

**MINUTES OF THE TOWN COMMISSION WORKSHOP  
TOWN OF LADY LAKE, FLORIDA**

**January 21, 2026**

The workshop meeting of the Lady Lake Town Commission was held in the Commission Chambers at Lady Lake Town Hall, 409 Fennell Blvd., Lady Lake, Florida, with Mayor Freeman presiding. The meeting convened at 4:30 p.m.

Before the start of the meeting, Police Chief Steve Hunt informed the Commission of recent incidents where the Town's drone was used. He stated that the department received a call that a resident with dementia had not been seen in approximately four hours. The drone was dispatched, and the resident was found near his home. Chief Hunt stated that the heat-seeking function worked efficiently, the person was located quickly and taken safely to his home, where EMS was waiting to evaluate his condition.

Chief Hunt stated the department was contacted to assist in locating a suicidal person who left their home and went into the woods. The person was located safely and received assistance without incident.

Chief Hunt stated that there were two store burglaries over the weekend. He stated that the suspects in the video surveillance appeared to be juveniles. He stated that while investigating suspicious activity in an apartment complex, the police noticed suspects attempting to break into a car. They identified these suspects as the same suspects in the burglaries. They were taken into custody and confessed to the burglary. He stated that Training Officer Chausse did a Zoom meeting with Orlando Fox 35.

Chief Hunt stated that the police department recently hired another officer, and the department is now fully staffed.

Chief Hunt thanked the Commission for all their support.

**CALL TO ORDER**

**ROLL CALL**

<b>Commissioner (Ward)</b>	<b>Present</b>
<b>Regan (Four)</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Gourlie (Two)</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Roberts (One)</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Sage (Five)</b>	<b>YES</b>

<b>Commissioner (Ward)</b>	<b>Present</b>
<b>Freeman (Three)</b>	<b>YES</b>

**STAFF PRESENT**

Bill Lawrence, Town Manager; Kathy Rosado, Town Clerk; Thad Carroll, Growth Management Director; Becky Higgins, Senior Planner; Lady Lake Police Chief Steve Hunt; C.T. Eagle, Public Works Director; Mike Burske, Parks and Recreation Director; John Pearl, Information Technology Director; Joella LeDonne, Finance Director; Brandi Carson, Assistant Finance Director; Tamika DeLee, Human Resources Director; Aly Herman, Library Director; Elisha Pappacoda, Communications Director; and Carol Osborne, Deputy Town Clerk.

**A. Discussion – Funding the Future Without Property Taxes – Motto: If It’s Going to Be, It’s Up to Me.**

Town Manager Bill Lawrence stated that in researching this subject with neighboring community leaders, he learned that they are preparing their budgets in the event this law passes. He stated that their attitude is that the law would not pass and, if it does, they would deal with it at that time.

Mr. Lawrence stated that he and the department managers are hoping for the best yet preparing for the worst.

Mr. Lawrence advised that the town’s general fund is \$27M, and \$7M of that comes from property taxes, which is 25% of the town’s budget. The research showed that the Town of Lady Lake collects the least amount of property taxes in this region. He stressed that this loss in revenue will impact town services.

Mr. Lawrence stated that the department managers focused on fiscal responsibility while maintaining the level of service residents expect. This includes aligning fees with actual service costs, re-implementing past fees, bringing fees up to par with neighboring municipalities, and exploring self-sustaining operations such as charging for events.

Mr. Lawrence stated that at the first meeting with the department managers, it was depressing as the first impact for each department is the loss of personnel. He stated that it is a detriment to lose good employees. He reviewed the potential impacts as follows:

**Police Department** - Loss of 8-10 officers and 2-3 civilian staff; operational reductions to vehicles, Community Outreach, etc.

**Parks & Recreation** - Cancellation of most events; 3-4 personnel cuts; reduced park maintenance.

**Library** - Reduction of 4-5 staff; significantly decreasing book budget, software, and office supplies.

**Finance** - Support 1-2 positions using different funding sources

**IT** - 1-2 positions; Total reduction of \$266,348, including \$153,991 in personnel costs.

**Public Works** - Cut of 50% of employees (9); reduction of services like Motor Pool, Facilities Maintenance, right of way maintenance, new purchases, etc.

