

**CITY OF TALLADEGA**  
**CITY COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING**  
**July 14, 2025 – 5:30pm**

The City Council of the City of Talladega met in a regular meeting on Monday, July 14, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. in the Talladega City Hall Chambers. The meeting was called to order and the following were present: Council President Hugh Sims, Councilman Steve Dickerson, Council Member Vickey Hall, Council Member Betty Spratlin, Fire Chief Danny Warwick, and Mayor Ashton Hall.

Moment of Silence.

Public hearing was opened for anyone who wished to comment and/or object to the ten (10) properties set for weed abatement. No one was present to comment and the public hearing was closed.

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Council Member Spratlin to approve invoices and expenditures. Roll Call. AYES: All.

<b>Total Invoices &amp; Expenditures from 6/12/2025-7/3/2025</b>		<b>\$583,438.97</b>
General Fund	388,943.13	
Corrections Fund	12,629.75	
Municipal Airport	2,624.60	
Capital Projects Trust Fund	179,241.49	

Motion by Council President Sims with a second from Councilman Dickerson for the approval of the minutes of the Regular Meeting on July 14, 2025. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Council President Sims deferred to Code Enforcement Officer Kirk for an update regarding the property located at 1310 Alabama Highway 21. Officer Kirk reported that the property has been an ongoing issue for approximately three years. He acknowledged the assistance of Attorney O’Brien in helping to rewrite the City’s ordinance, which has strengthened enforcement efforts. As a result, the situation at this property has recently been addressed and brought into compliance. However, Officer Kirk noted the property owner has a history of noncompliance, and Code Enforcement will continue to monitor the site closely. If the owner violates regulations again, action will be taken promptly. Officer Kirk emphasized the property’s location along a major thoroughfare into the city, noting that the condition of the sidewalk poses a hazard, especially for visually impaired students. He mentioned that sidewalk improvements are expected under a grant and suggested this be brought to the Council’s attention.

He also discussed the ongoing nature of abatement issues, citing another property at 385 Pinehurst Drive where the owner requested an extension on the final allowable day. The extension was granted, but the property was deliberately kept on the agenda so that, if no action is taken, the City can direct Public Works to proceed with abatement. Council President Sims added that, as far as he knows, no Council decision is needed at this time, as the issue has already been handled. He clarified for those unfamiliar that the property in question is the former Garrett Auto building on Highway 21 entering town. He thanked Officer Kirk and his work on the matter.

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Council President Sims to accept the resignation of Josephine McKinney on the Talladega Redevelopment Authority. AYES: All.

David Andrews with the Center for Municipal Solutions came before the Council to provide information regarding a proposal to buy out the lease for the cell tower located on George Holdridge Lane. The City owns the property where the tower is located, and the lease is currently held by AT&T. Harmony Towers is interested in purchasing the lease rights. Mr. Andrews advised against accepting the offer, stating that the proposed buyout represents only 8.95% of the remaining lease value. If accepted, the City would see a projected loss of just under \$2.5 million in revenue. Council President Sims noted that there was some additional information forthcoming from City Manager Swanson and that the matter would be tabled.

Council President Sims deferred to Donnie Miller from the Chamber of Commerce regarding an update economic development. Mr. Miller addressed the Council, joined by Charlie Diggs, stating that they recently became aware that the City had already established a Redevelopment Authority. Upon review, it was found that the Authority is active but has had minimal activity. Two members have already rolled off the board, and two more terms, including Diggs', are set to expire in November 2025.

Mr. Miller noted that after a recent meeting between the Chamber and local business leaders, there was renewed interest in revitalizing the Authority. A list of recommended board members was presented to the Council for consideration. He explained that two members from the previous Authority have officially resigned, and their letters were submitted to Council Member Hall. Charlie Diggs expressed his interest in remaining on the board for a new six-year term. Dr. Patterson is also willing to continue serving and has two years left on her current term. Mr. Miller emphasized the importance of appointing new members with diverse expertise; specifically in law, accounting, and business ownership, in order to strengthen the TRA's ability to support local economic development. He urged the Council to review the submitted names and take action as soon as possible.

