



City Council Meeting Work Session
July 14, 2026 – 7:00 PM
Pendergrass City Hall

I. **Call to Order- : Motion made by Bob Carter; seconded by Sylvia Basak. All in favor.**

Attendee Name	Position	Present	Absent
Sylvia Basak	Councilmember	X	
Laura Bigley	Councilmember		X
Bob Carter	Councilmember	X	
Bill Ellis	Mayor	X	
Holly Geiman	Councilmember		RESIGNED
Gabriel Gomez	Councilmember		X
Katherine Robinson	Councilmember	X	

II. **Pledge to the Flag and Invocation**

III. **Current Business:**

Negotiations with CADE and DDA reactivation- Mayor Ellis updated the Council regarding ongoing negotiations with Cade Partners concerning the loan associated with the property located at 65 Smith Bridges Street. The loan originated in 2018 under the previous administration following litigation involving the City. The original loan amount was approximately \$686,000.

Woody DeLong, who was one of the attorneys involved in the prior litigation and is also a partner in Cade Partners, has been negotiating with Mayor Ellis for several months regarding an early payoff. The City currently owes approximately \$346,000 in principal. Cade Partners has proposed accepting approximately \$312,000 as full payment of the loan. If the loan remains under its existing terms, payments will continue through 2037 at an interest rate of 2.5%.

Mayor Ellis explained that SPLOST 7 allocated \$500,000 for Public Facilities Debt Payment through the end of the SPLOST period in 2029. These funds were intended to pay this debt; however, the payments have been made from the General Fund instead. To date, the City has paid approximately \$158,000 from the General Fund. Mayor Ellis stated that the City may be able to reimburse the General Fund from the SPLOST 7 account for those payments.

Based on the Mayor's research, paying the loan off early could save the City approximately \$30,000 in principal and \$52,000 in future interest, for total estimated savings of just under \$90,000.

Because the loan was entered into through the Downtown Development Authority, the DDA would have to be reactivated before the early-payoff proposal could proceed. Reactivation would require a resolution. The DDA previously consisted of seven members serving staggered four-year terms; however, additional research is needed regarding how the members were originally appointed and how the terms were structured.

Mayor Ellis suggested considering representation from each subdivision when appointing members. The Council also discussed whether applications or volunteers should be sought, whether members should be compensated, and whether limitations should be established regarding the DDA's authority over matters such as business appearance, building colors, and similar design decisions.

The DDA would first review and act upon the proposed payoff. Its recommendation would then be presented to the Council for approval or denial. The earliest the process could be completed would likely be September, although it could extend into October.

Mayor Ellis is awaiting additional guidance from the City Attorney regarding the steps required to reactivate the DDA. Council members were asked to consider possible appointees and other details concerning the DDA's structure during the next two weeks.

The council reviewed the meeting minutes from the October 2025 Council Meeting and November 2025 Work Session. Mayor Ellis asks for a motion to approve the minutes.

City Administrator discussion- Jennifer Harrison was introduced to the Council as a potential candidate for the position of City Administrator. Ms. Harrison previously worked for the City of Hoschton for approximately 15 years. Mayor Ellis explained that he had planned to hire a City Administrator by the end of next year; however, the City does not want to miss the opportunity to consider someone with Ms. Harrison's experience and professional contacts. If the City decides to move forward, an employment contract would be required.

Council asked Ms. Harrison to identify three accomplishments from her time with Hoschton of which she was most proud. Ms. Harrison discussed her experience obtaining and administering grants, noting that grants helped fund nearly every capital improvement project undertaken by Hoschton. She also assisted in establishing Hoschton's Downtown Development Authority and helped bring Publix and Kroger developments to the Hoschton area. In addition, she developed partnerships with outside agencies and departments to reduce costs to the City. She emphasized her experience with LMIG funding and her working relationship with the Georgia Department of Transportation.

Ms. Harrison also discussed Hoschton's approximately \$53 million water plant expansion project, which is nearing completion and which she helped administer. She stated that Hoschton implemented a property tax rate of slightly more than two mills and currently has approximately \$34 million in reserves while completing several capital projects.

Council asked Ms. Harrison, based on Pendergrass's current growth, what she would like to approach differently and what she envisioned for the City. She identified sidewalks, community events, and additional green spaces that would encourage community involvement as possible priorities.

Mayor Ellis mentioned that the City owns approximately 24 acres on U.S. Highway 129 and had previously considered giving the property to Jackson County for the development of a park. Ms. Harrison suggested that the City consider leasing the property to the County instead of transferring ownership.

Council asked why Ms. Harrison left the City of Hoschton. She explained that Hoschton had reached a point where operations and projects were progressing well, and she wanted the opportunity to help another city grow. She stated that she believes her experience could help Pendergrass manage its growth and build something meaningful for the community.

