

CITY OF TALLADEGA
CITY COUNCIL CALLED BUDGET MEETING
September 19, 2025 – 9:00am

The City Council of the City of Talladega met in a regular meeting on Friday, September 19, 2025, at 9:00 a.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, Councilman Shane Denney, and City Manager Derrick Swanson, and Finance Director Shaneeka Phillips.

Moment of Silence.

Resolution #6387 approving an agreement with NextSite for economic development services

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Council Member Spratlin for the approval of Resolution #6387. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Resolution #6420 approving the travel request for Joanna Medlen and Emily Light to attend the District IV City Clerk's Meeting in Leesburg, Alabama on October 1, 2025

Motion by Council President Sims with a second from Councilman Dickerson for the approval of Resolution #6420. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Resolution #6421 approving the travel request for Mohamed Sow to attend the Domestic Violence Response and Sexual Assault Training in Fultondale, Alabama on December 9, 2025

Motion by Councilman Dickerson with a second from Council President Sims for the approval of Resolution #6421. Roll Call. AYES: All.

Human Resources Director Falkner addressed the Council and stated that, before the budget was considered, she wished to provide some information for their review. She emphasized the importance of supporting employees, noting that out of 236 City employees, 118 reside in Talladega. She urged the Council to do what is right for the employees and stressed that entry level positions are in desperate need of a raise. She explained that these are the employees who work outdoors in the cold, heat, and rain, and asked the Council to consider how difficult it is for families to manage on a wage of \$11.00 per hour. She further cautioned that if the City is unable to provide pay increases, it will not be able to retain workers, and she requested that this be considered when discussing appropriations.

Council President Sims remarked that he believed this information was supposed to have been presented by the City Manager and stated that he had not seen it. He asked whether it had been developed for inclusion in the budget. City Manager Swanson responded that it was being presented at this meeting.

Councilman Denney asked whether the budget had already been figured with employee raises included and how that would affect appropriations. City Manager Swanson explained that the budget would not be finalized until after appropriations were completed.

Council President Sims then stated that the Council would go through the appropriations one by one. Beginning with Diaper Row, he noted that the request was \$5,000 and observed that all members agreed with the amount, with himself abstaining. Council Member Hall indicated that she agreed with \$5,000.

Council President Sims continued with the request from First Family Services, which was for \$6,000. He stated that all members appeared to agree and Council Member Hall confirmed support for \$6,000.

Council President Sims then addressed the appropriation request from Hall of Heroes in the amount of \$25,000. He noted that it appeared to be the consensus of the Council and asked Council Member Hall to confirm. Council Member Hall stated her agreement with \$25,000.

Council President Sims next addressed the appropriation request for Heritage Hall. Council Member Spratlin recommended \$50,000, Councilman Dickerson recommended \$61,050, and Council President Sims recommended \$61,050. Council Member Hall then noted that the appropriation in the prior year had been \$61,150 and recommended funding that same amount. Council President Sims asked if there was agreement to approve \$61,150, and the Council responded in the affirmative.

Council President Sims then called for consideration of the appropriation for the Historic Ritz Theatre in the amount of \$55,135. He observed consensus among the Council about that amount, as well as agreement for Palmer Place in the amount of \$15,000. Council Member Hall confirmed her support.

Councilman Denney remarked that this was his first time participating in the appropriation process and that he had stayed up the prior night reviewing the requests. He explained that, while he was not yet familiar with all of the organizations, he was learning. He expressed particular support for the appropriation to the counseling program for children who have been abused, noting that in his view they deserve \$25,000, the same as other groups receiving support. Council President Sims stated that he agreed with Councilman Denney's position. Council Member Spratlin stated that she would change her recommendation accordingly. Councilman Dickerson asked whether the program had used its entire appropriation in the prior year. Council Member Spratlin noted that the program had not received much funding in the prior year. Councilman Dickerson asked how much had been used, and Council Member Spratlin responded that \$5,000 had been appropriated and fully expended.

Council President Sims stated that the Council had considered \$15,000, while Councilman Denney had recommended \$25,000, and asked whether \$20,000 would be an agreeable compromise. Council Member Hall asked what services the program provided. Councilman Denney explained that the program serves children who have been abused by providing counseling for both children and families, as well as intervention and support in difficult situations. Council President Sims asked if the program also provides housing assistance, and Councilman Denney confirmed that it does.

Council President Sims noted that the organization's office is located on Cherry Street and stated that the consensus was to appropriate \$20,000. He added that the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB) had not submitted an appropriation request this year. He further stated that Council Member Hall recommended that organizations be encouraged to submit requests during the regular appropriation process rather than approaching the Council midyear.

Council President Sims then reported that the Alabama Extension Office had requested \$30,000 and noted consensus to appropriate \$10,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$10,000.