**Human Resources** - 25% budget reduction; elimination of employee programs.

**Growth Management** - Reduction of 3-4 employees; Third-party fire inspections would be cut.

**Communications** - 50% staff reduction; elimination of livestream, digital signage and multimedia.

**Clerk** - Elimination of one position and reduction of operating expenses by 50%.

Mr. Lawrence stated the goal was to present alternative revenue streams to prevent departmental cuts. He stated that all municipal governments in all 50 states rely on property taxes. He stated that if this law passes, Florida would be the first state to operate without property tax revenue. He stressed that the Town of Lady Lake could be the only municipality to survive.

Mr. Lawrence outlined three phases of implementation for the alternative revenue streams, with Commission approval.

**Phase 1** – First priority implementation with Commission approval, includes adjusting current fee schedules, bringing back fees that were phased out.

Implement a **Stormwater Utility** as a means of enhancing resilience to flooding, protecting water quality, and promoting sustainable growth (Approximately \$500,000K - \$2 M). He stated that the Town is the only municipality in our region that does not have storm water fees.

**Townwide:** Implement impact fees for the Police Department; increase fees for the Library and Parks & Recreation.

Public Works Director C.T. Eagle stated that he recently met with StanTec, to discuss potentially developing impact fees for the police department, and revitalizing the impact fees for the Parks and Recreation department, and the Library. He stated that he is researching a GAP impact fee as well. He stated that Stantec conducted utility impact fee study approximately six years ago.

Mr. Eagle stated that another potential impact fee is a General Government Infrastructure impact fee, which cover the replacement of town hall, fiber optic lines or any potential large town projects. Revenue from these impact fees would be significant.

Mr. Lawrence stated that the impact fees for the police department would enable the purchase of new vehicles.

Mr. Eagle added that the impact fees would cover any capital infrastructure, such as a new police department or a new town hall.

Mr. Eagle stated that implementing the stormwater utility fee would offset the estimated loss in the utility fund. The reduction impact for the Public Works department is potentially \$736,000K and the lowest revenue for the stormwater assessment is approximately \$500,000K. By implementing the stormwater assessment fee at the mid-rate, it would offset the entire loss of the Public Works department.

Mr. Eagle emphasized that one of the commissioners who voted against the stormwater assessment last year must recommend it to the town manager to place it on an upcoming agenda.

**Police Department/Code Enforcement:** Institute fees for alarm permits and false alarms.

Police Chief Hunt advised that the police department responded to 532 alarms in 2025. He stated that the current program has not been impactful and has been used mainly for businesses with repeated false alarms.

**Library:** Increase existing room rental fees; begin charging for services that have been free, such as notary services, faxing, scanning, and test proctoring; sell branded merchandise and/or memorial plaques or bricks (Approx. \$50,000-60,000)

Library Director Aly Herman stated that the new meeting room has state-of-the-art equipment, and the rental fee will be increased. Regarding notary fees, she stated there is no set fee for notary services. A donation is requested, and many people do not comply with that request.

Ms. Herman stated that many people asked for Lady Lake Library merchandise.

Mayor Freeman asked if notaries have incurred any expenses.

Ms. Herman advised that the Town pay for their license fee.

**Parks & Recreation:** Seek Tourist Development Tax grants and corporate sponsorships, begin charging for services that have been free, such as event entry; increase facility-rental fees (Approx. \$50,000).

Parks and Recreation Director Mike Burske stated that currently there is no fee to use the ball fields during open play and would implement a pay-to-play policy. The ball field usage has increased significantly in the past five years.

Mr. Burske stated that the community building's current rental fees would be increased. He stated the Town's events would transition from municipal recreation to quasi-public recreation with fees.

Mr. Burske stressed that if the law passes, the Parks and Recreation department would become a for-profit recreation center.

**Clerk:** Institute lien search fees; bring back Business Tax Receipts (Approx. \$60,000).

Town Clerk Kathy Rosado stated that lien searches are currently processed at no charge. She stated that many municipalities charge for this service. She stated that business tax receipts would be reinstated. She cautioned that a bill to eliminate them throughout the state is currently pending.

Mr. Lawrence stated that one position in the clerk's office would be saved by implementing these two revenue streams.

**Communications:** Sell branded Town merchandise; seek publishing partnership to share ad sales (Approx. \$1,500).

Communications Director Elisha Pappacoda stated that, as a support department, it is difficult to generate revenue. She stated that she will present an RFP for a Public Relations graphic design company to move forward with branding. This year's budget includes funding for this item. There will be new merchandise for purchase.