Council President Sims asked Mr. Miller if he had information on the term lengths for the proposed TRA board members Ken Allen and Meacham. Miller responded that there would be two four-year terms and two six-year terms. He explained that once Dr. Patterson's term ends, her replacement would serve a six-year term. Council Member Spratlin then asked whether the Council needed to formally accept the resignation of Josephine McKinney. Mr. Miller confirmed that the resignation would need to be accepted in order for the Council to proceed with new appointments. Council President Sims stated that the main task at hand would be determining the length of the new terms and suggested the matter could be discussed further and decided at the next meeting.

Mr. Miller explained the reasoning behind the proposal, noting that the initiative involves working with a company out of Birmingham led by Chuck Branch, a planner who currently handles development projects for the City of Lincoln. Branch maps out entire areas, identifies available properties, and facilitates development opportunities. Mr. Miller shared that when he traveled to Las Vegas in May with Lincoln's Mayor Watson, Branch arranged seven meetings for the mayor with various developers, many of whom were specifically looking for opportunities in small towns and vacant buildings. He also emphasized that Talladega has a larger population than Lincoln and is located in a prime area for development—it just needs to be marketed. He referenced a plan previously done when he served on the Council in 2018 under Mayor Bryant and noted that Chuck Branch represents several developers. Mr. Miller stated that the program implemented in Lincoln was very successful and that this opportunity would come at no cost to the City and offered to arrange for Branch to come present if the Council was interested and urged them to consider the value of the proposal. He emphasized that promoting Talladega through venues like this is vital, especially given the large-scale attendance at the Las Vegas convention, which included over half a million participants. He noted that developers and business leaders are actively seeking locations, and Talladega has several unique selling points including CMP, Top Trails, Shocco Springs, and the Talladega Superspeedway.

Council President Sims asked for clarification on whether there would be a cost associated with Chuck Branch's services. Donnie Miller responded that the comprehensive development plan would cost between \$20,000 and \$35,000. The plan would include mapping a 5-, 10-, and 50-mile radius of Talladega and identifying key selling points to attract developers. Council President Sims asked if Branch had been involved in the recent development in Lincoln, to which Mr. Miller confirmed that he played a major role and is a well-known figure in retail development and planning. He also encouraged the Council to seriously consider hearing from Branch, noting that he would be willing to meet during the day or in a work session. Council President Sims clarified that there would be no cost just to have Branch come speak, and Mr. Miller confirmed that was correct. Council President Sims stated he would like to have Branch come in and present. Councilman Dickerson suggested the presentation could occur outside of a regular Council meeting, and Council President Sims proposed a work session or special called meeting, indicating interest in learning more. Mr. Miller shared that the presentation would last about 30–35 minutes and would include a detailed book compiling all available properties in Talladega and surrounding areas, along with an analysis of their development potential. He stressed that sometimes a city has to spend money to make money, and that this initiative could support local retail efforts and help market available properties. Finally, Mr. Miller handed out copies of a magazine featuring a story about Talladega, noting that it is the first issue, available for free at the Chamber and the Finance Office, and thanked the Council for their support as a sponsor.

Councilman Dickerson asked whether Chuck Branch's services included any workshops or business sessions with potential or current business owners. Donnie Miller responded that he wasn't sure about formal workshops but explained that during the trip to Las Vegas, Branch had arranged multiple daily meetings with different types of developers, typically two in the morning and three in the afternoon. In between those meetings, they also explored the convention and spoke with a variety of developers. Mr. Miller emphasized the importance of understanding demographics in smaller towns, sharing an example used by one developer: if someone is driving with three kids and comes across twelve restaurants, are they expected to stop at each one? Developers look at trends and simplicity, placing something like Raising Cane's on the bypass or main road could appeal to families because kids often want chicken fingers. Mr. Miller also noted that attractions like Shocco Springs brought 65,000

visitors into Talladega last year alone, reinforcing the City's potential to attract and support new businesses. Council President Sims thanked Mr. Miller and expressed appreciation for his willingness to serve and acknowledged the contributions he has already made to the City of Talladega.