Council President Sims next addressed the Boys and Girls Club, which requested \$25,000, and stated that the consensus was to allocate \$5,000 from each Council Member, totaling \$25,000. He also noted that the request from Dancing with the Stars for \$4,000 was a private business matter and would not receive any appropriation. Council Member Hall expressed agreement.

Council President Sims presented the Drug Task Force request for \$86,000 and noted full support. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$86,000.

Council President Sims continued with the Presbyterian Home for Children request of \$20,000 and noted consensus for \$10,000. Council Member Hall agreed with \$10,000.

Council President Sims concluded with Red Door Kitchen's request for \$25,000, stating that two members recommended \$25,000 while three recommended \$20,000. Council Member Hall confirmed her support for \$20,000. Council President Sims noted that the Council had previously discussed an appropriation of \$25,000 and stated that he would contribute a portion of his discretionary funds. He suggested setting the appropriation at \$20,000, and the Council agreed.

Council President Sims then reported that Samaritan House had requested \$20,000 and stated that the consensus was to approve \$10,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$10,000.

Council President Sims asked about Talladega Bottle Works, which had previously been considered at \$25,000. Council Member Spratlin advised that no application had been submitted. Council President Sims noted that \$20,000 had previously been provided in-kind but not used, and therefore no appropriation would be made this year.

He then addressed the request from the Board of Education for \$350,000, noting that consensus among the Council was to appropriate \$75,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$75,000.

Council President Sims continued with the NAACP request for \$4,000, stating that the consensus was to approve the full amount. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$4,000.

Council President Sims next reviewed the appropriation request from the Talladega County Economic Development Authority, which asked for \$26,000. He noted that the consensus was to provide \$10,000, and Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$10,000.

Council President Sims reported that Talladega Pilgrimage requested \$7,500 and that consensus was to appropriate \$5,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$5,000.

Council President Sims then turned to the Library, which requested \$40,000. Finance Director Phillips noted that the request included salaries. Council President Sims clarified that it had already been decided that salaries would be the cap. Councilman Denney stated that he did not believe the City could legally pay library salaries and that by law, employee salaries must be paid directly by the library. Council President Sims added that the City pays the salaries of its own employees, but beyond that, no appropriations for salaries would be provided this year. Councilman Denney expressed concern, stating that there had been significant controversy surrounding the library during the past year, including issues related to paying two directors and covering attorney's fees. He noted that it did not seem fair to allocate more funding to the library than to all other organizations combined. He suggested that the appropriation be reduced by \$5,000 to \$10,000 rather than providing what he described as a "blank check" to cover salaries. Council President Sims responded that he understood Councilman Denney's concerns but emphasized that he attends library meetings and that regardless of differences of opinion, the focus must remain on ensuring that the employees are paid. Finance Director Phillips reiterated that the library's appropriation request was specifically for salaries.

Councilman Denney restated that any library appropriation would be limited to salaries only and not for attorney's fees or other expenses. Council Member Hall asked whether the \$300,000 appropriation would be strictly for salaries. Finance Director Phillips confirmed that it would be, if that was the amount the Council wished to cap salaries at. Councilman Denney clarified that he was not suggesting that forty more employees be hired but emphasized that most of the payroll already amounts to \$300,000. Council President Sims asked whether the new pay scale for City employees would impact this appropriation and whether the figure could potentially be higher. Finance Director Phillips responded that the appropriation cap was \$300,000. Councilman Denney stated that, while adjustments would need to be made in the overall budget, he was comfortable with the \$300,000 salary cap.

Council President Sims then addressed the request from United Way, which was for \$40,000. He noted that consensus among the Council was to approve \$40,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$40,000.

Council President Sims reported that the request from VCCA was \$5,750. He noted that consensus was to appropriate \$1,500, and Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$1,500.

Council President Sims then introduced the request from Talladega College in the amount of \$25,430. He explained that Council Member Spratlin recommended \$0, Council President Sims recommended \$40,000 in-kind, Council Member Hall recommended \$20,000 in-kind, and Councilman Denney recommended \$0. He clarified that the Council's position was to support in-kind services as needed during the year, rather than providing a fixed appropriation, and that Talladega College could return to the Council with requests if support was needed. Finance Director Phillips clarified that appropriations to Talladega College would be in the form of goods and services.

Council President Sims stated that he was under the impression the City could not donate funds directly to a private organization and asked if that was the guidance given by the City Attorney the prior year. Finance Director Phillips responded that her understanding was that any funds must be used for a public purpose.

Councilman Dickerson added that the College's request outlined services to be provided for the citizens of Talladega as well as for City employees. He explained that "in-kind" appropriations are not blank checks but are tied to specific services, and that other funding questions would need to be resolved in the coming months.

