



**CITY OF LA MARQUE
CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL MINUTES
of
September 25, 2025**

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Mayor Bell called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

PRESENT:

Keith Bell	Mayor
Joe Compian	Mayor Pro Tem, District B
Kimberley Yancy	Councilmember District A
Joseph Lowry	Councilmember District C
Tonia Griffin	Councilmember District D

3. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Pro Tem Compian gave the invocation and Deputy City Clerk Kasey Lott led the Pledge.

4. CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

- Delon Delafosse (*online, refused to provide address*) expressed her support for the tax hike for the City's growth. She shared that she understands that the increased tax rate can be a strain. However, it requires putting funds into helping the citizens for the city to remain beautiful. She pledged to personally pay \$100 for three (3) citizens who fall between the age range of 60-64 and are on fixed income.
- Haley Winkelmann (*online, refused to provide address*) shared that the council needs to do what they have to in order to keep the city afloat. She stated that she wants to ensure that taxpayer funds are being spent responsibly and effectively. She expressed concern about the Police Department overtime budget and stated that she is uncomfortable giving funds to the police department if they are unable to budget appropriately.
- Bryan Goetchius (1127 Mainland Dr., Texas City, Texas) spoke about the different levels of corruption and the city's current state of chaos. He also expressed the need for better transparency and suggested a forensic audit.
- Nicholas Roque (1535 Newman Rd.) discussed legal and statutory objections to the tax increase. He noted that the tax hike was illegal due to audit filing delays. He shared that he submitted a complaint to the Attorney General's office and called for state oversight and a forensic audit.
- Michael Adams (1428 23rd Ave. N., Texas City, TX) spoke on behalf of the owners of 1727 Main Street to have the demolition of property reconsidered due

to permit denial. He emphasized the benefit of completing sixty four (64) affordable apartment units in the city limits. He noted a productive pre-meeting discussion with Robert Booth and is hopeful for a resolution.

- Justin McDonald (3 Pine Circle) questioned why additional funds are being requested amid poor past financial stewardship. He urged alternative funding strategies and better use of the existing \$10 million in Certificates of Obligations (COs).
- James DeWalt (Perle St.) raised concerns about lack of infrastructure in his neighborhood. He specifically noted issues with lights, signage and road repairs. He expressed his frustration with the city's priorities, especially large police department funding. He shared his skepticism about the city's business friendliness and support for youth services.
- Mark McGaffey (Downey Dr.) questioned the city's fiscal responsibility and tax policy. He requested more transparency regarding the railroad business park plans and environmental concerns. He also supported Mr. DeWalt's comments about the need to attract better businesses to the city.
- Robert Michetich (24 N. Curlew St.) suggested budgetary solutions to avoid a tax increase. He stated that he provided a detailed proposal and intended to expand on it further.
- Elizabeth Turner (2010 Howell Ave.) expressed her concern over lack of self-respect and respect among council members. She criticized the lack of inter-district communication and voiced her faith in God amid the frustrations with council leadership. She also questioned certain financial responsibility of the city, citing discrepancies in a CPA report that referenced "GLO Ike" instead of being correctly labeled as "Harvey".
- Bo Hunter (2613 Lake Park Dr.) expressed his concern about a residential property with ten (10) vehicles and compared it to a salvage yard. He met with Code Enforcement, but the current city code allows for such vehicle count if each vehicle is registered to the occupants of the residence. He requested for council to revise city codes on vehicle limits for residential properties.
- Verta Thompson (2304 Jackson St.) shared her concerns about poor street conditions and the property tax increases. She noted her experience in public budgeting and compliance, and emphasized the impact of tax increases on the disabled and fixed-income residents.
- John Kent (157 Lower Borondo) called for financial accountability and employee audits. He urged council members who cannot perform to resign. He questioned council on what assurances the citizens have that funds will not be mismanaged again.
- Brandon Kantowski (Oaklawn) criticized the police transparency and lack of access to body camera footage on a particular incident which he was involved in. He alluded to a "darkness" of systemic issues and enforcement of code violations. He congratulated Councilmember Griffin on her recent success of becoming an elected official. He emphasized the need for public and internal accountability.
- Re'Chard Loftis (*no address given*) reiterated concerns about chaos and dysfunction in the city government. He noted that he found "disturbing" information through document review. He criticized past and present corruption

and financial mismanagement and also pointed out increased public attendance when financial issues were discussed.

