



**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**CITY COUNCIL NEW MEMBER ORIENTATION  
DAY 1**

**Meeting Minutes**

**June 14, 2023  
8:30 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber and Lynwood Roberts Room, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Council Members-Elect Ken Amaro, Raul Arias, Mike Gay, Rahman Johnson, Will Lahnen, Jimmy Peluso, Joe Carlucci, Continuing Council Members Ron Salem, Michael Boylan, Tyrona Clark-Murray, Reggie Gaffney Jr., Ju' Coby Pittman, Nick Howland

**Also:** Margaret Sidman – Director/Council Secretary; Merriane Lahmeur, Sharonda Davis, Heather Pelgrin, Maritza Sanchez, Rebecca Nelson – Legislative Services Division; Jeff Clements, Colleen Hampsey, Cory Armstrong – Council Research Division; Teresa Eichner, Steve Cassada, Eric Grantham, Rhonda Patrick – Council Public Information Division; Yvonne Mitchell, Sharyn Nelson, Nancy Carlos, Crystal Tucker – Administrative Services Division

**Meeting Convened:** 8:32 a.m.

Council President-Elect Ron Salem convened the meeting and the newly elected and continuing council members introduced themselves and their Executive Council Assistants.

Introduction of Council Staff

Council Secretary/Director Margaret Sidman said the meeting would adjourn briefly at 10:00 a.m. for a media event in the City Hall atrium. She reviewed the agenda for the day and the rest of the week and the contents of the orientation manual. Day 3 of the orientation for council members will be held at Jacksonville University's Public Policy Institute and will introduce the City's constitutional officers and independent authorities. Ms. Sidman gave an overview of the City Council budget and the staff divisions. She introduced the chiefs of the various council staff divisions who in turn introduced their division personnel and gave overviews of their divisions' structure and functions.

Yvonne Mitchell, Chief of Administrative Services, reviewed the council members' responsibility for certifying time and attendance for their ECA's timesheet and payroll. She described the Council's safety and security policies for the first floor meeting rooms and the council offices on the fourth floor, including the requirement that all visitors to the council suite must be escorted at all times when in the suite. Meetings with the public should be held in the meeting rooms on the first floor; private meetings with Council staff or the administration can be held in Conference Rooms A and B in the council suite. Ms. Mitchell described the emergency evacuation policy and routes and the Council's evacuation assembly point at the southwest corner of James Weldon Johnson Park.

President-Elect Salem said the Council staff is extremely helpful and provides a wide range of service and assistance to council members to make their job easier. He offered the services of the returning council members to provide practical advice on how best to prepare for meetings and handle the day-to-day functions of the office. He emphasized the importance of tracking ECA time and signing for timesheets and of adhering to the policy of escorting all visitors into and out of the council suite to ensure security for everyone.

Ms. Sidman introduced Deputy Chief Administrative Officer Dr. Charles Moreland and Andre Ayoub, Interim Emergency Preparedness Chief, to discuss emergency preparedness and particularly the process for dealing with tropical storms and hurricanes. When the Emergency Operations Center is activated, City Council will be represented in the Emergency Operations Center by the Council President. The other council members will be informed of events and announcements by way of a conference call before the Mayor makes a public media announcement. The briefing calls typically take place at 8:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. and access is limited to 20 lines – the 19 council members and himself. Dr. Moreland emphasized that the Emergency Preparedness Division is active year-round in dealing with any type of large-scale event that requires a coordinated response. Council Member Salem said the administration does a very good job of keeping the Council informed during emergencies and being responsive to particular needs as they occur. Mr. Ayoub described his 28 years of experience with the Sheriff's Office and said that Jacksonville is a model city for emergency preparedness and coordination and is visited by other cities to learn about our process. He said that good communication is the root of all success.

Ms. Sidman described the Council's role in emergencies under Chapter 674 of the Ordinance Code and the council's Continuation of Operations Plan (COOP). In the event of a declared emergency each council member and staff person will get a phone call, email and text giving directions about calling their direct reports and supervisors to ensure continuity of communication. The 3 alternate council meeting sites are the Ed Ball Building downtown, the Kids Hope Alliance building on the Eastside, and the FSCJ Cecil Field campus. Ms. Sidman said that there will be an active shooter drill for the council and its staff in the future and emphasized the importance of obeying the Council President's directions should there be a need to evacuate the Council Chamber.

Teresa Eichner, Public Information Officer, described the JaxReady system which will be the primary form of communication during an emergency. She urged the members to put the JaxReady phone number and email address into all phones and email accounts so that they are readily identifiable as legitimate and are not blocked as spam.