Council President Sims noted that Councilman Dickerson recommended \$40,000, while he himself had recommended \$20,000. Council Member Hall asked if Talladega College could be invited to give a presentation to the Council. Council President Sims replied that it would be up to the Council.

Councilman Dickerson reiterated that in-kind support involves services and not direct funding, but Finance Director Phillips cautioned that such services still affect the budget since the City incurs charges and overtime costs. Councilman Denney stated that he was comfortable with that arrangement.

Council President Sims asked if a specific amount should be set. Councilman Denney responded that he believed Council Member Hall wanted to hear from Talladega College directly before a final decision was made. Council President Sims stated that no appropriation amount would be set for Talladega College until representatives had the opportunity to come before the Council and provide a presentation. Council Member Spratlin asked if they could attend on Monday night, and Finance Director Phillips responded that it would depend on their availability.

Council President Sims then reported that Talladega Main Street had submitted a request but that consensus among the Council was to appropriate \$0. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$0.

Council President Sims next reviewed the request from Liberty Learning for \$1,000. He noted that Council Members were not familiar with the program and that consensus was to appropriate \$0. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$0.

Council President Sims stated that Talladega 7 requested \$8,000 and that consensus was to appropriate \$5,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$5,000. Councilman Dickerson stated that all organizations receiving appropriations are required to submit reports back to the City. Council Member Hall asked whether the group under discussion was a nonprofit, and Councilman Dickerson confirmed that it was. Finance Director Phillips added that they are required to submit reports. Council President Sims asked what the organization had received the prior year. Finance Director Phillips responded that they had not received an appropriation last year and had not submitted a request. Councilman Dickerson clarified that funding the prior year had come from discretionary funds. Councilman Spratlin recommended \$5,000, and Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$5,000.

Council President Sims next reviewed the request from the Willie and Betty Farrior Scholarship Fund in the amount of \$2,000. Consensus of the Council was to appropriate \$2,000, and Council Member Hall confirmed agreement.

Council President Sims then introduced the request from Connect Strong for \$2,000. He stated that it was not a program he was personally familiar with, but noted that consensus among the Council was to appropriate \$2,000. Council Member Hall confirmed agreement with \$2,000.

Council President Sims remarked that the appropriation review process had gone more smoothly than expected for some items and asked the Council to move on to the next agenda item. Finance Director Phillips directed the discussion to the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). Council President Sims stated that the review would begin with Public Works, noting that their priority was street improvements, funding for street sweeper, service truck and pole shed. City Manager Swanson emphasized that the street sweeper was particularly needed. He explained that after review and discussion, the outright cost of \$400,000 was too high to consider; however, a lease option could be a more affordable alternative. He advised the Council to review the paperwork that had been submitted. Council President Sims stated that this was his first time seeing the proposal.

City Manager Swanson continued, noting that he had gathered information on possible payment schedules. He explained that a three-year or five-year lease would make the equipment much more affordable compared to a single payment of \$400,000. He added that acquiring the sweeper would save significant manpower, as the equipment would reduce the number of employees needed for the task. Swanson noted that the last time the City had a street sweeper was over ten years ago, and urged the Council to consider the long-term benefits to the City's operations.

Public Works Director Pointer confirmed that the new sweeper would require only one operator and would free up other employees for additional tasks. Councilman Denney stated that if the Council were to proceed, he favored a 60-month payment schedule rather than a 36-month term, as the City could not afford the \$400,000 cost upfront. He asked if the Council would consider approving the payments that day.

City Manager Swanson stated that the next item under consideration was the shop truck. He asked Public Works Director Pointer to provide input and whether the vehicle could be used for another year before replacement. Director Pointer explained that the truck came from the Water Department, is a 2008 model, and has significant wear and tears. City Manager Swanson asked if the truck could be serviced and kept for another year. Director Pointer responded that while he preferred to see the truck replaced, he would be willing to delay the request until next year if that would allow other employees to receive raises in the meantime. City Manager Swanson emphasized that departments must understand both the impact and necessity of what they are requesting. He suggested that the truck be deferred and placed into the Capital Improvement Plan for FY 2027.

City Manager Swanson then noted that another truck request under Animal Control was in the same situation. Director Pointer stressed that a replacement was needed. City Manager Swanson acknowledged the request so that all Council Members would be aware. Director Pointer added that Animal Control required a truck outfitted with a cage to transport animals to the veterinarian, as well as to separate dogs from cats. He noted that animals often must be transported to Atlanta for adoption, and that a fan was also needed for the vehicle. City Manager Swanson remarked that Animal Control was "truly on the road" and confirmed that the need was recognized.