- Harvey Freebird (*online, no address given*) advocated for reducing unnecessary police activity such as traffic stops for minor infractions to save money and suggested a "fire department model" where police only respond to emergencies.

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

***Mayor Bell recessed the Special City Council Meeting and opened the Public Hearing at 6:57 p.m.*

5.I. Ordinance No. O-2025-0018

No one spoke during this public hearing.

5.II. Ordinance No. O-2025-0019

- Robert Michetich (24 N Curlew) recapped his comments from the citizen's participation section of the agenda. He stated that the public should not be held to fix the taxes. He suggested alternative solutions including modifying authorizations and replenishing the reserve fund through planned measures.
- Brandon Kantowski (Oaklawn) indicated he was confused by the language provided in the ordinance. However, he is looking for a solution. He suggested selling non-essential items and assets from the overspending and placing the funds back into the budget.
- James Osteen (2012 Jeridona) expressed his disappointment in the council's oversight but still maintains confidence in their leadership. He recommended leaving the tax rate where it is and wants the council to redeem themselves.
- Jacqueline Perrin (1304 Rhodora) stressed that the city's problems are due to underfunding and overextension rather than any one person on council taking the blame. She expressed her support for the new Interim City Manager, Barbara Holly, and defended the need for public services.
- Verda Thompson (Jackson St.) stated her concerns over increasing property valuations compounding the impact of any tax rate hike. She urged for a balance in property taxation to prevent undue burden to homeowners.
- Felix Brown (*no address given*) requested that the council not raise taxes. He wants to see the Texas Rangers and the FBI called in to investigate the current issues. He noted that "the city cannot go forward and let the chips fall where they land" in moving forward.
- Shamira Green (*no address given*) shared her support for the community's opposition to raising taxes. She emphasized the need for transparency, collaboration, and strategic planning to improve city revenue through economic growth.
- Nicholas Roque (1535 Newman Rd.) asked if the city has received a determination from the Attorney General's Office. He questioned information he heard from City Attorney Gus Knebel on Senate Bill 1851, which is the new law he cited during the citizen's participation item on the

agenda, asking for clarity on if the new bill would go into effect immediately or take effect on the next budget. Attorney Robert Booth provided a point of information stating that while the bill has gone into effect, it would not apply until the next tax year. He also indicated that as of today, there has been no determination from the Attorney General on this.

- Justin McDonald (3 Pine Circle) stated that the audit synopsis requirements under the new law had not been met before the meeting. He also questioned the legal compliance of the city with this new law.
- Alice Ramy (Village Circle) shared her support for the tax increase to improve city services and safety. She acknowledged over-policing, but also noted that she has seen the crime rate decline in her district.

6. OLD BUSINESS

***Mayor Bell closed the Public Hearing and reconvened the Special Meeting at 7:14 p.m.*

6.1. Ordinance No. O-2025-0018

Interim City Manager Holly gave a presentation showing the changes made to the budget. She explained that in order to get a loan, the city would need to raise taxes by three cents (\$0.03) or three and a half cents (\$0.035) and the revenues from this tax would go straight to covering short-term debt. She noted that the City of La Marque has the lowest tax rate in all of Galveston County and the current rate is still under the amount in 2022. She expressed the need to rebuild the debt service, impact fees, and park fees. She emphasized that the City can get away with the three-cent (\$0.03) tax increase but would prefer three and one half cents (\$0.035).