Ms. Eicher described the process for responding to public record requests, which her division coordinates and responds to. She noted that any communication relating to City business is a public record, whether it be an email or text or phone record on either a City-issued device or a personal device. She pointed out the instructions in the orientation manual for setting cellphones to maintain all messages perpetually so that all relevant public records can be saved. She discussed the individual council member web pages on the City website and how they can be personalized and updated. Ms. Eichner described the equipment at each member's seat on the dais in the Council Chamber and their use during meetings for voting,

requesting permission to speak, use of the microphone, viewing PowerPoint presentations, and accessing other information. She emphasized that every meeting room that has microphones should be treated as if the microphones are live at all times because they very likely are. Council members should be very cognizant that the microphones will pick up anything said in the room and may be recording or streaming the audio to the internet. Ms. Eicher described the operation of the “request to speak” button and the voting system. She reminded the members that when an individual’s microphone button is pushed, the camera automatically pivots to that seat, so the mic button should not be pushed until the member has been recognized to speak.

The meeting was in recess from 9:58 to 10:22 so the members could attend the announcement by Mayor-Elect Donna Deegan of her executive team.

Ms. Eichner said that her staff is responsible for all of the Council’s computer and audio/video equipment both in City Hall and remotely at meetings off-site, including council member town hall meetings.

Ms. Sidman cited a provision in the City Code regarding the prohibition against using the city seal without proper authorization. She noted that the newly elected members should have received a letter and form from the State Division of Elections that needs to be signed and returned. At the council member installation next week there will be a City oath document that needs to be signed and notarized. Ms. Sidman explained City Council “5<sup>th</sup> weeks” which occur when there are 5 Tuesdays in a month. For those weeks there are no council or committee meetings and many staff members take personal leave so office staffing will be minimal during those weeks. She urged council members to take those short-staffed weeks into consideration when scheduling meetings. Ms. Sidman also noted that the City Council takes breaks the first two weeks of July and the last two weeks of December when no meetings are held.

Ms. Sidman gave an overview of parliamentary procedure and the Council Rules in preparation for the mock meeting, including the numbers needed for a quorum at Council and in committees, rules controlling recognition of speakers and time limits on speaking, and rules of decorum.

Merriane Lahmeur, Chief of Legislatives Services, emphasized that 14 members must be present in their seats at a council meeting for the council to transact business, including listening to public comment. She described the process for requesting excusal from a meeting. She described the circumstances when voice votes and electronic ballot votes are required and noted that voting is required unless there is a legitimate conflict of interest and the appropriate conflict form is submitted. Members must be physically present in the room to vote. Ms. Lahmeur described the schedule for release of marked agendas prior to meetings and reviewed the order of business during council meetings pursuant to the Council Rules. President-Elect Salem described the difference between a bill’s introducer and a co-sponsor. Council members introducing legislation may choose to send that legislation to all council members with a request that anyone interested choose to be a co-introducer before the bill is introduced. Ms. Lahmeur noted that names cannot be added as co-sponsors after the legislation has received its final council vote. She briefly reviewed the features of the Legislative Gateway system on the Council’s website, which provides access to agendas, minutes, legislation, meeting videos, and other resources.

The members participated in a mock council meeting to practice using the microphones, making motions, pushing the voting buttons, etc. During the course of the mock meeting, several of the returning council members offered helpful suggestions about preparation for meetings, application of procedural rules, common occurrences, and handling unusual situations.

The session was in recess for lunch from 12:26 to 1:30 p.m.

Council Auditor Kim Taylor described the history of the Auditor's Office set up at the time of consolidation in 1968. Her staff of 18 auditors and several support staff provide three basic services: internal audits, special projects and legislative review. The internal audit team is led by Brian Parks; the special projects team is led by Heather Reber. The Office provides research at the request of the Council as a whole, council committees and individual council members. The Auditor's Office is completely independent of the mayor and the administration pursuant to the City Charter. Internal audits are performance audits, not financial audits. The Auditor's Office is subject to a peer review from the national association of local government auditors every three years. All audits and reports are presented to the City Council and released to the public, and follow-ups occur until all outstanding issues are resolved. Ms. Taylor said that pursuant to state law, all audit work papers are confidential until the audit is complete.

Auditor's Office staff attends the board meetings of the four independent authorities to keep a close eye on their activities. The Kids Hope Alliance budget is reviewed annually because of the size of their budget and the amount of grant funding they receive. The Auditor's Office is responsible for placing recipients of City grant funds on a non-compliance list if they violate any of the provisions of the grants and the reporting requirements.

Phillip Peterson, head of the legislative review team, described how legislation is reviewed and explained that the staff is always available to answer questions and provide more detailed information to help council members understand the issues. The staff attends all of the standing committee meetings except for the LUZ Committee. The Auditor's Office staff marks up the committee agendas with amendments and informative notes, and the marked agendas come out on the Friday afternoon before committee week. He explained how the Auditor's Office works with the administrative departments to clarify issues and propose technical amendments on the marked agendas. Their proposed amendments are technical in nature, and other recommendations and concerns are included to assist the Council in making its policy decisions. The office also produces quarterly reports on the status and activities of each of the 14 council district bond funds. He noted that a bill is pending to appropriate \$100,000 to each of the 14 council districts for council member priorities. Ms. Taylor noted that in the past, projects that have been approved by outgoing council members in the final weeks of their terms have been rescinded by incoming council members if the funds have not yet been contractually encumbered.

