looking forward to Staff's recommendations in May.

(Clerk's Note: Mayor Martin called for a break at 9:56 AM, and the meeting resumed at 10:25 AM.)

5.d Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26 Budget Outlook

[2025-191](#)

(Clerk's Note: Item 5.d was not heard on Day 3 of the Workshop.)

5.e Hear the Parks & Recreation Department High Impact Plan

[2025-201](#)

(Clerk's Note: This item was moved from Day 2 to Day 3 of the Workshop.)

Bradley Keen, Parks & Recreation Director, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Parks & Recreation Department High Impact Plan for FY 24/25-28/29. He stated the department has gone through a year of change, but they continue to see an increase in park and recreation center traffic as the City's population continues to grow at a rapid pace. Mr. Keen noted that Staff is updating their 10-year Master Plan and preparing for their first CAPRA reaccreditation. He discussed how City staffing per park acreage and recreation centers per capita were low. He indicated there was a strong desire by residents for trail connections, stated Staff was updating their recreation planning and programming, and spoke to new playgrounds and renovations.

Mr. Keen explained how the Parks & Recreation Department was networking with agencies from around the state and country via the Florida and National Recreation and Parks Association. He noted that nine staff members hold the Certified Parks and Recreation professional certification, and their goal is to have 50% of their full-time employees obtain this designation. Mr. Keen reviewed the numbers of recreation center participants, recreation programs, and the number of visitors the Parks & Recreation Department has supported. He thanked the Council, Staff, and other departments for their continued support.

Councilman Picket acknowledged Nan Krushinski, Special Events Division Director, for her efforts thus far and with the upcoming Irish Festival.

Mayor Martin stated she looked forward to finalizing the Master Plan for Parks & Recreation and spoke to the importance of all parks and staffing projections. She suggested that Council take field trips in the future to look at potential locations for park space and notice them as a public meeting. City Manager Merejo stated the field trips will be made part of the plan.

- 5.f** Hear the Police Department High Impact Plan and Police District Growth and Development Plan

[2025-202](#)

(Clerk's Note: This item was moved from Day 2 to Day 3 of the Workshop.)

Chief Leo Niemczyk, Port St. Lucie Police Department, provided a PowerPoint presentation on the Police Department's High Impact Plan for FY 24/25 – 28/29. He stated the plan has not changed much. He explained the Police Department is an evidenced based data driven organization governed by the stratified policing model developed by Dr.

Rachel Santos and Dr. Roberto Santos, who will be onsite in April to provide training and education to the department.

Chief Niemczyk spoke to traffic incidents and locations, seeing improvement on roadways, and being committed to enforcing their way out of the problem. He stated that crime rates are a top priority, as they want to remain the safest city in the state and country, and explained the transition from UCR to NIBR crime data and reporting.

Chief Niemczyk discussed the Safe, Clean & Beautiful priority projects. He indicated they hoped to have the Police Training Facility completed by the end of the year or early next year. He stated that Police Recruitment & Retention has been a challenge for the City and other cities, and discussed the benefits of the Police Academy.

Chief Niemczyk stated the Police Department's big ask is based on their direction to grow to 1.6 officers per 1,000 residents in five years, as they are seeking 35 sworn officers and 10 civilian officers. He indicated that growth is their biggest challenge or opportunity, such as the need for District 6. Chief Niemczyk discussed the patrol districts and population zones, calls for service, floating officers on overtime to meet minimum staffing, contract requirements, and response times correlating to public safety.

Mayor Martin reminded everyone that it was a five-year process for District 5 and they had to make significant changes to meet that timeline. She stated they do not want to encounter the same situation down the road, so she appreciated the anticipated changes proposed by Chief Niemczyk.

Chief Niemczyk noted the only increase in response times was in District 4, and they were going to address the issue by breaking into three regions and adding District 6. He commented on the assignments of the new class of officers, how to support Legacy High School, and the April 2025 Implementation Plan.

Councilwoman Morgan inquired about the officers who went through the academy, the requirements to be accepted, and if the officers sign anything that commit them to the City of Port St. Lucie. Chief Niemczyk explained that it has been a learning process and the initial class was not under contract, as the academy was paid for by the Governor's grant for law enforcement and the only costs incurred were the officers' paychecks. He noted they retained a high percentage of that class. Chief Niemczyk indicated the upcoming class will be paid with the recruitment money that Council approved, as it costs \$150,000 for 30 officers/students and they

are under contract for two years or they must reimburse the City. Councilwoman Morgan thought it was important for the officers to be dedicated to the City of Port St. Lucie.