Councilman Denney suggested that the City could save approximately \$10,000 by purchasing a good used truck that was only a year and a half old and reducing the budget by that amount. Public Works Director Pointer responded that trucks must be purchased through the state bid process.

City Manager Swanson asked for clarification on the kennel roof request. He explained that the roof would provide shade for the animals when they are outside, helping to protect them from sun exposure and heat. Director Pointer added that the current tarp cover must be replaced whenever the weather worsens, and that a full roof would resolve the issue.

Councilman Denney acknowledged the importance of the kennel roof but emphasized the need to prioritize projects, suggesting that the Council consider delaying the request and cutting back as much as possible. Director Pointer stated that the construction of a deck was also necessary for insurance purposes and must be ADA compliant. City Manager Swanson recommended that if the roof was delayed, the porch should be prioritized. Director Pointer replied that he would prefer to see fencing installed. Councilman Denney proposed holding off on painting and the kennel roof until next year and asked Council Member Hall if she was agreeable to that approach.

Council Member Hall asked Public Works Director Pointer if he was agreeable to deferring the kennel roof request. Director Pointer responded that they would make it work.

City Manager Swanson then moved to the Police Department requests and asked the Chief to begin with the first item, which was the purchase of twenty-two assault rifles. He requested an explanation of the rationale behind the request. Police Chief McElrath explained that patrol officers are currently required to purchase their own rifles out of pocket. Council President Sims noted that the City already provides officers with a sidearm and asked whether the rifles were bid items. Chief McElrath responded that he would research the lowest pricing available. City Manager Swanson strongly recommended the purchase, stating that it was not appropriate for officers to rely on personally owned rifles for City duties. He emphasized that rifles would be provided, tracked, and inventoried as official Police Department equipment. Council Member Spratlin asked whether the rifles would remain the personal property of the officers. City Manager Swanson clarified that the rifles would belong to the City as part of the Police Department's inventory. Council Member Spratlin then asked whether the Department already had sufficient rifles. City Manager Swanson replied that they did not. Councilman Denney stated that the rifles were not replacements, but additional equipment needed to ensure officers were properly equipped to fight crime.

Councilman Dickerson stated that sidearms alone were no longer sufficient, as many incidents now involve assault rifles. He explained that in his ward, gunfire frequently involves assault rifles and emphasized the need to ensure officers are properly equipped. Council President Sims stated that there appeared to be consensus among the Council to support the rifle purchase.

City Manager Swanson then moved to the request for Motorola car radios. Police Chief McElrath explained that the current radios were at the end of their life cycle. Once they fail, they cannot be repaired or replaced. He noted that ten radios were replaced last year and that ten more would need to be replaced this year. Council President Sims agreed that the replacements should proceed.

City Manager Swanson next presented the request for replacement of carpet at the Police Department, stating that the carpet was tearing up, creating a tripping hazard, and had mold issues. Council President Sims asked whether this had been addressed during the last building remodel. City Manager Swanson replied that it had not been included, as the remodel had to be completed in phases. Councilman Denney asked if the plumbing issue that caused the mold had been corrected. City Manager Swanson confirmed that the plumbing repairs had been made. He then introduced the request for two mobile surveillance cameras, equipped with solar power, at a cost of \$114,000 for a five-year lease. Chief McElrath explained that the vendor would maintain the cameras and the Police Department would not be responsible for their upkeep.

Council President Sims asked if the cost for the two mobile surveillance cameras was \$114,000, and Chief Ron confirmed that it was. Councilman Dickerson stated that the cameras were one of the items on his wish list, noting that they would make a significant difference.

City Manager Swanson then moved to the request for desktop computers and asked if Councilman Denney wanted the upgrades to be phased in. Councilman Denney suggested that since the current systems were not entirely outdated, replacement could be for two. Chief McElrath clarified that the request was for desktop units for use inside the office. Councilman Denney emphasized that if installations and firewall upgrades were phased in, the City could avoid incurring large costs every year. Finance Director Phillips noted that phasing would be preferable.

City Manager Swanson then addressed the Police Department's largest request, which was \$1.4 million for replacement of the entire fleet of patrol vehicles. Chief McElrath explained that replacing the

fleet outright would be more cost-effective than continuing to repair aging vehicles, noting that significant funds were being spent on front-end work and maintenance. He suggested a five-year lease plan as an option for financing the replacements. Council President Sims asked what would be done with the vehicles being replaced. Chief McElrath responded that the out-of-service vehicles would be placed for bid. Council President Sims asked whether the new fleet would belong to the City. Police Chief McElrath explained that the lease agreement would include an option to purchase the vehicles at the end of the term. Councilman Denney inquired about the yearly cost of a lease. Finance Director Phillips stated that the amount would be \$298,000. Councilman Denney rounded the figure to \$300,000, and Phillips confirmed that was accurate.