Councilmember Lowry expressed his frustration, specifically with the term "it's only" when referring to taxpayer rate increases. He implored council to listen to the citizens and noted that the City of La Marque should not be compared to other cities. He also shared that the city needs new businesses to come, but the city's reputation is causing business owners to decide on working with other cities. Councilmember Yancy shared that she was here during the tax rollback in 2022 and chalked it up to paperwork errors and the Tax Assessor's Office. She noted that one million dollars (\$1,000,000) went back to the citizens and that is when the problem with the city's finances began. She noted that the city has done more to combat crime and repair streets during this time. She also recognized that Mayor Pro Tem Compian suggested that the city should already have been at a forty-one cent (\$0.41) tax rate. She noted that there are still many streets that need repairs and that nearly fifty to seventy percent (50-70%) of the budget is strictly tied to public safety, which needs to be fixed. She expressed her frustration, but noted that the council must do what is best for the city by listening to the experts and staff. She encouraged the citizens to talk with their councilmembers to discuss their concerns. She noted the hardships that the city staff endure when faced with hostile environments and issues. She inquired about the options that the city can take at this time and if what would happen if the city remained at the current tax rate.

Interim City Manager Holly responded to the Councilmember's questions by indicating that the city will have extreme difficulty in getting loans if the tax rate is not increased. She also noted that the Economic Development Corporation has been a great asset. She also explained that all positions are frozen and in order to keep the city afloat, the plan is to reduce expenses and get loans.

Councilmember Griffin expressed her concern for District D as she has conducted her own personal audits and identified maintenance issues. She shared her concern for service needs in the city to take care of tax payers. She explained that if the city keeps the tax rate the same, the city infrastructure will be impacted. She questioned what the citizens will get from Council if moving forward with the tax increase.

Councilmember Lowry argued that a tax increase is "throwing money at bad deeds". He reiterated the need to listen to the taxpayers.

Councilmember Yancy questioned if there was mismanagement.

Interim City Manager Holly shared that following the tax rollback, the budget did not accommodate for public services. She noted overspending in public safety at \$2.8 million. She placed the issues on the "innocence of not knowing how to maintain a budget" in the past and noted that pennies will keep the city afloat.

Councilmember Griffin requested additional transparency for residents to see how the overspending took place.

Councilmember Yancy questioned where the revenue was lost. Interim City Manager Holly responded that the revenues over the last few years were overstated.

Councilmember Lowry questioned if every penny of mismanaged funds was due to public safety. Interim City Manager Holly replied that the vast majority of it was spent on overtime. She also stated that the department heads need to do their job and be held accountable for their budgets.

Mayor Bell acknowledged the "brutal" presentation of the city's recent audit and stated that the former Finance Department was not well supervised by the previous City Managers. He previously requested that the new Finance Director, Worth Ferguson, go back five (5) years on finances. He also agrees wholeheartedly that the council should listen to the taxpayers. Mayor Bell recapped the 2022 Tax Rollback, the issues that the city faced leading to the rollback, and noted that even with the rollback effort benefiting the citizens with a one million dollar (\$1,000,000) refund, the citizens still supported the increase of public safety to address violent crime in the city. He raised concern over the last three (3) years of having an inaccurate budget. He shared his heartburn for increasing the tax rate. He asked the city manager for a detailed background of the \$936,000 cut from the budget.

Interim City Manager Holly responded that all open positions would be frozen, and all departments would be going as bare bones as possible to operate.

Mayor Bell asked Finance Director Ferguson to restate his qualifications to serve as the Finance Director.

Finance Director Ferguson shared his credentials, which included his work in state government for over twenty (20) years, including six (6) years in the state auditor's office in the fraud and investigative role. He also noted that he conducted audits of governments and universities, personally completed twenty two (22) forensic

audits, and uncovered over \$100 million in fraud throughout his investigations. Mayor Bell questioned Police Chief Randall Aragon on what was cut with the Police Department.

Chief Aragon indicated that approximately \$900,000 was cut from the current proposed budget. He noted that the police department is utilizing grants to cover numerous officers.

Councilmember Lowry emphasized that the City of La Marque has one of the highest crime rates in the state of Texas. He found it "repulsive" for the negativity against the police department.

Mayor Bell questioned Councilmember Lowry about where he would cut the funds.

Councilmember Lowry stated it would not be with Public Safety. He suggested moving funds from Public Works and Parks.

Interim City Manager Holly shared that the initial budget presented to council was with a forty-five cent (\$0.45) tax rate. She commended the city staff for coming together to help bring the numbers down to the thirty-nine cent (\$0.39) tax rate. Councilmember Lowry made an argument about the previous hiring process for the City Manager Position earlier this year. He noted that the candidate he supported had twenty-seven (27) years of experience in the federal government and was a veteran.

