

**REGULAR MEETING  
DESTIN CITY COUNCIL  
JANUARY 20, 2026  
ANNEX COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

The Council of the City of Destin met in regular session with the following members and staff present:

Destin City Council

Mayor Bobby Wagner  
Councilmember Torey Geile  
Councilmember Jim Bagby  
Councilmember Terésa Hebert

Councilmember Dewey Destin  
Councilmember Rodney Braden  
Councilmember Sandy Trammell

Destin City Staff

City Manager Larry Jones  
Public Works Director Michael Burgess  
Public Information Director Tamara Young  
City Engineer Robert Tomasek  
Community Development Director David Prichard  
Projects/Grants/Contract Manager Jeffrey Cozadd  
City Attorney Kimberly Kopp

City Clerk Rey Bailey  
Parks & Recreation Director Lisa Firth  
Principal Planner Daniel Butler  
Finance Director Krystal Strickland  
HR Director Jaime Haynes  
IT Director Andy Peters  
Building Official Noell Bell

**CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mayor Bobby Wagner called the meeting to order at 6:20 PM. Pastor David J. Butler gave the invocation, which was then followed by the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

**AGENDA APPROVAL**

Councilmember Trammell requested that agenda item 6B(1) be pulled from the agenda.

Councilmember Braden requested that Consent Agenda item 3A be pulled for further discussion.

**Motion by Councilmember Trammell, seconded by Councilmember Hebert, to approve the agenda, as amended, passed 6-0. Councilmember Schmidt was absent from the meeting.**

- 1. PROCLAMATIONS / RECOGNITIONS / SPECIAL / PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS / ANNOUNCEMENTS**
- 2. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Cameron, a resident of Indian Bayou North, encouraged the council to consider creating a tool library, similar to a regular library, where Destin residents could borrow tools for one-time use rather than purchasing them.

Mr. Ricky Lynn Grant Jr., of 175 Main Street, addressed the council with general remarks about becoming involved in the community, working with others, and pursuing personal goals, including regaining his driver's license and continuing to build a future in Destin. He expressed appreciation for the council and community, stated his desire to contribute positively, and emphasized wanting people to get along and support one another.

Mr. John Stephens, of 425 Indian Trail, informed the council that Okaloosa County's annual water safety meeting would be held the upcoming Thursday from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center and requested that Code Compliance email all Destin livery operators to encourage their attendance, noting that because Destin has its own ordinance, attendance is not otherwise required.

### 3. CONSENT AGENDA

#### A. Destin Fire District-Beach Safety Contract 2026

Councilmember Braden asked that the item be pulled for further discussion because he wanted clarification on what authority the city has over activity in the water. He questioned why the city funds lifeguard services and supports law enforcement responses for people in distress in the Gulf, yet appears unable to address vendors operating in shallow water just beyond the city's jurisdiction. He expressed concern that this creates an inconsistency in how safety and enforcement are handled. He also raised liability concerns, noting that vendors in ankle- or knee-deep water could draw children and other beachgoers into potentially dangerous conditions, such as rough surf, stingrays, or other hazards.

In response, staff noted that while the jurisdictional issue is a valid point, the city has historically chosen to help fund beach safety services as part of its responsibility to protect residents and visitors.

Councilmember Bagby then argued that Destin's vision as a family-oriented beach and fishing community supports funding lifeguards and related safety measures because the beach and Gulf are central to the city's identity and tourism economy. At the same time, he agreed that the vending issue warranted more review. Bagby proposed delaying Item 3A until the next regular meeting so staff could examine whether lifeguards could act only as observers or "scouts" who report violations to code enforcement, rather than directly enforcing rules; and whether any reimbursement or adjustment could apply if beach closures lasted for an extended period. The City Attorney cautioned that some vending issues were the subject of litigation and should not be discussed too deeply in the meeting.

