

OCOEE CITY COMMISSION

Ocoee Commission Chambers
1 N. Bluford Avenue
Ocoee, Florida

September 10, 2025

MINUTES

6:00 PM

TENTATIVE BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING

• **CALL TO ORDER 6:00 PM**

Mayor Johnson called the tentative budget hearing to order at 6:00 PM in the Commission Chambers of City Hall. The invocation was led by **City Manager Shadrix**, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Present: Mayor Johnson, Commissioner Kennedy, Commissioner Wilsen, Commissioner Firstner

Absent: Commissioner Oliver (*City Manager Shadrix shared a message on behalf of Commissioner Oliver explaining his absence.*)

Also Present: City Manager Shadrix, City Attorney Schaffer, City Clerk Sibbitt, Assistant Finance Director Lawitzke, and Chief Accountant Meruena

• **PUBLIC HEARING 6:01 PM**

A. Mayor's Announcement

This is a public hearing on the proposed budget and tentative millage rate for the City of Ocoee. Notice of this hearing was contained in the Notice of Proposed Property Taxes mailed by the Property Appraiser. The City Commission has previously set a tentative millage rate of **5.5000 mills** which represents a **17.28%** increase in millage over the rolled-back rate of **4.6898 mills**.

B. Briefing by City Attorney 6:02 PM

The preliminary millage rate set by the City Commission and contained in the TRIM Notice is **5.5000 mills**. The maximum millage rate, which may be levied by the City by regular majority vote for the 2025-2026 fiscal year is **7.1100 mills**, such maximum millage rate having been determined pursuant to Section 200.185(3)(a), Florida Statutes. The establishment of a millage rate between **7.1101 mills** and **7.8210 mills** requires a two-thirds vote (super majority) of the membership of the City Commission (or 4 votes). The establishment of a millage rate between **7.8211 mills** and **10.0000 mills** requires a unanimous vote of the City Commission. Additionally, any millage rate adopted above the preliminary millage rate of **5.5000 mills** would require notice by first-class mail to each taxpayer. The tentative millage rate adopted at this hearing will become the maximum millage rate which may be adopted by the City Commission at the public hearing on the final millage rate. A unanimous vote or a two-thirds vote may be required to adopt the tentative millage rate as the final millage rate. At the final public hearing, the City Commission may adopt a millage rate which is less than the tentative millage rate.

C. Briefing by Assistant Finance Director 6:03 PM

Assistant Finance Director Lawitzke announced that the final budget hearing is scheduled for next Wednesday, September 17th, at 6:00 PM, and presented a PowerPoint which summarized the budget priorities, and commitments for FY 2025-2026. Highlights in the presentation covered:

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- Economic Highlights
- Departmental Budget Reallocation to increase transparency
- Tentative Millage Rate – no change
- Capital Projects
- General fund total increase is 1.8%

Mayor Johnson opened the floor for public comments.

No speaker reservation forms were received; therefore, the public hearing was closed.

Commissioner Wilsen stated that she is pleased that the millage rate remains at 4.9500 mills.

D. Announcement by Assistant Finance Director: 6:17 PM

Assistant Finance Director Lawitzke recomputed the proposed tentative millage rate and announced the percent by which the recomputed proposed millage rate exceeds the rolled-back rate. This percentage is the proposed tentative percentage increase in property taxes. **City Manager Shadrix** announced that the proposed new tentative millage rate of **4.9500** is **5.5%** above the rollback rate.

1. Public Comments 6:20 PM

Mayor Johnson opened the floor for public comments.

The following persons addressed the City Commission:

- **Chris Adkins**, *Ocoee Resident*, expressed his concerns with funding and purchase approvals made prior to the increase in fire protection non-ad valorem assessment and garbage fees.
- **Cristina Or**, *Ocoee Resident*, expressed reservations about property tax rates in Orange County, particularly in Ocoee where property owners also pay county taxes. She suggested that Orange County and the City of Ocoee collaborate to establish a more affordable rate.
- **Norine Dworkin**, *Vox Populi*, asked for an explanation of how the budget balanced at 4.9500 mills after the Fire Assessment increase was put in place. **City Manager Shadrix** addressed her questions.