Next on the agenda was the cell tower lease buyout proposal. David Andrews from the Center for Municipal Solutions (CMS) provided background information and analysis regarding the lease. He explained that approximately five years ago, the City entered into a lease agreement with AT&T to construct a cell tower on City-owned Public Works property. The initial lease term was five years and is set to expire in August. The agreement allows for seventeen additional five-year renewal terms, for a total possible lease duration of 95 years if both parties choose to continue. The original rent was \$1,000 per month (\$12,000 annually), and it increases by 10% at the start of each renewal period. Starting in October, the monthly rent will increase to \$1,100, and this 10% escalation continues every five years for the full term of the lease. Mr. Andrews noted that this is the first time the City has had a cell tower on its property and is reviewing a proposal of this nature. The City recently received a buyout proposal from a company called Tower Alliance, which approaches municipalities with existing leases and offers lump-sum or installment payments in exchange for taking over the lease. Tower Alliance presented three options: (1) 36 monthly payments of \$6,660.67 totaling \$240,012; (2) 60 monthly payments of \$4,000, also totaling \$240,000; and (3) a one-time lump-sum payment of \$240,000. All three options represent approximately 8.95% of the total estimated lease revenue. Mr. Andrews emphasized that from a consulting standpoint, this offer is significantly below market value, and CMS does not recommend accepting it. He advised the Council to vote on whether to consider the proposal. If the Council is not interested, the City Clerk can notify the company accordingly. He also reiterated that CMS does not support accepting the proposal, given that \$240,000 is only about 8% of the potential lease value. Council President Sims noted that AT&T could choose to terminate the lease in five years. Mr. Andrews acknowledged that it is possible, but pointed out that over the next five years, the City would still gain approximately \$66,000 in revenue. He explained that companies like Tower Alliance are essentially betting that AT&T will maintain the lease long-term. From his professional experience working with CMS since 2007, he stated that he has not seen a single lease canceled by a carrier in any of the cities CMS has worked with. While it is technically possible for AT&T to cancel, he emphasized it is unlikely. He also clarified that the City has the option to cancel the lease at the end of any five-year term if it chooses. Council President Sims then asked if there were any questions and, hearing none, recommended tabling the item until the next meeting.

Council President Sims deferred to Lauren Deal to about the Ritz Theatre sign. Ms. Deal explained that the City has been working on installing a digital billboard on the downtown square. The only planned change involves replacing the two white message boards on the marquee, as shown on the second page of the presentation materials. She emphasized that the City received a grant to cover the full cost of the project, so there will be no expense to the City. Ms. Deal stressed that the main concern is safety as currently, someone has to climb a 20-foot ladder in all types of weather to change the sign, which poses a significant risk. She added that the digital sign would also allow the City to display emergency weather alerts within five minutes, greatly improving public communication. Ms. Deal requested the Council's approval to move forward with the marquee improvements and to authorize the City Manager, Mr. Swanson, to sign the sign permit. She clarified that the neon elements of the sign will remain and that many historic theatres are making similar updates. Council President Sims asked when the project would begin, and Lauren Deal responded that work is expected to start next week. She also took the opportunity to mention the ongoing free summer movie series at the Ritz Theatre, noting that *Moana 2* and *Inside Out* will be showing this Thursday, followed by *The Little Mermaid* next Thursday. She also reminded everyone about the upcoming Drawdown event on August 9. Council President Sims commended Ms. Deal for her efforts, encouraging everyone to attend the musical performances at the Ritz, which have been excellent. He noted that the most recent show featured music by the Allman Brothers and praised the overall quality of the events.