**Councilmember Bagby moved to table agenda item 3A to the February 2<sup>nd</sup> city council meeting, seconded by Councilmember Trammell. Motion passed 5-1; with Councilmember Destin dissenting. Councilmember Schmidt was absent from the meeting.**

#### B. Approval of minutes of December 1, 2025, Regular City Council Meeting

**Councilmember Hebert moved to approve Consent Agenda item 3B, as printed above, seconded by Councilmember Trammell. Motion passed 6-0.**

#### 4. CITY MANAGER REPORTS

##### A. Hayes' Lien Reduction Request 3861 Indian Trail, #102

The City Attorney introduced the item concerning a lien reduction request under Sections 14-86 and 14-87 of the City Code for the property located at 3861 Indian Trail, Unit 102. She advised that, as of January 12, 2026, code compliance staff had informed the property owners that the outstanding lien totaled \$17,700, consisting of approximately 334 days of noncompliance at \$50 per day, plus \$1,000 in administrative fines arising from two prior code enforcement hearings. She explained that the property owners were preparing to sell the home, with closing anticipated on February 2, 2026.

Mrs. Hayes then addressed the council and requested relief from the fines. She explained that in late 2023 or early 2024 her grandmother had moved into the three-story townhouse, and her husband constructed an exterior staircase without first obtaining a permit in order to provide a safe means of egress. She stated that her husband had attempted to work through the permit process, including coming to City Hall for assistance, but found the system confusing. Mrs. Hayes said the staircase was removed within the compliance period ordered by the magistrate and the home was restored, and they believed they had satisfied the city's requirements. She stated they understood the two \$500 hearing-related fees had been imposed, but did not realize that failing to pay those fees would keep the case in noncompliance and cause the \$50-per-day fine to continue accruing. She also described subsequent personal hardships, including her grandmother's passing, both spouses losing their jobs, and filing bankruptcy, and asked the council to reduce the fines so the home could be sold without placing the family at risk of foreclosure. Later in the discussion, she also confirmed that a separate unpermitted roof/enclosure issue at the property would be removed before the February 2 closing so the buyer would not inherit that violation.

**Councilmember Trammell made the initial motion to reduce the lien to \$1,700 total, which was seconded by Councilmember Destin.**

During general discussion, some council members raised concerns about whether property owners had received clear notice that unpaid administrative fines would continue to trigger daily accruals, and staff acknowledged this case predated council's more recent direction regarding enhanced notice procedures. Staff also clarified that there was a separate, subsequent violation on the property involving an enclosed second-story balcony/roof structure that was not part of the lien currently before the council, but which the owners were in the process of removing. Council members debated whether repeated lien reductions were undermining the purpose of the magistrate and code enforcement process, with some expressing frustration that liens were often negotiated down only when properties were being sold, while others noted past problems with the permitting system and the need for compassion and clearer follow-up procedures. There was also discussion about the approximately 20 older liens still outstanding, ongoing efforts to contact those property owners, and whether the city's percentage-based lien reduction policy was functioning as intended or needed revision.

**Councilmember Bagby offered a substitute motion to assess a \$1,000 administrative fee and reduce the lien to \$3,000, for a combined total of \$4,000, contingent upon correction of the current violation prior to February 2 and without the need for a Special Magistrate hearing. Motion passed 4-2, with Council members Geile and Braden dissenting.**

Following disposition of the lien request, **Councilmember Bagby made a motion to direct staff to place the current lien-reduction policy on the agenda for the next council meeting for full discussion and possible action. As part of this agenda item, staff is to provide the total number of outstanding cases,**

the total dollar value of the associated fines, confirmation that follow-up has been made on all cases, and any recommended revisions or alternative policy options that the council can realistically and consistently enforce; and for the council to establish a clear, enforceable policy that provides direction to staff and ensures consistent application going forward. Councilmember Destin provided a second to the motion, which passed 5-1, with Councilmember Geile dissenting.

B. Mayor Pro Tem – Discussion

**Councilmember Bagby moved to appoint Councilmember Terésa Hebert as the city's Mayor Pro Tem. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Destin and passed 6-0.**

Councilmember Trammell noted she would like to discuss, during the upcoming Visioning Session, whether current council committee assignments are still working for all members. The concern is that some members are unable to regularly attend committee meetings due to work schedules or other commitments. Councilmember Trammell suggests having a single, consolidated discussion to determine who wishes to remain on their assigned committees and to make any needed changes at one time.

The City Manager noted that the Visioning Session agenda already includes an appropriate item for this discussion – Item 6C, titled *Individual Leadership Commitments* – and advised that this topic could be addressed under that agenda item.