Councilman Denney asked whether the plan would be to replace the vehicles at one time and surplus the current fleet. Chief McElrath confirmed that this was the case. Councilman Denney noted that while the City could issue bonds for buildings and finance payments on equipment, the recurring payments remained a burden.

Council President Sims asked whether the Council was considering not cutting the request at all. City Manager Swanson explained that while the request would not be reduced, the annual payment amount of approximately \$300,000 would add up to close to the same amount as the \$1.4 million outright purchase. Councilman Denney asked whether the City would be charged for every mile or scratch under the lease agreement. Chief McElrath responded that they would not. Councilman Denney summarized that the Police Department's plan was to lease a new fleet, which would wear out in approximately three years and then need to restart the lease again. Chief McElrath stated that the lease agreement would be for five years.

Councilman Dickerson asked if the City could consider breaking the purchase into two phases, with eight vehicles this year and eight the next. He asked whether half of the current fleet could last another year if such a split was adopted. Chief McElrath responded that he preferred to replace the entire fleet at once. City Manager Swanson clarified that if eight vehicles were replaced this year and the other eight next year, the result would be the same, as the annual lease payments of approximately \$150,000 would continue into the following year. Councilman Denney agreed, noting that the City would still be in the same position financially. City Manager Swanson stated that the request totaled \$892,000, with an additional \$228,164 for the remaining units. He explained that the \$228,000 represented the cost for all of the vehicles together, noting that the entire request amounted to approximately \$300,000 annually under lease. Councilman Denney stated he was satisfied with that plan. Council President Sims observed that while the Council was working to make cuts in some areas, other requests could not be reduced.

City Manager Swanson then transitioned to the Community Appearance requests, beginning with mowers and an inmate transport van. He noted that while the van's motor was in good condition, the exterior appearance was poor and not favorable for presentation. Public Works Director Pointer noted that one of the vans was a hand-me-down. City Manager Swanson asked if the vehicle could last another year with cosmetic improvements. Director Pointer responded that it could, and that the van should last at least one more year. Councilman Denney advised not to worry about it further and to allow the van to remain in service for another year.

City Manager Swanson then turned discussion to the Fire Department. He stated that they would begin with routine maintenance items before addressing larger requests. Fire Chief Warwick explained that the department had maintenance obligations carried over from the prior year, including necessary work on fire hydrants. City Manager Swanson added that, since the City no longer shared services, it was now responsible for purchasing parts directly from outside vendors. Fire Chief Warwick confirmed that this was correct. City Manager Swanson recommended that maintenance be considered a priority item. Council President Sims asked whether hydrant maintenance included the replacement of seals, noting that he had observed Water Department personnel repainting hydrants. Chief Tyson reported that there are currently 966 hydrants in service, which require annual flow testing and maintenance. It was noted that \$30,000 had been allocated for this purpose, and Council reached consensus to move forward with that amount. Chief Tyson further explained that it has been sixty-two years since a new fire station was built. Due to a recent incident that divided the department, concerns were raised that in an emergency the City may not have enough firefighters to respond adequately. Chief Tyson reported that a prefabricated building had been located which could serve as a station. The estimated cost for a new building was approximately \$6 million; however, by using the prefabricated building and constructing bays, the cost could be reduced to around \$3.5 million.

City Manager Swanson stated that bonds could be considered for this project, potentially using some existing bonds to offset costs. Councilman Denney added that with the industrial park and other equipment located in the area, a new station would be a valuable asset to protect those resources. Councilman Denney noted that establishing a fire station in the industrial park would also serve as a benefit to economic development efforts, since insurance ratings are a key factor for potential industries. He also emphasized that acquiring the building would be a “win for Talladega,” calling it an opportunity to save money and strengthen fire protection. Councilman Denney suggested the City move forward with an offer. Council President Sims asked for clarification on the estimated price, which was reported at \$385,000. Council members expressed interest in making an offer, with consensus to authorize moving forward with negotiations.

City Manager Swanson brought forward the request for replacement of Fire Department vehicles. Chief Warwick explained that frontline vehicles are needed desperately, but that grant funding agreements are already in place for certain purchases. Finance Director Phillips advised that the City should wait until the grant funds are confirmed. City Manager Swanson noted that, if possible, the City should look at refurbishing existing vehicles to extend their service life until new units can be purchased with grant funding.

City Manager Swanson presented the budget request for Parks and Recreation, noting that \$982,000 had been allocated for all parks combined. He reminded Council that during the prior year, funding was initially set aside for the first major project, but when the request came back to Council, those funds were redirected to other priorities. He emphasized that this year, the allocation was again included in the budget.

