

CHARTER REVIEW ADVISORY COMMISSION

CITY OF TAMPA, FLORIDA

Old City Hall

315 E Kennedy Blvd.

Tampa, Florida 33602

MINUTES FOR MEETING ON: August 11, 2026, AT 6:01 P.M.

The Charter Review Advisory Commission (CRC) of the City of Tampa, Florida convened in a regular meeting in the Sister Cities Room at Old City Hall, 315 E. Kennedy Boulevard, First Floor, at 6:01 p.m. on the 11th day of August 2026. The Zoom meeting was live streamed and recorded, and available on YouTube and minutes were prepared by Dharsh Saravana, City Council/City Clerk Support Specialist, Office of the City Clerk.

Members present upon roll call: Stephen Benson (virtual), Garrett Greco, Bobby Creighton, Ashley Morrow, Rebecca Kert, Alan Cohn, Kathleen Shanahan, Bill Schifino, Ron Christaldi, Alison Hewitt, and Sue Carlton.

City Staff in attendance were Gavin Barrera, T&I Support Technician, Marley Wilkes, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Mayor, Darlene Johnson, Legislative Aide, and Dharsh Saravana, City Council/City Clerk Support Specialist.

Others in attendance were CRC Facilitator Robert Hendrickson and CRC Attorney Kenneth Tinkler of Carlton Fields.

Public Comments

The following individuals addressed the CRC:

Joe Citro thanked the CRC members for their work and said that their work would be invaluable to the city for the next several years.

Stephanie Poynor commented on Tampa City Council's August 6th Budget Workshop meeting stating that the budget should be submitted to City Council when the Mayor introduces the budget. Poynor spoke about the lack of accountability for elected officials' ethics violations and the need for an Inspector General Office. Written public comment was submitted, which is attached to the minutes.

Allison Hewitt expressed that an Inspector General Office can curb political power, keep City Council and the Mayor's administration accountable, and allow individuals to freely share ethics complaints.

Approval of 7/28/26 Meeting Minutes

Chair Ashley Morrow asked for a motion to approve the prior meeting's minutes. Ron Christaldi identified a misspelling of his name.

MOTION (Schifino/ Cohn) to adopt the July 28, 2026, CRC Minutes as amended. Motion carried unanimously.

Review Potential Amendments to the Tampa City Charter

The CRC Attorney shared revised charter language for the appointment of the Zoning Hearing Officer.

Motion (Kert/ Creighton) to approve charter language as presented by the CRC Attorney clarifying that the appointment process for a Zoning Hearing Officer shall mirror the application and appointment process used by the Planning Commission as presented. Motion carried 7-2 with Christaldi and Greco voting no.

The CRC Attorney presented revised charter language establishing an Inspector General Office. After discussion, the CRC moved forward with adopting the language *ad seriatim*, as follows:

Motion (Schifino/ Cohn) to approve selection and retention committee with the addition of a designee from Stetson Law School to be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by a majority vote of City Council. Motion failed 2-6 with Greco, Creighton, Morrow, Kert, Shanahan, and Christaldi voting no and Benson not voting on said motion.

Motion (Schifino/ Cohn) to approve the section regarding the selection and retention committee of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney with the addition of a designee from Stetson Law School. Motion carried 7-2 with Morrow and Christaldi voting no.

Motion (Creighton/ Schifino) to approve sections (d), Periodic Review of Performance, (e), Removal, and (f), Vacancy, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion carried 6-3 with Shanahan, Christaldi, and Kert voting no.

Motion (Creighton/ Schifino) to approve sections (g), Interaction with the Internal Audit Department, and (h), Employment Status; Contract Basis, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion carried 6-3 with Shanahan, Christaldi, and Kert voting no.

Motion (Creighton) to strike section (i), Ordinance, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion failed due to lack of a second.

Motion (Schifino/ Greco) to approve section (i), Ordinance, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion carried 5-4 with Shanahan, Christaldi, Creighton, and Kert voting no.