C. RFB 25-18-PW Pavement Marking/Road Striping Continuing Services, authorization to execute a contract

**Motion by Councilmember Destin, seconded by Councilmember Hebert, to authorize the City Manager to execute a three-year contract with Emerald Coast Striping, LLC through December 31, 2028, passed 6-0.**

D. RFB 25-14-PW, Fire Equipment, Alarm Monitoring, and Life Safety Systems, authorization to execute a contract

**Councilmember Bagby moved to award RFB 25-14-PW, Fire Equipment, Alarm Monitoring, and Life Safety Systems Services to B&C Fire Safety, Inc., and authorize the City Manager to negotiate a continuing services contract for a three-year term with two optional one-year renewals and to bring the contract back for council approval at the first meeting in February 2026. Councilmember Destin seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.**

- E. Capital Project Status - Informational Only
- F. TDC Monthly Report - Informational Only
- G. Operations Financial Report - Informational Only
- H. Quarterly Investment Report - Informational Only

**Councilmember Trammell moved to direct staff to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) to review the city's investment portfolio at this time. Motion was seconded by Councilmember Hebert and passed 6-0.**

- I. Minutes of Standing Boards and Committees - Informational Only
- J. Announcements

The City Manager provided an update on several legislative matters currently under consideration in Tallahassee that could significantly affect local governments.

- 1) Regarding property taxes, multiple proposals are still being discussed and have not yet been settled into a final form. Early indications suggest the focus may be on homesteaded properties, including potential expansion of homestead exemptions, possibly up to a full exemption. Council will be kept informed as more definitive information becomes available.
- 2) House Bill 103 and Senate Bill 122, which address local business taxes, are commonly referred to as Business Tax Receipts. These bills would eliminate most local authority to levy business taxes statewide, with only limited exceptions that generally do not apply to the City of Destin. If enacted, the legislation would permanently remove a local revenue source, reduce the City's ability to align revenues with service demands, limit future budget flexibility, and further erode local financial control.
- 3) Senate Bill 548 and House Bill 1139 were presented as legislation affecting impact fees. These bills would make it significantly more difficult for cities to raise or adjust impact fees, which are paid by new development to help fund infrastructure such as roads and utilities. While promoted as a measure to reduce housing costs, the legislation would limit increases even when infrastructure demands grow, shift costs from new development to existing residents, increase legal risks if fees are challenged, and reduce funding options for capital improvements.
- 4) Senate Bill 1138 and House Bill 927, which deal with qualified contractors. This legislation would allow private contractors to certify that development projects meet city requirements and would require cities to accept those certifications without discretion. For a city the size of Destin, this would require certifying multiple contractors whose approvals would effectively replace the City's review authority, significantly reducing local oversight of development approvals.
- 5) House Bill 1049 concerning building permit requirements. This bill would expand the types of home improvement projects that do not require a building permit and limit the City's ability to tailor permitting rules to local conditions. Specifically, projects costing less than \$7,500 would be exempt from permitting requirements, creating concerns about oversight and enforcement.
- 6) Additional building permit legislation was discussed, including House Bill 803 and Senate Bill 1234. These bills would establish more uniform statewide timelines for permit issuance and inspections and expand the use of private inspectors. While these changes could speed up approvals, they would reduce flexibility for cities managing complex developments, particularly in coastal and flood-prone areas.
- 7) Senate Bill 840, described as a corrective measure to Senate Bill 180. While the full extent of the fix is still unclear, the bill would reduce the affected area from 100 miles to 50 miles and shorten the applicable timeframe so that it expires on July 1 of this year instead of 2027. The bill is sponsored by the same legislator as Senate Bill 180, which may help advance the effort and provide some relief.

The City Manager concluded by offering to convey any council actions or positions to Tallahassee and confirmed that staff will continue to monitor these legislative issues and keep the council apprised as they move forward.

- 8) The mayor updated the council on the status of the Marler Bridge, noting that the PD&E study is currently on hold pending completion of a rehabilitation versus replacement analysis. He stated there is no other reason for the delay. The mayor recommended that the City of Destin proactively engage FDOT leadership to clearly communicate the City's position that bridge replacement is preferable to rehabilitation, citing safety, evacuation routes, level of service, intercoastal connectivity, height limitations, military support, land-use consistency, and long-term planning considerations. He requested council directions to allow him and the City Manager to meet directly with FDOT to convey the council's objectives.

