

MINUTES
CITY OF INDIAN ROCKS BEACH
CITY COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING
Tuesday, July 14, 2026
6:00 p.m.

The City of Indian Rocks Beach City Commission held a regular meeting at 6:00 p.m. on July 14, 2026, in the Civic Auditorium/Commission Chambers at City Hall, located at 1507 Bay Palm Blvd., Indian Rocks Beach, Florida.

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence.

ROLL CALL

Commission Members Present:

- Mayor Commissioner Lan Vaughan
- Vice Mayor Commissioner Janet Wilson
- Commissioner John Bigelow
- Commissioner Hilary King
- Commissioner Kellee Watt

Commission Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager Ryan Henderson, City Attorney Matthew Maggard, Administrative Director Robin Gomez, City Clerk Lorin Kornijtschuk, Planning and Zoning Consultant Hetty Harmon and Public Information Officer Mishelle Hargett.

Quorum established.

(To provide continuity for research, items are listed in agenda order although not necessarily discussed in that order.)

1. PRESENTATIONS

1.1 PROCLAMATION Mary Rose Holmes, Plein Aire Cottage Artists

Presented by: Mayor Commissioner Lan Vaughan

Mayor Vaughan read a proclamation recognizing Mary Rose Holmes, a fifth-generation pioneer Floridian and founder of the award-winning Plein Aire Cottage Artists group.

Mary Rose Holmes accepted the proclamation and said she was honored by the recognition.

1.2 REPORT OF Pinellas County Sheriff's Office

The Pinellas County Sheriff's Office (PCSO) submitted a written Crime Analysis Report for the month of June 2026.

1.3 REPORT OF Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue District

Presented by: Fire Chief Ken Grimes

The Pinellas Suncoast Fire & Rescue District presented a PowerPoint report for the month of June 2026.

2. NEIGHBOR'S COMMENTS

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan opened neighbor comments.

James Magner, formerly lived on Indian Rocks Beach: Thanked the City for efforts in reducing trash from July 4th. Recommended adding more trash cans at main thoroughfares.

John Pfanstiehl, 448 Harbor Dr. S., Thanked City staff and Commission for the Hurricane Expo.

Tom Wilson, 444 Harbor Dr. S.: Stated new parking arrangements are working, and beaches remain crowded every weekend.

Matthew Barrowclough, 211 11th Ave., Stated the City is violating Florida statute by changing parking at Brown Park.

Beth McMullen, 481 Harbor Dr. South: Addressed claims made regarding the city allegedly violating Florida statute when changing parking at Brown Park. Cited City Code of Ordinances Section 62-35(D).

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan closed neighbor comments.

3. REPORTS OF:

3.1 City Manager

Presented by: City Manager Ryan Henderson

City Manager Henderson recognized the volunteers and neighbors serving on advisory boards and the Hurricane Task Force. He highlighted the Finance and Budget Advisory Committee's contributions to the recent budget workshop. He said he looks forward to engaging the Neighbor Advisory Board now that the Task Force is complete and to re-engaging the Planning and Zoning Commission.

3.2 City Attorney

Presented by: City Attorney Matthew Maggard

City Attorney Matt Maggard requested another shade (executive/closed) meeting regarding litigation with Homes not Hotels Group.

City Clerk Kornijtschuk proposed Thursday at 3:00 PM for the shade meeting. All commissioners confirmed availability.

3.3 City Commission

COMMISSION COMMENTS

Commissioner Kellee Watt thanked staff for the Hurricane Expo and praised the hotline magnets. She recognized Beth McMullen for her beach escarpment presentation to the Marine Center. She reported on short-term rentals that approximately 800 letters were sent in April to unregistered properties, with a strong response and high compliance.

Commissioner John Bigelow praised the talent and positive feedback on the city's advisory boards and expressed confidence in the city's direction. He thanked Mishelle and Commissioner King for their work on the Hurricane Expo.

Commissioner Hilary King reported the Hurricane Task Force has completed its work developing recommendations for storm preparation, response, and recovery. Immediate results include the successful Hurricane Expo and the emergency weather hotline magnets. The Task Force identified five priority categories of achievable actions, primarily in communications and recovery, with recommendations such as neighborhood captains and temporary mobile businesses during recovery. The formal report will be presented August 18. She thanked the seven volunteers.