Motion (Creighton/ Schifino) to approve section (j), Implementation, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion carried 6-3 with Shanahan, Christaldi, and Kert voting no.

Motion (Creighton/ Schifino) to approve section (a), Establishment; Purpose, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney. Motion carried 6-3 with Shanahan, Christaldi, and Kert voting no.

Motion (Schifino/ Cohn) to approve section (b), Powers, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney with the addition of the Inspector General Office having the ability to subpoena individuals/ organizations which are funded by or do business with the City of Tampa. Motion carried 5-4 with Shanahan, Christaldi, Kert, and Greco voting no.

The CRC members motioned again regarding section (c) after further deliberation.

Motion (Schifino/ Cohn) to approve section (c), Appointment; Inspector General Selection & Retention Committee, of the proposed language as presented by the CRC attorney with the addition of Stetson Law School Dean or their designee. Motion carried 6-3 with Shanahan, Christaldi, and Kert voting no.

The Facilitator utilized a whiteboard to take notes covering recommended changes, which are attached to the minutes as Exhibits A and B.

Discussion

Regarding the Independent Inspector General Office, the CRC deliberated on matters regarding whether appointment by Mayor and confirmation by the City Council would compromise the selection and retention committee's operational independence, the appropriate scope of subpoena power for the Inspector General office that balances operational needs with resident privacy, whether the office can only act on issues referred to them or conduct their own investigations, and whether anonymity of individuals making ethics complaints can be maintained.

The CRC Facilitator and Attorney revisited discussion regarding the final work product the CRC members would like to submit to City Council. The members recommended including the Charter language with all tracked changes and all meeting minutes and accepted the CRC Facilitator's suggestion to include an introductory memo and appendix. The members also scheduled a final meeting for September 1st, 2026, at 6:00 pm in the Sister Cities Room, and canceled the August 25th and September 8th meeting, to approve and finalize the work products produced by the CRC Facilitator, Attorney, and Clerk.

New Business

There was no new business.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn (Shanahan/Creighton): There being no further business to come before the Charter Review Advisory Commission at this time, upon no objection, CRC Chair Ashely Morrow adjourned said meeting at 8:38 p.m., on this the 11th day of August 2026.

Minutes Approved by CRC on 09/01/2026
Chairperson Ashley Morrow

AUG 11

Hearing officer

- Updated language to reflect planning comm. appointments

IG

- Risk that IG selection comm being of a majority party may (or could) "weaponize" the IG function.
- However, mayor + CC need to approve appointment → and cannot truly know party affiliations.
- Not clear about authority - seems to be a lot of overlap w/ current functions ex ethics commission
- Yes straw vote to selection committee
- No " " " removing mayor/CC from approval
- Need mayor + CC buy-in
- Federal system has worked (OIG); not politicized
- Should be recusal process if C.D.I.
- Could be expensive given other groups perform similar function
 - ↳ 1 person office

- D, E, F → √ (six yes's)
- G, H → ~~√~~ "
- I → √ (five yes's)
- J → √ (six)
- A → √ (six)
- B → ^{add} "dealing bus with a funded by city gov." √ (five)
- C → √ (six)

-
- Hybrid
 - memo w/ intro + charter Δs
 - Appendix
 -

Statement in Support of an Independent Office of Inspector General

The Charter Review Advisory Commission has voted to recommend an independent Office of Inspector General, and members on both sides of that vote raised the right question: whether Tampa needs a new office, or merely better use of the offices it has. That skepticism deserves a direct answer. What follows is one: a plain description of the problem, a documented account of what it has already cost, and the reason the Charter is the only place a solution can durably live.

The problem, stated plainly

Tampa has no office that can investigate its own government. Not one body in the City's structure can receive a complaint about a senior official, investigate it independently, and report what it finds.