Councilwoman Morgan spoke to school resource officers, as they are funded through the state school district which pays the Sheriff's Office. She inquired if the City was getting reimbursed fairly or if the City should ask the Sheriff to take it over. Chief Niemczyk explained the current deal is for the Sheriff to pay 50% and the City to pay 50% for the five officers in the high schools, and soon to be six officers with the new high school. He stated he believed it was a fair deal and discussed the advantages of having Port St. Lucie police officers in the high schools.

Councilwoman Morgan inquired as to why the City was not billing the Sheriff's Office for 100% of the cost, since they are receiving the full amount from the school district and the City is providing the service. Chief Niemczyk stated the response from the Sheriff will be that he does not need the City, a deputy will be placed in the schools, and the City will lose the benefit of having an officer in the high schools. He said he views it as a partnership but is always willing to renegotiate. Councilwoman Morgan suggested renegotiating it so that 75% or 80% is paid by the Sheriff's Office or billing the Sheriff for 50% and the School District for 50%. Chief Niemczyk stated they could have that conversation, but he did not see the incentive for the School District.

Councilwoman Morgan commented on the Facebook posts regarding traffic and the Port St. Lucie Police Department, and stated she has not read one negative comment. She indicated she would like Target Zero, FDOT's mantra, to happen in the City. She stated FDOT should provide the funds for redlight cameras and additional staffing for the aggressive drivers. Chief Niemczyk stated he had no problem asking for money and Councilwoman Morgan indicated that she will ask for the funds. She thanked Chief Niemczyk and his officers for everything they do, and stated she was proud to be a part of Port St. Lucie.

Councilman Pickett stated the Police Department does an excellent job at communicating all the speeding tickets being written, and asked if they could do the same proactively for the expected increase in crime rates based on the different reporting methods. Chief Niemczyk indicated the perception in the community has been that crime is skyrocketing due to social media, so they are only posting positive comments and reinforcement messages regarding traffic and golf carts for example. He stated they will be providing a lot of education and PSAs before starting a strict enforcement program. He suggested discussing the crime stats at

the local HOA meetings.

Mayor Martin stated she can include this information in the PowerPoint presentations she provides to the residents moving forward. She offered the presentation to the other Council members to utilize during their speaking engagements and stated it can be customized to certain areas or issues, so they are all conveying the same message.

Councilman Bonna thanked Chief Niemczyk for what he has done since assuming his new position. He inquired as to how close they were to reaching the 1.6 officers per one thousand residents. Chief Niemczyk stated it was a five-year plan, but they are shooting at a moving target based on projections of anticipated growth. Councilman Bonna stated he echoed the previous comments regarding funding of the safety resource officers and trusted that Chief Niemczyk would negotiate the best deal.

Mayor Martin stated she appreciated the data driven information and the innovations the Police Department is embarking on, as they continue to be the safest city in the state of Florida. She indicated she was looking forward to the training facility and real time operation center, and commented on the possibility of cameras in school zones and redlight cameras.

Councilman Pickett inquired about the legality of redlight cameras. Mayor Martin explained the company can scrub the photos to ensure they are legitimate, but Florida state statute requires that a human reviews them as well. She stated it will require staffing, but there will be more to come. Chief Niemczyk stated that technology is critical for the City, as they deal with growth and staffing issues. Mayor Martin indicated they need to find a balance.

City Manager Merejo thanked all of the directors for their presentations and information. He stated they have a first-class operation, as the organization is being set up for the future, so that someone can step in when he is not there and seamlessly move forward with the operations of the City.

Council Comments:

Councilwoman Morgan expressed that she liked the relaxed and “informalness” vibe of the workshop. She stated it was going to be a tough budget year, as they always try to reduce the millage rate and they have some important items to cover, such as the need for more officers. She thanked everyone involved in the workshop.

Councilman Pickett thanked everyone who presented. He stated they have some challenges ahead, some tough decisions to make, and some cuts will need to be made in order to stay competitive. He indicated he looked forward to seeing the summer budget.

Councilman Bonna thanked everyone for the information that was presented. He stated he was proud of this organization and loves to brag about it. He discussed the accomplishments of the City compared to other cities.

Mayor Martin agreed with Councilman Bonna's comments. She thanked everyone in the room, in the departments, and out in the field. She stated they have built a culture where Staff and Council are always looking for efficiencies by providing data driven methodology and innovations, looking at technology, embracing opportunities, finding a balance, and moving the organization forward for the betterment of their residents. Mayor Martin expressed that she loves having their workshops and reminded everyone that they are all the same or equivalent as they work together. She discussed their accomplishments and stated she would like to communicate same to the residents.

At this time, Kevin Matyjasek announced that Summer Burdick was awarded the Young Leader Award for the State of Florida from the American Public Works Association.

6. Adjourn

There being no further discussion, the meeting adjourned at 11:33 PM.

Sally Walsh, City Clerk

Jasmin De Freese, Deputy City Clerk

Typed by: Traci Mehl, Deputy City Clerk