



**CITY OF MOUNT DORA, FLORIDA  
CITY COUNCIL BUDGET  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
June 9, 2025  
City Hall 510 North Baker Street  
Mount Dora, Florida 32757**

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**CALL TO ORDER**

Having been duly advertised as required by law, at 6:00 p.m., Mayor Homich called to order the City Council Budget Workshop in the City Hall Council Chamber.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

A moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance were led by Mayor Homich.

**ROLL CALL**

Members Present

James Homich, Mayor

John Cataldo, Vice-mayor

Cal Rolfson, District 2

Dennis Dawson, District 3

Marc Crail, District 4

Nate Walker, District 5

Doug Bryant, At-large

Also Present

Vince Sandersfeld, City Manager

Matt Dodson, Budget Officer

Jeanann Hand, City Clerk

**DISCUSSION ITEMS**

1. Budget Parameters and Fire Assessment

Mr. Sandersfeld introduced Budget Officer Matt Dodson, who would be presenting the information for this meeting. The PowerPoint used for the meeting is attached to the minutes as Exhibit A.

Mr. Dodson informed the Council that the Guiding Principles for the budget are as follows: providing high-quality services, strengthening and expanding Mount Dora's infrastructure, enhancing the City of Mount Dora's appearance, ensuring compliance with all federal, state, and local laws and codes, and focusing on succession planning.

While discussing Guiding Principles, Council and staff emphasized the value of succession planning, which ultimately provides savings to the City by establishing a healthy flow of responsibilities across all departments.

Council and staff discussed future assumptions that must be taken into consideration when balancing the budget. Indirect administrative cost allocation, position budgeting, and employee splits affect all of the City's operating funds. Insurance estimates had not yet been received. An expected minor increase in clinic costs was in line with the inflation rate. Property and Casualty, as well as Workers' Compensation insurance rates are expected to increase by 2%.

Mr. Dodson presented information explaining the differences between taxes and charges for services.

Property tax roll update numbers from the Lake County Property Appraiser were received the week before the meeting, showing an 8.33% increase in gross taxable value. A portion of that figure belongs to the CRA and represents the circumstance with no change to the millage rate.

Council discussed the setting of the millage rate and rollback rate, as well as the elimination of services. Further discussion focused on adhering to goals set in the Strategic Plan and spending wisely. Council acknowledged the difficulties of setting a budget while considering a reasonable millage rate. Mr. Sandersfeld spoke about the challenges of operating within the current budget.

Council and staff discussed the Lake County Property Appraiser's publication of the maximum millage rate and the confusion it sometimes causes for the public. They reviewed the history of the City's millage rate and its correlation to the Consumer Price Index.

Mr. Dodson presented a slide showing the impact of FY 24-25 and proposed FY 25-26 taxes on the average resident. Proposed numbers indicate an increase of \$95, which includes the proposed increase in the Fire assessment.

Council and staff discussed the undervaluation of commercial property, the authority of the Lake County assessor to adjust the formula, and an exemption for low-income seniors.

Mr. Dodson spoke about slides presenting a sample of the Lake County Notice of Proposed Property Taxes and Property Change in Values, which showed increases in Countywide and City Taxable Values.

Mr. Dodson reviewed changes in the City's new construction since 2015. Council and staff considered the reasons for last year's decrease, which was attributed to low annexation and new development.

Council and staff then directed their focus to the City's Fire assessment and related matters, beginning with an overview of the proposed FY 25-26 Fire Budget.

Fire Impact Fees are dependent on new development; therefore, if development stops, this fund will not be able to contribute toward the loan. Instead, funds must then be taken from the fire assessment fees. That movement will then subsequently decrease the transfer of remaining funds to the General Fund for support of the Fire Services.

Raising the Fire Assessment Fee by \$30 will provide an additional \$340,000.

Council and staff reviewed figures related to the 2018 Fire Assessment Bond.

The Fire Budget comprises four distinct funds: General Fund Fire Protection, Fire Impact, Fire Assessment, and the 2018 Fire Assessment Bond. The proposed assessment increase would pay for agreed-upon Fire increases this year related to the union and bond payment. An increase in the assessment would decrease the amount Fire takes from the General Fund. The funds would be spent strictly on Fire. This item will be addressed more fully at the July 21<sup>st</sup> Governmental Funds Workshop.

The figures shown are based on estimates of impact fees over the next year. Council and staff spoke about projected impact fees and the sources of funding for the Fire budget.

Council and staff explored the possibility of not increasing the Fire Assessment Fee. Some Council members expressed concern with the structure and fairness of the current Fire Assessment Fee. Council and staff went over the calculations for amounts assessed for residential and commercial properties, as well as the fairness of those numbers.

Fire Chief Joseph Hightower spoke about the establishment of fire assessments nationwide and the methods used for calculation. Council and staff reviewed the history of Council's decisions regarding the Fire Assessment Fee. Residents who qualify for the Fire Assessment Reimbursement Program would not experience an increase in the amount they pay for their reduced rate.

Council members who were present for the first Fire Assessment implementation explained the reason for enacting a rate based on the flat fee recommendation. Bond payments are on schedule, with payments increasing slightly over time.

Buildings begin paying the fire assessment when they are added to the tax roll, which coincides with the timing of their Certificate of Occupancy.

Hightower mentioned Council's option to conduct another study and consider changes based on the results. The Fire assessment resolution was based on data from the National Fire Registry, which took into account both residential and commercial properties, and considered the overall budget to determine the Fire assessment needed to fund the Fire Department fully. A new study would likely result in figures advising the City to raise the rate.

The Council and staff examined the number and classifications of fire calls.

A \$30 increase in the Fire assessment Fee would yield an additional \$340,000 to fund the City's fire services. The June 17<sup>th</sup> City Council agenda has the resolution to set the preliminary fire assessment fee. The final number can be less than the set preliminary fee, but it cannot exceed the preliminary fee.

Council and staff mentioned the Lake County Fire Services meeting.

The Council requested that staff provide further information about the Fire Assessment Hardship program and suggested that the program be more extensively promoted, including publication in the City Newsletter.

The Council and staff went over the impact of this assessment on individuals struggling financially. The Council and staff agreed to examine ways to make this more workable, considering factors such as square footage and differences between residential and commercial assessments.

Mr. Dodson presented information about upcoming meetings, workshops, and public hearings.

Council and staff discussed Council's involvement in operational staffing and budgeting.


Councilmember Rolfson spoke about the Florida League of Cities board meeting and provided information about legislators who will decide whether there should be a significant reduction in property taxes.

Mayor Homich spoke about the June 24 Lake 100 forum on the topic of traffic.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business for discussion, the meeting adjourned at approximately 7:51 p.m.

  
JEANANN HAND, CITY CLERK

  
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JAMES HOMICH, MAYOR  
CITY OF MOUNT DORA