Vice Mayor Commissioner Janet Wilson noted that residents she referred to the Hurricane Task Force felt heard. She attended the DePaul School art exhibit at the Beach Art Center, the June Suncoast League of Cities meeting, the John Maroney First Responders Appreciation Dinner, and the Florida League of Cities tax reform webinar. She announced July Mix and Mingle with school supply donations accepted.

Mayor Commissioner Lan Vaughan praised the Hurricane Expo and highlighted the city newsletter and upcoming Coffee with Neighbors. He cited improved communication, noting a complaint about Sunday construction work which led to four site closures and continued enforcement. He reported that Florida mayors are widely concerned about the tax shift's impact on municipalities but assured that Indian Rocks Beach is well prepared. He stated the city will have a strong voice at the state level on this issue of state overreach.

4. WORK SESSION ITEMS

4.1 Citizenserve Demonstration Presented by: City Manager Ryan Henderson and Administrative Director Robin Gomez

Presentation:

- The City entered into a contract with Citizenserve on March 25, 2026, following a staff assessment beginning in October that identified technological and service gaps.
- The Code Department was overrun with paper records, prompting the move to a cloud-based system to automate Code Operations, including permit and license collection and online registration and submissions.
- Citizenserve, a local provider serving numerous municipalities,
- Administrative Director Gomez demonstrated the platform's capabilities for online permit applications, vacation rental registrations, license renewals, inspections, and payments.
- The system will pre-populate existing registration data for approximately 800 registered vacation rental properties.
- Applicants will be able to upload required documents, schedule inspections via an online calendar, and track application status; automatic email reminders will be sent 60 days before renewal deadlines.
- Staff will review applications for completeness through the portal, reducing back-and-forth communication.
- Target launch date is Labor Day (end of August 2026).
- The system includes a public portal for searching permits and licenses; code enforcement officers will receive iPads for on-site inspections that record directly into the system.
- Compliance tracking and complaint filing will be integrated.

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan suggested a workshop for short-term rental operators and raised the possibility of a surcharge for paper applications or requiring portal-only submissions.

4.2 Waste Connections Presentation Presented by: Ian Boyle, Waste Connections, and Logan Anderson, Route Manager; introduced by City Manager Ryan Henderson

Presentation:

- Waste Connections has partnered with the city since 2011 through the Madeira Beach piggyback contract; current contract expires December 31, 2026.

- Current monthly rates: \$12.47 residential; \$30.99 condo.
 - Industry transition from dual-stream to single-stream recycling (2005–2015) increased participation 10–30% but also increased contamination; China's 2018 policy requiring less than 1% contamination caused an industry-wide crisis and higher processing costs.
 - Indian Rocks Beach contamination rate is approximately 22.6%, compared to 21.8% for Pinellas County, 27% for Florida, and a 20–25% national single-stream average. Participation is estimated at 85–90%.
 - Waste Connections invested in improved processing facilities to handle contamination rather than reject loads.
 - Material breakdown: contamination 25–27%; glass 24–26% (no revenue, processing cost only); mixed paper 31–33%; cardboard 10–14%; plastic bottles 5–6%; steel/aluminum 2–4%.
 - Drivers pick up bins unless contamination is obvious (e.g., visible kitchen garbage bags).
 - Company offered to implement a sticker program for contaminated bins, coordinate with city code enforcement, and host a facility tour for the Commission.
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5. CONSENT AGENDA

The following items were presented on the Consent Agenda:

- 5.1 APPROVAL OF June 9, 2026, Regular City Commission Meeting Minutes
- 5.2 APPROVAL OF June 15, 2026, Executive Client Session Minutes
- 5.3 APPROVAL OF June 23, 2026, City Commission Work Session
- 5.4 APPOINT Board of Adjustment and Appeals Alternate Member Liz Covington to Regular Member status, completing Stewart DeVore's term (expires June 30, 2028), following his resignation
- 5.5 AUTHORIZING the City Manager to sign a one-year agreement to renew group health coverage with the Public Risk Management (PRM) Group Health Trust for Fiscal Year 2026-2027

Motion: Approve the items on the consent agenda as presented to us.