Trace any complaint about city leadership and it dead-ends. Internal Audit reports to the mayor and reviews processes, not conduct. The Human Resources complaint intake sits inside the administration, in the same chain of command as any official it would examine. The City Attorney serves both the mayor and the council; asking that office to investigate one client for the other creates an immediate professional conflict. The Civil Service Board hears only appeals from discipline already imposed, and offers unclassified employees nothing at all. The Ethics Commission reaches only violations of the ethics code and cannot follow money, examine a contract, or review an operational failure; its staff Ethics Officer is, by designation, an Employee Relations manager inside the administration's Human Resources Department, and by the City's own written interpretation, the Commission's power to initiate inquiries on its own motion extends only to City officers and employees.

This convergence is not an inference. The City's Personnel Manual codifies it. Every complaint channel the Manual establishes leads to the same desk. Discrimination complaints go to a supervisor, a director, or Employee Relations, and terminate with the Director of Human Resources. The anonymous Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Disparity Hotline is monitored by Internal Audit, which "will in turn, advise Human Resources," and is in any case "not to be used for reporting grievances, issues involving disciplinary actions, or other personnel related issues." The whistleblower policy directs employees to contact the Director of Human Resources, who refers them back to those same internal procedures. And when a complaint is substantiated, the Manual states exactly where the disposition goes: all EEO violations "will be brought to the Mayor's Executive briefings through the Chief of Staff to determine the appropriate discipline." That is written policy. The final word on every substantiated complaint in this city belongs to the mayor's executive team, whoever the complaint concerns.

The administration confirmed this structure to council on June 4, 2026, and described it as a feature: "any allegations start out by Employee Relations," the chief of staff explained, and dispositions receive "a complete executive review."

None of this is a claim about anyone's intentions. It is a description of the organizational chart, confirmed by the City's own manual and the administration's own presentation. Every door a complaint can enter leads back toward the officials the complaint may concern, and the conflict of interest is visible on its face.

The consequences are not hypothetical. Over the past decade, across three administrations and both branches of city government, the same sequence has repeated five times, including once before a federal jury.

What the gap has already cost

Vidovic v. City of Tampa, No. 8:16-cv-00714 (M.D. Fla.). This is the one case in this record that reached a verdict, so it is the one where no one can say the allegations were never proven. In December 2017, after a four-week trial, a federal jury found that the City discriminated against a firefighter because she was pregnant and retaliated against her when she complained, awarding \$245,000. The retaliation the jury found followed complaints made to her captains, her superiors, Human Resources, and the EEOC; every internal channel had the complaint and none acted. She was fired the day after filing her federal lawsuit. With the City's own outside counsel billing more than \$300,000, the matter cost taxpayers over \$550,000. What happened next matters most for this Commission. The court declined to order structural reforms, ruling that pregnancy policies, facilities, and reporting procedures were "best left to the City of Tampa to create and implement." The City did not implement them. Four years after the verdict, in October 2021, the same firefighter stood before city council requesting essentially the same reforms, including, notably, independent third-party investigations of harassment complaints. The requests were still pending when the next cases arrived.

United States v. City of Tampa, No. 8:23-cv-02934 (M.D. Fla.). The Department of Justice sued the City over its 2017–2018 parental leave policy, adopted while the Vidovic case was being litigated. The federal complaint alleged that roughly 150 male employees were denied leave benefits available to female employees, and that some who tried to apply were discouraged by their supervisors or by officials in the City's own Human Resources department, the very office that receives discrimination complaints. No internal channel surfaced or corrected the problem, in the two years the policy operated or the five years after. It took the EEOC, the Department of Justice, and a federal lawsuit. The City resolved the case in 2024 for \$300,000 in damages plus up to 240 hours of restored leave per eligible employee, and agreed to adopt the safeguards the United States identified as necessary: complaint channels outside the chain of command, investigators independent of the officials they investigate, and outside investigators when a department director is the subject.