The public hearing was closed.

2. Commissioners' Comments 6:32 PM

Commissioner Kennedy stated that the City Manager is working with Orange County to address taxes. He responded to public comments on property values and taxation, noting the limited ratio of commercial to residential properties and its impact on the millage rate. He further cautioned of a potential financial crisis stemming from state-level decisions and addressed questions regarding revenue from the Forest Lake Golf Course.

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Commissioner Wilsen commented on tax exemptions and explained that when a resident receives an exemption, the City still must produce the money to operate and provide services to residents.

City Manager Shadrix addressed a public comment that alleged the City increased the cost of reclaimed water by 90%, clarifying that this is completely false. He explained that the City is absorbing approximately \$1.1 million in costs resulting from Orange County's mandate for an uninterruptible backup supply, and that these costs have not been passed on to residents.

Mayor Johnson expounded upon Commissioner Kennedy's explanation of the millage rate relative to the ratio of commercial property; he also clarified that the City is not purchasing the golf course, it has always owned the property. He further explained that the City bought out the previous operator's lease to regain control of the golf course's operation and hire a new operator to make improvements, with more favorable contractual terms. Under the temporary operator, the City is already realizing revenue. **Mayor Johnson** also explained that Orange County and the Orange County School Board are two separate entities, both which assess ad valorem taxes on residents' bills.

- **Alan Vance**, *Ocoee Resident*, inquired about the City's plan if the state eliminates property taxes. **Mayor Johnson** addressed his question.

Commissioner Wilsen spoke about the Florida League of Cities and the Local Voices United program.

Mayor Johnson expressed the need for Ocoee residents to make their voices heard among Orange County leadership. He further pondered the services and the value that Ocoee and its residents receive from the County, taking into consideration the County's property tax revenue from Ocoee residents. **City Manager Shadrix** addressed his comments.

E. Motion to Adopt the Tentative Millage Rate 6:52 PM

City Attorney Schaffer read the title of the ordinance.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OCOEE, FLORIDA, ESTABLISHING A TENTATIVE MILLAGE RATE OF 4.9500 MILLS FOR AD VALOREM TAXES FOR THE CITY OF OCOEE FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025, AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2026; PROVIDING FOR MILLAGE RATE ADJUSTMENT; PROVIDING FOR COLLECTION OF TAXES; PROVIDING FOR 5.5% IN MILLAGE RATE OVER THE ROLLED-BACK RATE; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Motion: Move that the City Commission adopt the tentative millage rate at 4.9500 mills for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026; Moved by Commissioner Wilsen, seconded by Commissioner Firstner. Motion carried 4-0 with Commissioner Oliver absent.

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F. Motion to Adopt the Tentative Budget 6:53 PM

City Attorney Schaffer read the title of the ordinance.

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OCOEE, ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA, ADOPTING A TENTATIVE BUDGET FOR THE FISCAL YEAR BEGINNING OCTOBER 1, 2025, AND ENDING SEPTEMBER 30, 2026; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

Motion: Move that the City Commission adopt the tentative budget as distributed along with the revisions resulting from the Budget Workshop for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2025, and ending September 30, 2026; Moved by Commissioner Kennedy, Seconded by Commissioner Firstner. Motion carried 4-0 with Commissioner Oliver absent.

Mayor Johnson announced the public hearing to consider the final millage rate, and final budget, is scheduled to be held Wednesday, September 17, 2025, at 6:00 PM in the City Hall Commission Chambers. The hearing has been advertised in accordance with the provisions of Section 200.065, Florida Statutes, and Section C-37 of Article VI of the Ocoee City Charter. The appropriate Ordinances necessary to adopt the Final Millage Rate and Final Budget will be prepared by City staff, and all other action necessary to comply with the requirements of Section 200.065, Florida Statutes, will be undertaken.

• ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 6:56 PM.

APPROVED:

Attest:



Melanie Sibbitt, City Clerk

City of Ocoee



Rusty Johnson, Mayor