**Resolution #6293** approving the weed abatement for property located at 385 Pinehurst Drive

**Resolution #6294** approving the weed abatement for property located at 319 E. Sloan Ave.

**Resolution #6295** approving the weed abatement for property located at 520 N. Court St.

**Resolution #6296** approving the weed abatement for property located at 914 Washington Ave.  
(1)

**Resolution #6297** approving the weed abatement for property located at 914 Washington Ave.  
(2)

**Resolution #6298** approving the weed abatement for property located at 510 Isbell Circle

**Resolution #6299** approving the weed abatement for property located at 508 Isbell Circle

**Resolution #6300** approving the weed abatement for property located at 206 Mary St.

**Resolution #6301** approving the weed abatement for property located at 204 Mary St.

**Resolution #6302** approving the weed abatement for property located at 622 Park Ave.

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Councilman Dickerson for the approval of Resolution #6293 to Resolution #6302. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6303** declaring 108 South St. E. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6304** declaring Lot on East St. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6305** declaring 110 Nassau St. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6306** declaring 823 Allen St. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6307** declaring 102 Franklin Drive North a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6308** declaring 311 Ave. H a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6309** declaring 502 E. Parkway Ave. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6310** declaring Lot on Howard St. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6311** declaring 605 Broadway Ave. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6312** declaring Lot on AL Hwy. 21 N. a public nuisance for weeds

**Resolution #6313** declaring 416 E. Damon Ave. a public nuisance for weeds

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Council Member Spratlin for the approval of Resolution #6303 to Resolution #6313. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6314** amending Resolution #3499 by reducing the number of members on the Talladega Municipal Airport Board from twelve to nine

Motion by Council President Sims with a second from Council Member Spratlin for the approval of Resolution #6314. Roll Call. AYES: All.

### **Travel Requests**

**Resolution #6315** approving the travel request for Anna Eliuk to attend a Grant Writing Strategies course on July 28 to July 29, 2025 in Anniston, Alabama

**Resolution #6316** approving the travel request for Morgan McDonald, Tra'Shaundez Bolden, Seth Searcy, Quonterious Hill, and Nakia Garrett to attend Mental Health First Aid for First Responders training on August 14, 2025 in Ashland, Alabama

**Resolution #6317** approving the travel request for Jake Travis to attend Mental Health First Aid for First Responders training on November 5, 2025 in Fultondale, Alabama

Motion by Councilman Sims with a second from Councilman Dickerson for the approval of Resolution #6315 to Resolution #6317. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6318** approving an agreement with Diamond Tours for the Parks and Recreation Senior Trip to Pigeon Forge and Smoky Mountains Show Trip

Motion by Council Member Spratlin with a second from Councilman Sims for the approval of Resolution #6318. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6319** granting approval to Talladega First, Inc. for the installation of digital message boards on the existing marquee at the Historic Ritz Theatre

Motion by Councilman Dickerson with a second from Councilman Sims for the approval of Resolution #6319. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6320** approving the travel request for Austin Wood and Robert Crowe to attend Latent Fingerprint Class on July 16, 2025 in Jacksonville, Alabama

Motion by Councilman Sims with a second from Councilman Dickerson for the approval of Resolution #6320. Roll Call. AYES: All.

**Resolution #6321** approving the façade grant to Charles Smith and Tangelia Smith with Ray's Lounge, property owner of 228 Battle St. West in the amount of \$10,000.00

Motion by Councilman Dickerson with a second from Council Member Hall for the approval of Resolution #6321. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second by Council Member Spratlin to approve invoices and expenditures for the Water Department. Roll Call. AYES: All.

<b>Water Department Expenditures for 6/12/2025 to 7/3/2025</b>	<b>\$759,858.97</b>
Water/Sewer Fund	759,858.97

In the absence of City Manager Swanson, Chief Warwick provided comments during the City Manager’s portion of the meeting. He reported that the third round of the CDBG grant has been approved. Terry Acuff will be present on July 3, and the bid opening is scheduled for August 20 at 11:00 a.m. Demolition is expected to begin in the second or third week of September 2025, pending completion of title searches. He confirmed that the list of properties had been provided to the Council. Additionally, Chief Warwick shared a photo of the plaque on the new fire apparatus and noted that although the trucks are already in service, there are plans to hold a small ceremony to officially place them into service and unveil the plaque. The ceremony will be scheduled based on the Council’s availability.