City Manager Swanson explained that each ward has projects identified within its parks. He stated that Councilman Denney has a major park within his ward, with projects identified there, as well as Councilman Dickerson. Council Member Spratlin was working to secure improvements for Pope Hill, while Council Member Hall’s ward did not currently have park facilities and needed support. He further noted that Council President Sims was working on improvements at Station 2 and that efforts were being made to ensure the new park received everything needed to be fully productive. Council President Sims noted that the lights installed at Jemison Park were appreciated and had made a noticeable difference.

Councilman Denney stated that the City did not have a million dollars to allocate and explained that, because some wards had more facilities than others, the division should be made accordingly. He suggested reducing the overall appropriation to \$600,000, with \$150,000 each to himself and Councilman Dickerson, and \$100,000 each to the remaining three Council Members. Councilman Denney emphasized that voters expected to see improvements in their wards, and it was important to show residents that their tax dollars were being spent in their neighborhoods. Council Member Hall questioned Denney’s proposal, asking how he could justify receiving \$150,000 when his ward already had a park. Councilman Denney responded that his ward included multiple facilities, such as Spring Street Park, Bemiston Park, and Veteran’s Park, and that the maintenance needs at those locations alone exceeded \$150,000. He said the additional funding would ensure that his residents received the services they deserved. Council President Sims pointed out that resurfacing the pickleball courts at Jemison Park alone was estimated to cost \$200,000. Councilman Denney noted that Jemison Park had just received \$100,000 for new lights.

Council President Sims responded that while Councilman Denney was requesting \$150,000, he himself could not effectively use only \$100,000. Councilman Denney replied that he understood but suggested taking \$500,000, splitting it five ways, and letting each council member have \$100,000 to spend in their ward.

Councilman Dickerson added that the City should also consider the rental of buildings, pointing out that the City currently does not rent facilities on Sundays. He noted that in the past three months there had been more requests for Sunday rentals than any other day. He suggested adjusting policies to allow Sunday rentals, provided the city could ensure fairness and consistency.

Council Member Hall asked if that meant someone would have to work on Sundays. Councilman Dickerson responded that either a staff member would need to be present or a key control system put in place, emphasizing the need for a consistent schedule.

Parks and Recreation Director Ammons clarified that the ordinance governing park hours states that parks are open from sunrise until 10 p.m., seven days a week. She added that a recent request from a resident had highlighted the inconsistency between ordinances and practices.

Councilman Dickerson asked who had passed the ordinance. Director Ammons responded that it had been the council. City Manager Swanson noted that ordinances indicate the parks should be open on Sundays and stressed the importance of consistency and fairness across the board.

Councilman Denney reiterated his earlier point, emphasizing that dividing the funds evenly among council members would ensure each ward benefited. Director Ammons added that some projects, such as Jemison Park, required phasing and could not simply be reduced in scope. Council President Sims asked if the City could consider doing half of the resurfacing. Director Ammons responded that it was already being phased and was being addressed section by section. Council President Sims then asked if painting could be used as a temporary fix. Director Ammons replied that while a temporary band aid approach could be used, it would not address the underlying need. City Manager Swanson concluded that band aid fixes were not sufficient.

Council President Sims noted there was still some money left from the Brecon project. Parks and Recreation Director Ammons noted there is \$3,000 left and mentioned the parking issue, pointing out the need for a 20-parking area.

Councilman Denney stated that while he recognized Director Ammons was doing a phenomenal job, the City did not have a million dollars to spend on projects. He suggested that instead of allocating \$150,000 strictly to the Spring Street gym, the City consider adding air conditioning at the Bemiston gym so that there would be three recreation centers. He explained this approach would give each ward a win and demonstrate fairness to voters. Director Ammons asked which project Council wanted to prioritize. Council President Sims added that the Bemiston gym would benefit everyone, not just one ward. Councilman Denney emphasized that the Spring Street gym needed a new floor but agreed the Bemiston facility provided broader benefit.

Council President Sims asked about staffing at Bemiston, and Director Ammons confirmed there was no attendant on site. City Manager Swanson added that the lighting at Bemiston would need to be changed as part of improvements. All members agreed if the improvements were distributed fairly across wards. Council President Sims noted he could not move forward with his project at Jemison this year, so supporting Bemiston would help spread resources. Council Member Hall said she would find a way to use funds within her ward, while the Council moved to the next agenda item.

City Manager Swanson introduced the topic of Non-Departmental (ND) projects and asked Finance Director Phillips to present. Director Phillips recommended allocating \$300,000, explaining that funds were available in the gas tax and that an additional \$600,000 in city-wide paving funds could also be utilized. Council President Sims asked if Council Member Spratlin's road would be taken care of by way of this. Council Member Spratlin noted that the road she wished to have repaired was only two miles long and there was a quote received for it although the decision to pave vs. tar and gravel has not been made yet. City Manager Swanson asked again if each ward would receive \$125,000. Council President Sims noted that again, similar to the Parks and Recreation line items, if a council member needed a little extra, he would be willing to split his appropriation with them.