The council aide matter, 2021–2024. The gap is not confined to the executive branch, and when it reached city council, the City's response demonstrated what the structure requires: improvisation. Faced in 2021 with a legislative aide's harassment complaint against a sitting council member, someone no internal office had any standing process to investigate, the City hired an outside law firm at a cost of \$100,000. That investigation was genuinely independent, and it worked: after interviewing twenty witnesses, it found 18 of 19 allegations more likely than not to have occurred. The City settled with the aide for \$200,000, with a mayoral apology acknowledging that the council member "would have already been terminated had he been a city employee." But note what the episode actually demonstrates. The City concedes that independent investigation is sometimes necessary; it simply reserves for itself the choice of when. This complaint received a \$100,000 outside firm. The complaint against the police chief received the in-house Employee Relations Manager. The Mobility Department received no investigation at all, despite requests to council. Same city, same years, three different processes, selected at the administration's discretion. And the improvised process generated its own fairness complaints from the accused, who through counsel said he was not notified of the complaint for over a year and learned of the settlement through the media. Council later approved \$45,000 to reimburse his legal fees, bringing the public cost to roughly \$345,000. Ad hoc independence is not independence, for the complainant or the accused.

Lopez v. City of Tampa, No. 8:23-cv-2548-KKM (M.D. Fla.). An employee filed a discrimination complaint with the City on April 19, 2022, after receiving a negative performance review for use of medical leave, days after returning from a miscarriage. The City never investigated it. Its Employee Relations Manager testified that no investigation was required because the complainant was an unclassified employee. The complaint went nowhere internally, so it went to federal court, where it survived the City's motion for summary judgment on the central retaliation claims: the court held that a reasonable jury could find the department administrator intervened to prevent the employee's rehiring because she had complained, citing sworn supervisor testimony that the administrator said the employee "has got to go" and, of a later opening, "not anymore, I saw to that." Rather than let a jury decide, the City settled for \$350,000, approved by council on February 19, 2026, with attorney's fees on top.

The department at the center of the Lopez case had been visibly troubled since 2023, when several senior women departed and former employees addressed council during a whistleblower workshop. That June, a senior transportation manager who had received a perfect performance review five months earlier was terminated without a stated reason. Her grievance, filed with Employee Relations on June 7, 2023, explained in a footnote why she had never complained before: she "did not feel safe discussing issues of discrimination, insults, and intimidation based upon my past observations of retaliatory actions against those who did so." When the allegations became public, the administration's response, as reported by the Tampa Bay Times and Creative Loafing Tampa Bay, was that none of these employees had ever said a word about any problem with the department until now. That was offered as vindication. It is the diagnosis. Employees said nothing because, as the grievance records in real time, they had watched what happened to

those who did. Asked by reporters whether the allegations would be investigated, the mayor said the City is "always doing after action and looking into what we could have done better." No investigation followed, and the City declined calls for an outside one. And the City's written Statement of Position to the EEOC on the resulting discrimination charge rested on now-familiar ground: unclassified employees "are appointed, at-will and serve at the pleasure of the administration," and "[i]t is not required that unclassified employees be given a reason for a change in their employment status." That is the same doctrine offered under oath in Lopez and repeated in the Cate investigation finding. Three documents, three years, one consistent position: for the City's entire unclassified workforce, no complaint requires investigation and no termination requires a reason. And it is a position that appears nowhere in the City's written rules. The Personnel Manual's Equal Opportunity policy applies "to every aspect of the City of Tampa employment policies and practices" and promises that any complaint of an EEO violation "will be promptly and appropriately investigated by the Human Resources Department," with no exception for the unclassified. What the Manual does withhold from unclassified employees is the grievance procedure, available by its terms only to "any classified City of Tampa employee." So the written policy promises every employee an investigation; the practiced doctrine, asserted in sworn testimony and federal filings, denies one to the entire unclassified workforce; and no office exists with the independence to notice, let alone resolve, the contradiction.

The Cate matter, March–April 2026. The final example is unfolding now and remains unresolved; this statement takes no position on its merits and relies only on documented facts, which are these. In March, the Police Department terminated an assistant chief of nearly thirty years' service, the highest-ranking woman in the department, two days after another employee she had supported gave a statement to internal affairs regarding a discrimination complaint. On March 24, she filed a formal complaint with Human Resources alleging discrimination and retaliation. The investigation was conducted by the City's Employee Relations Manager, the same official who testified in the Lopez case that complaints from unclassified employees required no investigation, and consisted of interviews with the police chief, another assistant chief, and three other department employees. A month later, the City announced its conclusion: no violation could be substantiated, in part because the complainant "was an appointed unclassified employee, and therefore serves at the pleasure of the administration."