**Phase 2 -** Second priority, to be discussed if the referendum passes. Includes less popular alternatives.

Increase administrative rates for **Solid Waste Assessment** (Approx. \$200,000).

Mr. Eagle stated that the town has a franchise agreement with and contracts with Waste Management for solid waste. He stated that the town does not receive much revenue with this contract. This service fee is on the property's tax bill. He stated if the rates were raised by 10%, the present solid waste budget of approximately \$2M would increase by an additional \$190,000K. He stated that the town could recoup expenses for staff time and administration by charging this as an increase for administrative services. The general fund would increase to \$397,000 K.

Re-evaluate fees for additional **Police services**.

Chief Hunt stated that administrative fees are not charged for police outside detail. He stated that The Villages no longer has a contract with the town for this service and currently hires police detail when needed.

Chief Hunt stated that Operation Holiday Shield is an overtime detail where officer provide additional security at the shopping plazas. This detail could be offered to the businesses at a cost.

Mr. Lawrance reiterated that when our officers are hired for outside details, the administrative services costs are not included.

**Parks & Recreation** to split revenue with **Driving Range** operators (Approx. \$125k-\$400k annually)

Mr. Burske stated that American Legion Post 347 and the Orange Blossom Gardens Lions Club have a partnership to operate the driving range on Rolling Acres Road. These organizations utilize volunteers and the driving range gross' approximately \$400K annually, and pay the town \$500 annually to rent the driving range.

Mr. Burske proposed three options when renegotiating the lease agreement as follows:

- The town receives one-third of the gross receipts.
- The town solely operates the driving range. This entails hiring personnel and purchasing equipment.
- Place the driving range operation out for bid.

Mr. Burske acknowledged that these options would not be received well. However, the town must take care of itself.

**Pay applicable** salaries through **Utility Fund** (such as Finance Department – Approximately \$160,000)

Mr. Lawrence stated that a portion of funds from the Enterprise Fund is transferred to the General Fund as part of the salaries for the finance director, the assistant finance director, the town manager, and the public works director.

Mr. Eagle concurred with Mr. Lawrence.

**Phase 3** - Operating as a service provider to neighboring communities. Phase 3 includes collaborative yet challenging methods of revenue generation.

Mr. Lawrence stated that this phase would be implemented if the law passes. He stated that staff is hopeful that these proposals would prevent the town from losing any employees while maintaining the same level of services.

**Operating as a service provider of Town services to other jurisdictions at a cost.**

Mr. Lawrence stated that if the law passes and neighboring municipalities do not have a plan in place, the town will offer certain services at a cost. This would include IT services, human resources, growth management, police services, and essentially any of the town's services.

**Install red light and school zone cameras (Approximately \$1 M per year in other cities)**

Police Chief Hunt stated that school zone violations would be a \$100 fine, and a portion is distributed to the town. He stated that Red Light cameras have been controversial yet could be a revenue source.

**Annual golf cart registrations (\$25 per cart per year – approximately \$175,000 annually)**

Mr. Lawrence stated that there are many communities that utilize required golf cart registrations.

**Institute bed tax to pay for tourism capital improvements.**

**Implement hospitality tax at restaurants.**

Mr. Burske stated that currently Dade County and Broward County are the only municipalities in the state who are permitted to utilize this tax. There would need to be a change at the state level to allow all municipalities to utilize this tax.

**Explore short-term rental registration fees.**

**Monetize fiber infrastructure.**

IT Director John Pearl, stated the Fiber wide Area Network project was purposely overbuilt in anticipation of utilizing it as a revenue source. The biggest cost is opening the ground. Subsequent costs are considerably less. The town completed the second year of a nine-year project. He stated that there is interest currently from parties that are coming to our area in doing communications projects and asked if the town has capacity. He stated that these opportunities have not been entertained because fiber wide project is still in its early stages.

Mr. Pearl stated that there are several ways to monetize this by leasing dark fiber, conduit capacity, among other options. He cautioned that legally, the town cannot operate as a utility, cannot sell directly, and cannot compete with the local internet service provider.

Mr. Lawrence stated that alternative sources of revenue are an ongoing discussion and invited the commission to present ideas as well. He commended the department managers for their teamwork in presenting these potential revenue sources.