City Manager Swanson emphasized that each Council Member is responsible for determining how ward funds are allocated, noting that they are held accountable for their own ward. He explained that the paving plan provides percentages and point values for streets, allowing members to review areas requiring crack sealing and other treatments to preserve good roadways. The plan identifies which maintenance methods are appropriate, enabling sounder decisions. He cautioned that deviating from the plan can increase costs, citing as an example a two-mile stretch of Whitson Road estimated at \$145,000 for paving.

Councilman Denney reported that he had been quoted between \$80,000 and \$100,000 for gravel on a particular roadway. He noted that the decision must be made within the available \$125,000 annual allocation, unless additional funds are transferred.

Council President Sims stated that he would need to review the condition of streets in his ward before making determinations. City Manager Swanson acknowledged that the referenced road serves approximately five or six residences and has not been paved in twenty years.

City Manager Swanson then transitioned discussion to water projects, noting that \$387,000 was available on the table for consideration. Water and Sewer Director Fuller reported that her department is seeking to replace all desktop computers at the main office, the service center, and both the wastewater and water treatment plants. She noted that it has been five years since new computers were purchased and the upgrades would include full data transfer for all staff.

Director Fuller further reported that one of the air conditioning units is no longer functioning, and coil repairs are required for another unit. At the water treatment plant, replacement of pH meters in the laboratory was recommended, which are essential in testing water quality. Additionally, Director Fuller stated that the department is requesting a new metal roof for the shop. An earlier estimate came in at \$15,000, but a more recent estimate was received at \$12,800, which is lower than the original cost projection. She also requested replacement of a 2017 Ford F-150 truck currently in service, citing an axle problem and reports that the engine has been cutting off while driving, raising safety concerns. City Manager Swanson asked Director Fuller if she had taken the vehicle to the City Shop for inspection. Director Fuller responded in the affirmative and then reported that the department also requires a new pump and trailer for the main plant. She noted that the Service Center's air conditioning system is not working and will need to be replaced.

City Manager Swanson asked what the pump would be used for. Director Fuller explained that the department seeks to upgrade to a four-inch pump mounted on a trailer that can be moved between the three wastewater treatment plants to assist in pump work. While the existing pump is still operational, Fuller noted the need for a larger capacity pump for efficiency. Council President Sims asked if all air conditioning units were worn out. Director Fuller confirmed that they were and advised that Armbrester is no longer able to provide repairs. Councilman Denney asked whether bids had been obtained, and Director Fuller responded that Armbrester is currently the service provider. Councilman Dickerson asked what items, if any, could be reduced or deferred. Director Fuller responded that the items listed represented essential needs but noted that desktop replacements could be delayed if required. Council President Sims asked about the need for additional trucks. Councilman Denney observed that if a truck were to fail in the middle of the road it may not necessarily be detrimental. Director Fuller explained that repairs had been made to extend the life of one of the trucks for another year. Further discussion included the four-inch auger. Councilman Denney asked whether the department's three augers were still in service. Director Fuller confirmed, adding that repairs had been made and one auger could last another year. Councilman Denney suggested that deferring replacement of the auger would save approximately \$75,000 and further asked whether the purchase of twelve new desktop computers could be phased in over time, possibly budgeting \$10,000 this year. Director Fuller responded that she preferred to replace the computers all at once but agreed that if the Council wished to defer replacement, that could be done. City Manager Swanson noted that the computers are all currently operational. Director Fuller confirmed this. City Manager Swanson added that Councilman Denney's concern was whether replacing only a portion of the computers would create problems by upgrading some while leaving others outdated. Director Fuller asked for clarification on what upgrades were suggested. Councilman Denney explained that the proposal was to purchase some computers now while retaining others, asking whether the software and performance would remain consistent across systems. Council President Sims inquired about the specific problem with the current computers. Director Fuller noted that the department's computers are running slowly. Finance Director Phillips added that due to a Microsoft migration, some of the existing units are unable to accommodate the change. Councilman Denney inquired about the request for a new metal roof. Director Fuller explained that the roof at the facility is leaking. Councilman Denney asked whether it could be patched, and Director Fuller responded that an inspection had already been conducted, with an estimate of \$12,800 to install a new metal roof.