Set aside whether that conclusion is right. The structure that produced it cannot make it believable, and the defect runs deeper than who conducted the interviews. The administration decided that this complaint would be handled in-house, decided who the investigator would be, decided which five witnesses to hear, and decided when the inquiry was complete. That is the same discretion visible across this entire record: an outside firm for the council aide's complaint, an in-house review for the assistant chief's, no investigation at all for the Mobility complaints, each choice made by the officials whose organization was the subject. If the complaint has merit, a process selected and scoped by its subject cannot be trusted to find it. And if the termination was entirely justified, as it may have been, that same process cannot credibly clear anyone either; a finding of "no evidence" issued on these terms exonerates no one in the public's eyes.

Independent investigation protects the accused as much as the accuser, but the prior and greater safeguard is an independent decision-maker in charge of what gets investigated at all. Under the current structure, that decision belongs, every time, to the people the complaint concerns.

The tell

This June, in a staff report to council on the City's whistleblower and retaliation procedures, the administration offered this assurance: "Legal findings of retaliation – zero to date."

The statement is true only if it is scoped carefully, and it is empty either way. A federal jury found retaliation against this City in 2017. Since then there have been zero findings because the City settles contested cases before any finding can be made, and investigates the rest itself or by ad hoc arrangement, then presents the absence of findings to council as evidence of health. The cumulative public cost of the matters described here, verdicts, settlements, investigation contracts, and known fees, approaches \$1.5 million.

The morning of June 4, 2026 captures the entire pattern in a single council meeting. The chief of staff opened the administrative update by presenting the retiring administrator at the center of the Lopez case for recognition, and council voted a commendation, 6 to 1. Later that same day, the administration delivered its staff report on whistleblower and retaliation procedures containing the "zero to date" assurance, weeks after the Cate investigation self-cleared and months after the Lopez settlement was approved. Council commended in the morning and was reassured in the afternoon, and at no point in between did any independent investigative record exist for any member to consult. Whatever any member believed about those matters, the structure guaranteed they were deciding blind.

That is the problem in one sentence: the City's account of its own conduct is written entirely by the people whose conduct is in question, and no one, not council, not the public, not the employees involved, can check it.

What the Office of Inspector General solves

The proposed Article XII answers each element of this problem directly.

It gives complaints a door that does not lead back to the subject: any resident or any city staff member may refer a matter directly to the office, alongside the mayor and council, and the office alone decides whether the public interest warrants an investigation, audit, or review, with whistleblower protections for those who report mandated by ordinance. And this is the proposal's most consequential transfer of power, though it is easy to miss: the threshold decision, what gets examined and what does not, moves out of the hands of the officials a complaint may concern and into an office with no stake in the answer. Every failure in this record begins at that threshold. The complaint never investigated, the inquiry scoped to five interviews, the outside firm hired for

one matter and withheld from another: these were not investigative failures. They were selection decisions, made by the subjects.

It sees patterns no one can currently see. One complaint is a personnel matter. A department shedding senior staff, drawing repeated allegations, and generating settlements is a systemic failure, squarely within the office's jurisdiction over mismanagement and abuse of power. Today the offices holding those pieces all report to the same place, and no one is positioned to connect them.

It can reach the people no internal process can reach, in either branch. The City has already conceded this need three times: the DOJ settlement requires an outside investigator when a department director is the subject, the council aide matter required hiring one, and the in-house alternative in the Cate matter persuaded no one. Article XII makes that capacity permanent, rule-bound, and answerable to the public, instead of a discretionary purchase the administration makes for some complaints and withholds from others.