**Councilmember Hebert moved to authorize the mayor and the City Manager to meet with FDOT leadership in Chipley to discuss the Marler Bridge, and to convey the city council's objectives and concerns. Motion was seconded by Councilmember Bagby and passed 6-0.**

Additional announcements from the Public Information Director:

- 9) The city will hold its visioning session on Friday at 9:00 a.m. at the Annex. Several community partners have already confirmed their attendance, including Destin Fire, the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office, and the Chamber. Representatives from these organizations will be present, and the public is encouraged and welcome to attend.
- 10) The city would like to extend sincere thanks to Congressman Petronis, Senator Scott, their respective offices, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and all the citizens who participated in the letter-writing campaign related to navigational aids. Their collective efforts were greatly appreciated.
- 11) Regarding navigational aids, the city has seen some initial progress with lights recently being installed. More importantly, the U.S. Coast Guard has now committed funding for the necessary infrastructure improvements. The city is currently awaiting a timeline for when this work will be completed.
- 12) The annexation survey officially closed today, with a total of 151 responses received. The consultant has provided the raw data, which staff will compile into clear, easy-to-read pie charts for Council's review.
- 13) The compiled survey results will be distributed to council within the next couple of days. Survey calls have concluded, all data has been collected, and staff will meet tomorrow to review, filter, and finalize the remaining charts before sharing the information.

## **5. PUBLIC HEARINGS**

- A. First reading of Ordinance 25-26-LC - an ordinance of the City of Destin, Florida, Deleting section 7.13.00. "Nonconforming Uses and Structures" and section 16.08.00. "Nonconforming Signs", of the Land Development Code and creating a new Article 3 "Nonconformities"; amending and updating regulations relating to Nonconformities; creating an exception for structures located within the South Harbor Mixed Use district (SHMU) that are damaged by natural disasters or certain other forces majeure by greater than fifty percent as set forth herein.

The City Attorney read proposed Ordinance 25-26-LC by title, and then presented it to the city council on first reading.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF DESTIN, FLORIDA, DELETING SECTION 7.13.00. "NONCONFORMING USES AND STRUCTURES" AND SECTION 16.08.00. "NONCONFORMING SIGNS", OF THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE AND CREATING A NEW ARTICLE 3 "NONCONFORMITIES"; AMENDING AND UPDATING REGULATIONS RELATING TO NONCONFORMITIES; CREATING AN EXCEPTION FOR STRUCTURES LOCATED WITHIN THE SOUTH HARBOR MIXED USE DISTRICT (SHMU) THAT ARE DAMAGED BY NATURAL DISASTERS OR CERTAIN OTHER FORCES MAJEURE BY GREATER THAN FIFTY PERCENT AS SET FORTH HEREIN; PROVIDING FOR AUTHORITY; PROVIDING FOR FINDINGS OF FACT; PROVIDING FOR INCORPORATION INTO THE LAND DEVELOPMENT CODE; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICTING PROVISIONS; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

The mayor opened a public hearing to receive comments for or against the proposed ordinance. Having none, the mayor closed the public hearing and turned the matter over to the city council for discussion and consideration.

**Councilmember Bagby moved for the approval of Ordinance 25-26-LC on first reading with the amendment that paragraph 3.06 specify that billboards may not be improved. Motion was seconded by Councilmember Hebert.**

As explained by the Community Development Director, the existing language stated that offsite signs, billboards, or permanent outdoor advertising sign structures or portions thereof requiring a building permit "shall not be repaired or replaced." At Councilmember Bagby's request, the word "improved" was added so the revised language would read that such signs or structures "shall not be improved, repaired, or replaced."

Councilmember Bagby explained that he requested this change to prevent billboards from being upgraded in ways that would allow them to remain in use indefinitely, specifically mentioning additions such as solar panels and lights. He indicated that without including the word "improved," the ordinance might still allow enhancements that would extend the life and continued operation of these structures.

More discussion followed regarding the broader purpose of the ordinance. Councilmember Braden expressed concern about the stated goal of preserving the harbor's heritage, commenting that he had not been shown any buildings in the area that represented that heritage and questioning what, specifically, the ordinance was preserving. He also remarked that some buildings in the area should be removed and suggested that if structures were destroyed by a hurricane, they should be allowed to be rebuilt subject to applicable updates. Councilmember Destin disputed the idea that the city had no heritage.