Councilman Denney then asked why the City should repair air conditioning units if three new HVAC units were being requested. Director Fuller clarified that the requested repair is for the main office unit, while the other three units are not operational at all and require replacement. Councilman Denney suggested that the City could scrap vehicles and the pump request, saving approximately \$83,000, and cap the request at \$12,800 for the roof and three HVAC units. Director Fuller acknowledged that the three HVAC units are currently unusable. Council President Sims asked whether the Service Center facility ends at George Holdridge's property line, and Director Fuller confirmed that it does.

City Manager Swanson then transitioned the discussion to the Finance Department. Finance Director Phillips noted a \$25,000 remodel request for the front counter and safe, noting that some safety concerns still needed to be addressed. Councilman Denney stated that it was a fair request. City Manager Swanson explained that once appropriations are finalized, staff will move forward to balance the budget and provide supporting documentation. He noted that salaries remain the largest outstanding item. Council President Sims referred to the salary worksheet, specifically the proposed raises. Swanson advised that the Council must decide what can reasonably be addressed, emphasizing the importance of retaining employees and recruiting effectively. He explained that the new pay scale proposal totals \$656,000 in increased costs.

Councilman Denney stated he had spoken to a couple of individuals about the proposal, emphasizing that he personally did not want compensation from his council position, even suggesting that his payroll be allocated to Parks and Recreation. He reiterated that the absolute maximum possible amount should go toward City employee pay and benefits, stating that “every penny” available should be directed to that purpose. Council President Sims asked whether those funds could be allocated to Parks and Recreation. Councilman Denney responded that while his comments were personal, the focus should remain on funding employee raises. Finance Director Phillips reminded the Council that any cost-of-living adjustment must also consider retirement contributions and fringe benefits, which would increase the total beyond \$600,000. Councilman Denney asked if all members could agree that whatever maximum could be afforded should be given to City workers. Finance Director Phillips asked whether the proposal would include free health insurance and family coverage discounts, to which Councilman Denney replied yes. Councilman Dickerson inquired about entry-level pay. Human Resources Director Falkner explained that the proposed pay plan includes raising Grade 1, Step 1 to \$9.75 per hour. Previously the rate was \$9.00. Grades 1–5 would receive a 15% increase, while employees above Grade 5 would see approximately a 3.1% increase. City Manager Swanson stated that employees working in difficult conditions deserved to be elevated to the appropriate level on the scale. Councilman Dickerson asked about the percentage increase and what a new hire starting tomorrow would receive. Falkner confirmed that the new entry rate would be \$9.75 per hour. Finance Director Phillips clarified that while starting pay is adjusted upward, existing employees would also receive a 15% increase. Councilman Dickerson asked about incentives for long-term employees compared with new hires entering at nearly the same pay. Director Falkner responded that the focus this year is on retention, with future adjustments possible for recruitment strategies. Councilman Denney raised the scenario of a new hire yesterday starting at \$9.00 and questioned whether they would be adjusted to \$9.75. Director Falkner explained that new employees remain on probation and adjustments are not automatic during that period. Finance Director Phillips cautioned that funds could not be diverted from existing employees to accommodate probationary hires. Council Member Spratlin asked about the length of the probationary period, and Council President Sims confirmed that it is 12 months.

Councilman Denney asked whether new employees hired during probation receive pay increases. Director Falkner responded that they do not until their probation is completed and they are placed fully on the scale. Councilman Denney asked if all employees would be treated equally if the proposal were approved. Finance Director Phillips confirmed that they would, adding that recruitment incentives could be considered next year. City Manager Swanson noted that department heads and supervisors would have the opportunity to review the proposal before final approval. Council President Sims asked if there was anything else to consider for the budget.

Council President Sims then expressed appreciation that the pay scale issue had been resolved, thanking staff for their hard work. He acknowledged the upcoming Washington, D.C. trip and encouraged participants to bring back funding opportunities.

Councilman Dickerson also thanked staff for their efforts and expressed hope that implementation would begin promptly.

Council Member Spratlin noted the importance of providing Council Members with appropriation documentation showing available balances and deadlines. City Manager Swanson stated those reports would be provided.

Council Member Hall asked if she still had \$250,000 remaining in her allocation, to which Finance Director Phillips confirmed yes.

Councilman Denney offered heartfelt remarks directed to Police Chief McElrath, expressing deep appreciation for his service to the City. He stated that for the past two decades Chief McElrath has done everything right, taking on difficult shifts that few others were willing to work, and carrying out his duties with integrity and dedication. He added that he is proud of the Chief, describing him as the right man for the job. Denney further remarked that the Chief has earned the respect of his officers and of the community, and that whether his appointment is made permanent, he has already demonstrated the qualities of strong leadership.

Motion by Council Member Hall with a second from Councilman Dickerson 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 Friday, September 19, 2025 at 9:00 a.m. in the City of Talladega, Alabama City Hall Council Chambers.


Joanna Medlen, City Clerk