Mayor Bell responded that, due to the specifications in the Charter, the candidate must have municipal experience. He noted that while he understands

Councilmember Lowry's argument, the charter must be followed.

Mayor Pro Tem Compian shared his experience of understanding how to recover from disasters. He specifically noted that it is a form of leadership to accept responsibility and asked for forgiveness from the citizens. He stated that his approach is "to sit back and listen" by respecting those who speak before council, actively notes their concerns, and follows up to verify that these concerns have been addressed. He requested financial transparency and commended the Economic Development Corporation (EDC) for their willingness to help with providing the city a \$1.5 million loan. He gave opinions on potential solutions, such as resolving the lawsuit against the Texas City Railway Terminal, selling land, and receiving reimbursements from FEMA for Hurricane Beryl. He noted that the city must be disciplined as it is getting by "on the hair of our chinny - chin - chin." He indicated that the recovery phase of this is to show the responsibility to preserve the good faith and credit of the City of La Marque to combat high interest rates. He noted that in order to not "get screwed" by high interest rates, the city must show a fiscally sound plan with additional income that will cover the debt the city is accruing. He noted that the Texas Water Development Board loan has the ability to help with city infrastructure such as broken waterlines, sewer leakages in homes, etc. and is a grant that is forgivable as long as the city complies with the terms. He shared that he does not support the forty-five-cent (\$0.45) increase but rather a two-cent (\$0.02) tax increase. He noted that the council agreed to form a finance committee that will convene immediately after all members are assigned. Mayor Pro Tem made a motion to accept the budget at the thirty-nine cent (\$0.39) tax rate. Councilmember Yancy seconded. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

*****AFTER THE APPROVAL OF THE TAX RATE INCREASE***

Mayor Pro Tem made a motion to amend the previously approved budget and adopt a budget with a two-cent (\$0.02) increase entirely on debt repayment. ***It was noted as a non-substantial change and therefore did not need a new ordinance.* Councilmember Yancy seconded. **MOTION CARRIED WITH 3 AYES (Compian, Yancy, Griffin), 1 NAY (Bell) AND 1 ABSTENTION (Lowry).**

6.II. Ordinance No. O-2025-0019

Councilmember Yancy questioned the difference between the proposed rate and what city is proposing of three cents (\$0.03).

Mayor Pro Tem Compian responded with the two-cent (\$0.02) tax rate would allow for \$364,092 versus a three-cent (\$0.03) tax rate increase which would total approximately \$546,138. It was determined that the difference would be \$182,046.

Mayor Pro Tem Compian noted that the Council must make tough decisions. He shared that council has already analyzed water rates and, due to erroneous information of having a surplus of \$19,000,000 in utility fund, the city will have to minimize the impact.

Interim City Manager Holly shared that the new Maintenance & Operations rate would be \$0.311749 and the Interest and Sinking rate would stay the same at \$0.115253.

Councilmember Yancy questioned if the city can make it based on the two-cent (\$0.02) increase.

Interim City Manager Holly stated that the city can make it work because it "shows the banks that we are serious" and want to keep our credit rating up and want to move forward.

Mayor Pro Tem Compian made it clear that with this two-cent (\$0.02) increase, the city must commit to the community to remain transparent and will hold "feet to the fire" to ensure things are being done in this fashion.

Mayor Pro Tem made a motion to set the tax rate with a two-cent (\$0.02) increase. As a result of this increase, the maintenance and operation amount is \$0.311749 and the interest portion and debt is \$0.115253. Councilmember Yancy seconded.

Mayor Bell stated that this is not about "awarding bad behavior as the bad behavior has been separated from our city." He expressed his heartburn about raising taxes. He encouraged each member of council to do what is in the best interest of their constituency. His issue is the rise of the budget by \$6 million from 2025. He noted that there was overspending as an administrative team, and there should have been a financial plan. He expressed his respect for Interim City Manager Holly and Finance Director Worth Ferguson. He does not believe this should have happened in the way that it has. He reiterated to council that they should vote in order to meet the needs of their constituents.