It gives council and the public a fact-finder. With the power to compel the appearance of any official, employee, or contractor for interview, and to publish independent public reports of its findings, the next time council is asked to approve a settlement, or a commendation, it can act on an investigative record instead of a staff assurance.

And it keeps problems, and dollars, inside the city. Every matter in this record followed the same arc: internal complaint fails, employee goes external, years pass, taxpayers fund a six-figure resolution, and nothing structural changes. An internal channel employees trust resolves the same matters in months, at a fraction of the cost, with findings the City can actually use to fix what is broken. The real cost of this office is not its budget. It is what the City pays, in settlements, in fees, and in trust, every time a problem that could have been found early is instead found in federal court.

Why the Charter, and only the Charter

Here the record answers the last objection before it is raised. Twice now, eight years apart, federal judges have looked at Tampa's structural problems and declined to fix them from the bench. In 2018, the court in Vidovic denied injunctive relief, ruling that reformed policies and procedures were "best left to the City of Tampa to create and implement." In 2024, the court in the DOJ matter declined to enter the consent decree's oversight provisions, concluding that ongoing federal supervision of a city's personnel structure was not a workable role for a federal judge. Both courts were right, and both said the same thing: this is Tampa's to build. The City did not build it after 2018, and the safeguards from the 2024 settlement exist today only as administrative policy. That is not a criticism of any administration; it is a statement about what policy is. A safeguard that any administration, this one or any future one, can amend without a vote is a commitment, not a structure, and the question before the Commission is not whether the current executive

deserves trust but whether the citizens of Tampa should have to extend it, permanently, as their only protection.

Nor is this a question of restraining one branch for the benefit of the other, and the record proves it, because the conflict runs in both directions. When the complaints concerned the administration, the process belonged to the administration. And when the complaint concerned a council member, the process belonged to the administration too: the executive branch retained the investigating firm, negotiated the settlement, and issued the mayoral apology, resolving a matter of the legislative branch's integrity entirely through executive channels, while the accused member, by his account, was not notified for over a year. Under the current structure, neither branch can receive an arms-length answer about the other, or offer one about itself, and the public receives none at all. Independent decision-making authority over these matters serves the citizens rather than either branch, and it takes nothing from anyone except the conflict itself.

The federal courts have now twice returned this responsibility to the City. This Commission is the first body since with both the mandate and the means to accept it.

Members of the public who have appeared before this Commission have asked for the same foundational safeguards, and they are the right list: independence from political or administrative influence; meaningful authority for objective, proactive oversight across all City departments; a full-time office supported by sufficient staffing; and stable funding to fulfill the mission. For a city with an annual budget approaching \$2 billion, oversight cannot be a part-time responsibility. By embedding these safeguards in the Charter, the Commission makes them part of the City's enduring framework rather than leaving them to future ordinances or administrative decisions.

The proposed Article XII transfers no executive or legislative power. It creates the single capability the current structure cannot supply and recent history shows the City needs: an investigator that no one under investigation controls.

Sources: Vidovic v. City of Tampa, No. 8:16-cv-00714 (M.D. Fla.): jury verdict of Dec. 7, 2017, and orders on reinstatement and injunctive relief (2018); United States v. City of Tampa, No. 8:23-cv-02934 (M.D. Fla.): complaint, proposed consent decree, opinion declining entry (2024), and U.S. Dep't of Justice Civil Rights Division case summary (dismissal Oct. 1, 2024, upon settlement); Lopez v. City of Tampa, No. 8:23-cv-2548-KKM (M.D. Fla.): Order on Motion for Summary Judgment (Doc. 61); Tampa City Council meetings of Oct. 7, 2021, Feb. 19, 2026, and June 4, 2026 (realtime transcript and video via the City's council meeting archive); the City of Tampa Personnel Manual as published at tampa.gov (2026), Policies B1.1 (Equal Opportunity), B23.2 (Whistleblower Policy/Fraud, Waste, Abuse and Disparity Hotline), and B27 (Grievance Procedure); correspondence of the City's Ethics Officer and Human Resources Director (March 2022) and the Ethics Commission's disposition letter (April 2022), which by its terms is public record; a non-bargaining unit grievance filed with City of Tampa Employee Relations on June 7, 2023, and the City of Tampa's Statement of Position submitted to the EEOC in response to the resulting discrimination charge (quoted with the complainant's consent); independent investigation report by Trenam Law regarding a 2021 legislative aide complaint, and the City's May 2022 settlement agreement and apology letter, with council action on fee reimbursement (March 2024); City of Tampa Human Resources investigation records and TPD memoranda concerning the March 2026 termination of an assistant chief, released via public records requests (April 2026); administration staff report to council on whistleblower and retaliation policy (June 2026); public comment received by the Commission, July 28, 2026; contemporaneous reporting by the Tampa Bay Times, Creative Loafing Tampa Bay, The Tampa Monitor, WMNF, and others (2016–2026).