Mr. Lawrence stated the commission will begin to see some of these items on upcoming agendas. He stated that the goal is to continue to provide the same level of services if the

town loses \$7M of property tax revenue. He stressed that the town will survive and wants the town to be in a strong position to take advantage of an opportunity if the law passes.

Commissioner Roberts inquired if an MTSU stormwater fund is considered a property tax and one of the items that the state is considering eliminating.

Mr. Eagle stated that the state has considered eliminating this in the past. He stated that the state is currently considering eliminating the ad valorem tax. He clarified that the MTSU is a service fee, not a tax.

Commissioner Sage thanked the department managers for their proposals and acknowledged their efforts.

Commissioner Sage inquired how the stormwater utility fee would be utilized and would it reduce the utility fund. He stated that when this was presented to the commission last year, he believed the town would provide additional services with this revenue. Would the money generated from this source reduce the public works budget?

Mr. Eagle stressed that this is not a tax. It is a service fee based on estimated residential units (ERUs), \$2 per ERU or the size of an impervious area of a lot.

Mr. Eagle stated that the stormwater utility revenue would cover mowing rights-of-way and retention ponds, repair of retention ponds among other duties that are currently being done by the maintenance and utilities departments. He stated the stormwater fund would centralize these duties and add services ultimately offsetting much of the public works budget. He stated that it would not cover facilities maintenance or motor pool, along with other duties.

Mayor Freeman thanked Mr. Lawrence for his leadership with this plan and the department managers for their time with these proposals.

Mayor Freeman stated that he met with Representative Nan Cobb who stated that amendments to joint resolutions require 60% majority of the vote, which she believes is high.

Mayor Freeman stated that he is unsure how this law would affect those who do not live on homesteaded property, such as himself. He stated this tax elimination proposal is unfair to those who do not live on homesteaded property. He stated that Rep. Cobb does not believe this issue will go very far in the legislature.

Mayor Freeman stated regardless of whether this tax amendment is passed, what the department managers have proposed is proactive.

Commissioner Sage stated that the town should inform the town residents via a press release of the anticipated impact to town services. He stated that the residents get a good value from their tax dollars in Lady Lake.

Mayor Freeman stated that the Florida League of Cities is currently working on an education program for the public as to the effect this will have across the state. He stated that some municipalities will go out of business if this law passes because much of their budget comes from ad valorem taxes.

Mr. Lawrence stated that even though the Florida League of Cities will send information, Ms. Pappacoda has begun compiling our information to educate the town residents.

Ms. Pappacoda stated that the information will show the value of what the tax money is funding. She stated that the challenge is to educate without promoting a referendum. She stated that the town may utilize the information from the Florida League of Cities as well.

Commissioner Gourlie stated that he understands that there will be cuts if this law passes. He stressed that not all property taxes will be eliminated. He stated it will affect those properties that have a homestead exemption, and it is just the ad valorem that will be eliminated.

Commissioner Gourlie stated that commercial properties, rental properties, and residential properties that do not have a homestead exemption will not be affected. He stated that it is admirable that the town is preparing to increase revenue, yet he stated that he did not hear how the town would cut expenditures.

Commissioner Gourlie stated that not all property taxes will be lost. He stated that it is misleading to use that information to scare the public that there will not be services because there will not be taxes. He stated that taxes have increased to the degree that many retired residents must now find part-time work to pay their taxes.

Mr. Lawrence stated that there are 11 bills regarding property tax proposals in Committee. There is no way to know which ones will be approved. He stressed that the town is preparing for the worst scenario, and that Phase 3 of this presentation showed that staff and services would be cut. He stated that is the final option and he does not want that to come to fruition.


Mr. Lawrence stated that he is open to hear any proposal for life without property taxes from the commissioners.

Commissioner Regan stated that Florida may be the first state to eliminate ad valorem property tax. He stated that the cost of homeowner's insurance has increased due to the growth in home values and hurricanes. He stated that this is before the legislature as well and the people in Tallahassee are not in touch with the residents.

Commissioner Regan stated that a lot of people have expressed to him that their property tax brings a lot of value to them.

**ADJOURN**

There being no discussion, the meeting adjourned at 5:23 p.m.



Kathleen Rosado, Town Clerk



Ed Freeman, Mayor