Ms. Taylor stated that the full budget approved by the City Council (including the independent authorities and constitutional officers) is approximately \$7.7 billion. Her office reviews revenue projections and proposed expenditures in great detail to present to the Finance Committee during budget hearings. They especially look for any changes in service levels that may not be obvious at first glance. She outlined the budget timeline which begins with the Mayor's Office and Finance Department in the early spring, is officially presented to the City Council in mid-July, and is approved by Council at the last meeting in September following budget hearings during the month of August. The Council will set the tentative maximum millage rate at its first meeting after the July summer break. Ms. Taylor explained the "rolled back millage rate" notification requirement under state law. Council has the ability to reduce the millage rate during the budget hearing process, but increasing the rate above the advertised TRIM notice amount incurs another round of mailed notices to all property owners at a cost exceeding \$300,000.

Ms. Taylor briefly explained the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) process and how projects roll forward from year to year to funded status in Year 1. She said the current year's CIP was considerably larger than in previous years. A full day of the budget hearings is devoted to the CIP. In response to a question from Council Member-elect Amaro, Ms. Taylor said the City has very healthy reserves and good bond ratings, although the ratings vary from issue to issue depending on the funding source. Council Member Salem said the City's reserves have been growing substantially during the Curry administration to the current solid levels and that is very important because emergency costs (such as hurricane response and cleanups)

must be paid for out of those reserves and then reimbursement sought from FEMA, which takes many years to receive.

Ms. Sidman introduced representatives of various administrative departments to discuss executive branch functions. Monica Cichowlas presented MyJax and the 630-CITY customer service center and how it can be accessed by citizens via a website, telephone, email and smartphone app. The highest volume of calls is received for solid waste issues. She described how the calls are received, referred to the appropriate department and eventually closed out. She noted that a state law changed last year that required that all complaints and service requests must be accompanied by a name, so no anonymous complaints may be taken and the names of complainants are a matter of public record.

Thomas Register, the Chief of Municipal Code Enforcement, described the areas the division inspects and enforces. His division participates in several multi-agency enforcement actions, including the Drug Abatement Response Team (DART). He explained the limitations on his staff that come with obeying Constitutional requirements for reasonable expectations of privacy by residents and property owners and the requirements for due process. Mr. Register described the enforcement processes and the appeal process. Code Enforcement enforces a variety of City codes, including nuisance properties, the Zoning Code, tree issues, junk vehicles, litter signs, and problem pools. Court injunctions and property foreclosure are available but seldom used enforcement mechanisms.

Steve Long, Director of Public Works, described his department's organizational structure and areas of responsibility and presented numerous statistics describing the department's assets and workload. Will Williams, the department's Operations Director, listed the most common citizen complaints that will likely come to council members that relate to the Public Works Department. The department's divisions include: Right-of-Way and Stormwater Maintenance; Mowing and Landscape Maintenance; Public Buildings; Solid Waste; Real Estate; Engineering and Construction Management; and Traffic Engineering. Mr. Long said that solid waste calls are the most common type of complaint, but really represent a very small percentage of the 3 million service calls performed by the waste haulers each month. Mr. Williams presented a list of common requests the department receives that are not within its area of responsibility and explained which department or other agency is actually responsible.

Kevin Jones with the JFRD Fire Marshall's Office described his agency's functions which include enforcing the state's fire prevention code via inspections of new and renovated buildings and food trucks. The Fire Marshall participates in interagency inspections and enforcement actions, including the DART team and targeted blight enforcement efforts.

Andre Ayoub, Chief of the Emergency Preparedness Division described the Incident Command System (ICS) which is used for all types of large incidents, from hurricanes to the Florida/Georgia football game to large festivals, road races and the like. The public information officers of all participating agencies coordinate through the ICS to release one set of information and notices so there is one coherent message reaching the public. Chief Ayoub described City Council's role during an active incident. As described earlier in the day, the Council will be briefed by the EOC via twice-a-day conference calls before the Mayor makes public statements to the media. He urged council members to direct all questions or requests for assistance to himself or Deputy CAO Moreland rather than calling department heads directly. He urged council members to assist his division to reinforce official instructions, evacuation orders, etc. to the public so that a consistent message is being delivered and reinforced to have the greatest effect. The 2023-24 hurricane readiness guide will be released shortly.

Keith Powers, Chief of the Fire and Rescue Department, said the department is one of the best in the country because of the quality of the men and women who ride the streets every day doing the job that needs to be done. He invited every council member to do ride-alongs to see exactly what the department

does every day to protect and serve the public. Council Member Salem said he did a ride-along when he was first elected to the council and found it a very enlightening experience.

Ms. Sidman said tomorrow will focus on ethics and information provided by the Office of General Counsel on the legislative process, quasi-judicial proceedings and the like..

**Meeting adjourned:** 3:35 p.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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