Tampa City Council questions Castor administration's transparency

By [Breanne Williams](#) – Reporter, Tampa Bay Business Journal

Aug 10, 2026

Several members of Tampa City Council on Monday floated the idea of an investigation into Mayor Jane Castor's administration, marking the latest escalation in [a yearslong feud](#) between the council and the mayor's office.

In a budget workshop on Monday, several city council members said they were vexed over years of a lack of openness from the Castor administration and began speculating on the best path forward to address their concerns. Within the first 10 minutes of the workshop, members of the council called for a “full investigation” into the administration, with Councilmember Bill Carlson suggesting that the council reach out to the Florida Attorney General and Councilmember Charlie Miranda threatening to sue the administration.

Multiple council members voiced disappointment over not being given access to the full budget with enough time to review it. They also said that the physical copies of the budget they received were in a very small, nearly unreadable font. Councilmember Lynn Hurtak said her budget package folder was physically damaged. City council chairperson Alan Clendenin called the delivery of the budget “malicious compliance.”

“It should not be that difficult to provide council with a document so that they can do their fiduciary responsibility in evaluating the budget for 2027 — actually, I’ll say 2025, 2026 and now 2027 because those are three that I’ve been involved in, and I understand that this predates this moment,” Clendenin said.

Mayoral spokesperson Adam Smith said that they “absolutely should have done better” on the font size of the package, but that council has had access to the proposed budget for two weeks. They received printed copies a few days ago. He said a few years ago, the city switched to OpenGov to make the budget easily accessible to the public.

Hurtak and Councilmember Naya Young repeatedly voiced their exasperation over receiving detailed financial breakdowns live rather than as part of the budget summary, which forced council to “digest” the complex figures in real time rather than review them beforehand.

“We have to digest so much information in 30 seconds, sitting right here,” Young said. “All of this is important information that we shouldn’t get on the date of. And then you come to us and say, ‘We need to have this in by Sept. 1, we need to have this by this date ...’ You come here and you railroad us, and you don’t give us any information.”

Clendenin said he will be bringing forward a resolution to launch an investigation into how council arrived at this tense relationship with the administration. He said he didn't want to believe that people had lied to him, but that he felt council had been a good partner and was still constantly dealing with these issues. He said council had the "legislative authority to launch an investigation" and that at the next meeting, they could "address that issue."

Miranda said that individually, city council and the city operate well, but that they are "not so great as a unit."

"I'm this close to filing a lawsuit — and not asking anybody for any help — to find out what the hell's really going on," Miranda said.

Council's frustration is coming to a head as it prepares to vote on a controversial stormwater project that has ~~increased in cost~~ — up from \$64.5 million to over \$100 million. It is nearing a final vote from the city council, whose members are concerned they cannot properly vet it without having more information.

The project has drawn ~~support~~ from businesses along the corridor and strong support from residents in the surrounding area who are desperate for flood relief. However, there is debate over how many homes would be affected by the project and whether a better alternative exists. The Castor administration has said it looked at many alternatives and that this is the best path forward.

Stephanie Poynor has been on the Citizens Budget Committee since 2021, we have done this EVERY single year that I have been on the committee. There were NO surprises for anyone in the administration. NONE