A Council member noted that Hoschton had experienced division and disagreement over the years and asked how Ms. Harrison worked through those circumstances. Ms. Harrison described herself as a positive person who remained focused on projects and services for residents. She explained that completing visible, achievable projects helps residents see their tax dollars at work and builds public trust. She emphasized that City officials should serve as advocates for residents and encouraged the Mayor and Council to work together and remain focused on moving the City forward.

Council asked whether Ms. Harrison would be willing to undergo a background check and comply with the City's personnel policy. Ms. Harrison indicated that she would. Mayor Ellis noted that the City's personnel policy originated from the City of Hoschton and was originally developed under Ms. Harrison's administration.

Council also asked whether Ms. Harrison would hire individuals from within Pendergrass whenever possible. Ms. Harrison responded that she would and stated that creating employment opportunities is important to her.

Council thanked Ms. Harrison for attending the meeting. Council also emphasized that one of the City's primary concerns is ensuring that adequate water and sewer infrastructure is in place and that future growth is managed in a way that does not overburden those systems.

Library Move to 98 Glenn Gee Rd.- Mayor Ellis reported that he had spoken with Pendergrass Baptist Church regarding the City's possible use of a house owned by the Church, located at 98 Glenn Gee Road across from the current City Hall, as the new location for the public library.

Mayor Ellis previously emailed Council members a proposed building-use agreement, which was reviewed and approved by the City Attorney. The agreement would allow the City to use the property for three years, with an option to extend the agreement, at a cost of \$1 per year.

Council asked whether the property had been inspected. Mayor Ellis stated that he had looked at the property and reviewed its layout with the Council. The house will need a new air-conditioning unit, for which the Mayor received an estimate of approximately \$7,400. Other anticipated work includes removing some carpeting, painting, patching areas of the walls, and repairing several broken windows. The City's existing library bookshelves would be moved to the new location.

Council asked whether the City would hire a full-time librarian. Mayor Ellis stated that this would not necessarily be required and that the City may seek volunteers to assist with library operations. The City will also consider offering afternoon hours, which are not currently available at the existing library.

Council also discussed the possibility of rejoining the PINES library system and contacting a nearby university to determine whether any students may be interested in assisting with the library.

Hiring Handyman-Mayor Ellis reported that the City advertised a position for a new facilities maintenance employee. Six candidates applied, and the Mayor has interviewed two of them. Mayor Ellis stated that he would like to offer the position to one of the candidates.

The employee would be responsible for maintaining and repairing City facilities, including the proposed new library, the depot, and the amphitheater. The employee's first assignment would be completing the necessary repairs and improvements at the new library location.

The proposed pay range for the position is \$21 to \$25 per hour. The employee would also receive health insurance and the other benefits available to full-time City employees.

Mayor Ellis explained that a Streets Department employee recently left the City, providing room in the budget for the new position. The vacant Streets Department position will not be filled.

Phone and Internet Upgrade- Mayor Ellis reported that the City has been negotiating with Comcast regarding an upgraded telephone and internet system and is close to finalizing a proposal. The new telephone system would include a dial-by-number directory.

The Mayor explained that the City's current telephone and internet services consist of several different systems and providers. Council asked whether the proposed upgrade would save the City money. Mayor Ellis stated that a previous administrator entered into a fiber service contract costing approximately \$3,000 per month, with

approximately two years remaining on the agreement. The City is currently paying approximately \$2,900 per month for its combined services.

Under the proposed Comcast agreement, the City's telephone and internet services would be consolidated into one system at a cost of approximately \$2,970 per month. Adding service at the proposed new library location would increase the monthly cost by approximately \$500.

Comcast would maintain the entire system. The proposal includes Comcast's enhanced business service, which is one level above its standard business program and provides an estimated four-hour on-site response time when service problems occur.

The proposed agreement would be for a three-year term. The City will need to decide whether to proceed by the end of the month.

Labor Day Discussion- Councilmember Bob Carter asked whether the City plans to hold a Labor Day event. City Clerk Renee Martinez confirmed that a Labor Day event is planned. She noted that the City had previously discussed holding a Labor Day celebration in place of its annual July 4th event. Councilmember Carter expressed his support for replacing the July 4th celebration with a Labor Day celebration.

Ms. Martinez also reported that the City's Fall Festival is scheduled for the second Saturday in October. A time has not yet been determined. The City would like to have Bettin' on a Mule return as the featured band. Several vendors have contacted the City asking about the festival date because they are interested in participating.

Mayor Ellis asked the Council whether they had visited the Town Square to see the steel framework being erected for the new commercial buildings. Councilmember Sylvia Basak commented that the building appears much larger now that the steel is going up.

IV. Public Comment:
none

Adjourn

Motion made by Sylvia Basak; seconded by Bob Carter

All in favor


Renee Martinez

City Clerk

July 16, 2026