Council President Sims noted that both he and Councilman Spratlin were available at any time. He asked Council Member Hall if Friday would work for her and confirmed with Councilman Dickerson that Friday morning was good for him. Councilman Dickerson responded that Friday morning was fine. Chief Warwick said he would coordinate with the City Manager to arrange the ceremony for Friday morning.

Mayor Hall expressed gratitude to those who attended the Night of Prayer last Thursday evening and thanked everyone who helped make the event successful. He noted that more events like this are planned for the future.

Councilman Dickerson addressed several topics. First, he referred to the last Council meeting, noting that a presentation had been given and it was supposed to be a workshop. He asked for clarification during the closing remarks on why the workshop was canceled. He thanked Chief Warwick, JJ, and everyone responsible for the updated list that has been provided over several meetings, explaining that he needs this information to report back to his constituents who have been calling him.

He also expressed appreciation to the Mayor and recognized a business owner mentioned at the event the Mayor spoke about. While the Mayor referred to the refreshments, Councilman Dickerson clarified that Mr. Barry Calhoun of Busy Bees actually provided full meals to anyone who came to his truck, feeding many people for free. He wanted to ensure Mr. Calhoun received proper recognition for donating his food, time, and service to the citizens of Talladega in need.

Lastly, he addressed Council President Sims regarding Ward 5 funds, noting that the funds are currently sitting unused. With September approaching and no councilman yet for that ward, he proposed a motion to split the Ward 5 funds so they can be utilized before the fiscal year ends. Motion by Councilman Dickerson with a second from Council President Sims to split the discretionary funds for Ward 5. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Council President Sims noted that a planned work session was scheduled for tonight, but the participant was not available. He acknowledged that the notice came late last week and expressed hope that the participant would be able to attend at a later date. He reminded everyone that they had received a copy of a commercial lease agreement, which was provided to all Council members. He proposed approving the use of this commercial lease form moving forward.

City Attorney O'Brien clarified that the commercial lease was prepared to serve as a template for future use. He advised against approving it in blanket form, noting that each lease agreement may require modifications based on negotiations between the City and the specific tenant. He explained that the template should be used as a starting point, with terms added or removed as needed to fit each individual situation. Council President Sims stated that the lease can be used as a template to begin negotiations with prospective tenants. He mentioned that there are currently two interested parties for the building, but noted that the City must first deem the property as surplus. City Attorney O'Brien confirmed that an ordinance is required to officially declare the property surplus and to approve any lease agreement with a tenant. Council President Sims asked if the ordinance to declare the property surplus and to approve the lease agreement could be done at the same time. City Attorney O'Brien confirmed that it could. Council President Sims then stated that O'Brien would prepare the ordinance to declare the property surplus, and Attorney O'Brien added that the ordinance would also include approval of the lease agreement once a tenant is selected. Council President Sims noted that the lease terms would be worked out with the prospective tenant, and Attorney O'Brien said the City Clerk would notify him when ready so he could draft the ordinance.

Councilman Dickerson asked if there was a recommendation from the City Manager. Council President Sims responded that there was not a specific recommendation, only that the City Manager had informed the Council of two interested parties. He concluded his comments and asked if there were any further questions.

Motion by Councilman Sims with a second from Council Member Spratlin to approve the contribution request from Talladega 7 during the June 23<sup>rd</sup> Council meeting in the amount of \$2,000.00. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Motion by Councilman Dickerson with a second from Council Member Hall to adjourn the meeting. AYES: All.

**AUTHENTICATION**

I, Joanna Medlen, City Clerk of the City of Talladega, Alabama, do hereby attest that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of the proceedings of the City Council of Talladega, Alabama, which met in a regular session on Monday, July 14, 2025 at 5:30 p.m. in the City of Talladega, Alabama City Hall Council Chambers.

  
Joanna Medlen, City Clerk