**Motion passed 4-2, with Council members Geile and Braden dissenting.**

#### **6. COMMENTS/PRESENTATIONS FROM MAYOR, COUNCIL, AND CITY ATTORNEY**

- A. Councilmember Braden
- B. Councilmember Trammell
  - 1) Nomination of Ms. Megan Gehlbach to the Board of Adjustment

Item pulled from the agenda.

Councilmember Trammell addressed ongoing correspondence requesting support for a resolution opposing offshore drilling in the Gulf. She expressed concern that, despite the city having previously taken action on this issue, the requests continue to suggest no resolution has been completed. Staff will follow up to confirm whether the resolution was formally adopted and transmitted, and if not, to bring a resolution back to council at the next meeting.

Councilmember Trammell shared information on behalf of the Parks Foundation regarding a conceptual rendering for improvements to the pavilion at Clement Taylor Park. The rendering reflects a design inspired by the site's historical significance as the location of the original schoolhouse. She emphasized that the image is only a concept and that no permitting or formal city approvals have been requested at this time. The Foundation will begin fundraising efforts, including a "buy-a-brick" initiative, with its first fundraiser scheduled for Friday, February 13, at LaPaz Restaurant and Local Market. Council members will receive invitations to the event.

C. Councilmember Destin

**Councilmember Destin moved to direct the mayor, in coordination with the City Manager and City Attorney, to prepare a presentation and deliver it at the County Commission's second meeting in February. The purpose of the presentation is to inform the County Commission that the city is prepared to participate in their efforts to comply with the State's directives and to work collaboratively toward an interlocal agreement. The motion further directs that the city's cooperative efforts be communicated to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and other affected state officials to demonstrate the city's good-faith compliance with those directives. Motion was seconded by Councilmember Braden and passed 6-0.**

D. Councilmember Bagby

**Councilmember Bagby made a motion directing staff to draft a resolution, along with a cover letter, addressed to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, with courtesy copies to the Cabinet and the local legislative delegation. The resolution would request that the City of Destin be named in the lease agreement as the managing entity for the four-acre park, based on the city's ownership of the roadway through the park and its management of an adjoining parcel. Councilmember Hebert seconded the motion, which passed 6-0.**

Councilmember Bagby stated that the drafted resolution is not to be transmitted at this time and must return to the city council for further consideration. He explained that sending the resolution would be contingent upon the outcome of the Mayor's and City Manager's presentation to the Board of County Commissioners, specifically at their second meeting in February. If that presentation does not result in the desired action by the city, Councilmember Bagby indicated he would then move for the resolution to be sent.

**Councilmember Bagby made a motion to approve the Harbor CRA Work Plan as presented by the Harbor CRA Board Chairman earlier this evening. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Hebert and passed, 6-0.**

E. Councilmember Hebert

F. Councilmember Geile

Council discussed a request related to a minor development order for a canopy over an existing paved area, expressing concern that the LDC language required unnecessary fees and review for projects that do not change use, intensity, or impervious surface. Members agreed the issue stemmed from code interpretation and outdated wording, not staff action. The council emphasized the need for clearer LDC language to avoid similar situations in the future.

**Councilmember Geile made a motion directing staff to review and address the issue through code clarification or amendment, seconded by Councilmember Hebert. The motion passed 6-0.**

G. Councilmember Schmidt

H. Mayor Wagner

I. City Attorney

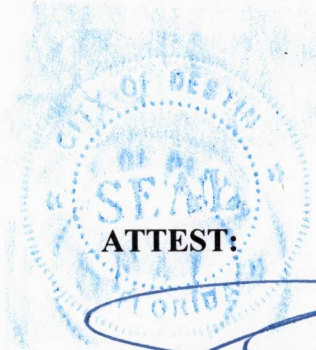
1) City Manager Contract - Anniversary of Agreement

**Motion by Councilmember Bagby, seconded by Councilmember Trammell to approve a performance/retention-based fee increase of 4% in addition to the City Manager's cost-of-living adjustment passed 6-0.**

**7. PUBLIC COMMENTS**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Having no further business at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM**



**ATTEST:**

**Rey Bailey, City Clerk**

**Bobby Wagner, Mayor**