Mayor Pro Tem Compian spoke to the concerns of the seniors and disabled on a tax increase. He noted that the city tax will remain the same due to a freeze with the exception of the Drainage District taxes and emergency services taxes. He also encouraged citizens to protest their taxes if their appraisal goes up.

MOTION CARRIED 3 AYES (Compian, Yancy, Griffin) and 2 NAYS (Bell, Lowry).

***The M&O was incorrectly verbalized on the dais. The correct M&O rate should*

be \$0.3032480. The motion was directed at a two-cent (\$0.02) increase in the total tax rate from the previous year.

7. NEW BUSINESS

7.1. Ordinance No. O-2025-0025

Mayor Pro Tem Compian provided a brief history of how this ordinance has come to council for consideration. He noted that the city previously established an Heavy Industrial Zoning District (I-3). However, the property itself was not rezoned at that time. He noticed that there are limitations created. However, the Texas City Railway Terminal will fit within the rules of a Heavy Industrial Zoning District. Jason Hayley (Vice President of Texas City Railway Terminal) discussed how his company is working hard with the City of La Marque legal team to put in protections for the citizens and the community. He ensured that the Texas City Railway Terminal would operate within the ordinances, laws, and statutes. He also explained how this could bring in new business to La Marque.

Mayor Pro Tem thanked Mr. Hayley and his team for their engagement with the council throughout this process.

Councilmember Lowry requested a Town Hall prior to the second reading of this ordinance to discuss concerns. Mr. Hayley stated he can commit to being available for a Town Hall to alleviate citizen concerns.

Councilmember Yancy shared that negotiations on this have lasted well over 5 years and asked if Councilmember Lowry was okay with moving forward, as this property is in his district. She asked Mr. Hayley if the Texas City Railway Terminal would consider adding a park for the neighborhood when developing their plans. Councilmember Lowry responded that he is ok with it as long as the Town Hall happens before the second reading of the ordinance.

Mayor Pro Tem made a motion to proceed with the zoning designation. Councilmember Griffin seconded. **MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.**

8. EXECUTIVE SESSION

There was no executive session.

9. ACTIONS TAKEN FROM EXECUTIVE SESSION

No action was taken.

10. REQUESTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councilmember Griffin did not speak.

Councilmember Lowry requested to set up a Town Hall to discuss the rezoning ordinance involving the Texas City Railway Terminal and requested that this be published on the website and on the city's social media pages. He thanked Councilmember Griffin for her email regarding drainage reports. He thanked Mayor Pro Tem Compian for listening, as he considers him a role model as he speaks with compassion. He also requested an update on drainage in his district.

Councilmember Yancy encouraged residents to attend the October 4th Town Hall. She spoke directly to Councilmember Lowry, saying she is willing to work together and extended an olive branch to stop attacking her family. She requested a meeting with Interim City Manager Holly to discuss cases coming from the La Marque Police

Department and the residents' concerns about over-policing. She thanked Ms. Holly for coming in and helping staff and council. She noted that it is time to bring in additional oversight of corruption that may be happening within the Police Department. She thanked Interim City Manager Holly for her research into the two-cent (\$0.02) tax increase and asked that council work together and not place blame. She encouraged the constituency to have meetings with the City Manager and their councilmembers to combat misinformation that was spread.

Mayor Pro Tem requested quarterly updates on legal cases. He shared his appreciation for the turnout and noted that he listens carefully and hoped his reasoning was clear. He expressed the desire to continue having a community that "we can be proud of."

Mayor Bell reminded the public of the Candlelight Vigil on October 2nd at 6:00 p.m. in Council Chambers, the Unified Town Hall taking place at the Central Fire Station on October 4th at 11:00 a.m., and National Night Out taking place on October 7th at Mac McGaffey Highland Bayou Park. He expressed his thanks to Interim City Manager Holly and Finance Director Worth Ferguson for the work that they did for preparing the budget, identifying issues, and working with department heads to make city services as effective as possible. He thanked the department heads for trimming budgets and reiterated his thanks to Interim City Manager Holly and called her a "tough cookie".

11. ADJOURNMENT

***Meeting was adjourned at 9:56 p.m.*