Moved by: Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson

Seconded by: Commissioner King

Motion passed (5-0)

Roll Call Vote:

- Commissioner Watt - Yes
- Commissioner King - Yes
- Commissioner Bigelow - Yes
- Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson - Yes

- Mayor Commissioner Vaughan - Yes
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6. PUBLIC HEARINGS

6.1 VARIANCE REQUEST BOA CASE No. 2026-03, 960 Gulf Blvd. #5

Presented by: Hetty Harmon, Planning and Zoning Consultant

Staff Presentation: A variance request from Sec.110-131(5)(f) seeking 29.5 feet into the required 35 ft front yard setback (resulting in 5.5 ft total), 2.5 feet into the required 7.5 ft side yard setback on the south side (resulting in 5.0 ft total), and 5.0 feet into the required 10.0 ft rear yard setback (resulting in 5.0 ft total). The property is a non-conforming lot smaller than required lot size. The existing structure is 480 sq ft; the applicant proposes 991 sq ft. The Board of Adjustment and Appeals denied the request 5-0. There were 26 pieces of correspondence in opposition, primarily from the condominium to the south, raising concerns about traffic, water lines, construction impacts, and proximity to the seawall. Under current code, the structure can be elevated in the exact same footprint without variance but cannot be enlarged beyond existing square footage without a variance.

Public Hearing:

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan opened the public hearing.

Giuseppe Morabito, applicant/property owner

- Stated the CT zoning district is too large and was designed for hotels, motels, and multifamily uses rather than small beach cottages.
- Stated the setback requirements are too rigid for FEMA-compliant elevated homes, and that a hardship exists because FEMA elevation requirements make it impossible to build a functional, code-compliant home within the existing footprint.
- Noted staff agreed on three of the four variance criteria.
- Cited precedent of a neighboring property receiving a variance for 1,030 square feet, compared to the 991 square feet requested.
- Stated the proposal would increase property values, reduce rental supply, improve parking by providing two spaces instead of one, and is in harmony with the neighborhood.

Marion Smith, Unit #5 owner at 960 Gulf Blvd: opposed variance

Brian Abrams, 940 Gulf Blvd: opposed variance

Commissioner Watt asked if the house is currently inhabited and functional; applicant confirmed it is a short-term rental that was inspected last year with no damage found and was never rebuilt.

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan closed the public hearing.

Motion: Deny the request for a variance request BOA case #2026-03, 960 Gulf Blvd. #5

Moved by: Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson

Seconded by: Commissioner Watt

Motion passed (5-0), variance denied

Roll Call Vote:

- Commissioner Watt - Yes
 - Commissioner Bigelow - Yes
 - Commissioner King - Yes
 - Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson - Yes
 - Mayor Commissioner Vaughan - Yes
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7. ACTION ITEMS

7.1 AUTHORIZING the City Manager to contract services with Catalyst Communications

Presented by: Preston Rudy, Founder and CEO, and Peter Rogar, Executive Vice President, Catalyst Communications Group, and City Manager Henderson

Presentation:

- City Manager Henderson explained that during the April strategic planning session, the Commission discussed developing a strategy to better tell the city's story regarding the impacts of short-term rentals in residential neighborhoods.
- Staff identified Catalyst Communications, a firm experienced in Florida media markets and with clients seeking to change narratives related to legislation and statewide interests.
- Mr. Rudy introduced himself as a former reporter of 25 years and former communications director for U.S. Representative David Jolly before founding Catalyst Communications Group nine years ago.
- The Tampa-based firm has 17 employees with more than 250 years of combined media experience; the firm does not actively solicit business and has won three of four RFPs in nine years.
- Services outlined include public relations, strategic messaging, crisis management, and media training.
- Mr. Rudy emphasized the firm's belief that municipalities should have the right to regulate short-term rentals in residential neighborhoods and highlighted building a coalition of municipalities to advocate for local control.

- The City Attorney noted Ron Cristaldi recommended Catalyst as experts on this type of issue.

Commission Discussion:

- Commissioners expressed strong support for engaging Catalyst Communications.
- Commissioner Watt asked about the timeline for potential legislative change and whether a lobbyist would be needed; Mr. Rudy indicated change may take a couple of legislative sessions and confirmed a lobbyist would be necessary.
- Commissioner King asked about working with other cities; Mr. Rudy confirmed the firm is not currently doing so but intends to build a coalition.
- Mayor Vaughan noted conversations at the Florida Council of Mayors indicating other cities face similar issues
- Vice Mayor Wilson asked about the strategy for connecting with other municipalities through organizations such as the Florida League of Cities and Suncoast League of Cities.
- Commissioner King raised the question of why property owners have not sued the state for deprivation of property rights.
- Discussion emphasized messaging around property rights and affordable housing impacts, and that the issue affects inland communities such as Largo and Seminole, not only coastal cities.
- Administrative Director Robin Gomez clarified that fees presented in the budget are \$5,000 per month (\$60,000 per year) beginning October 1, 2026.

Motion: Authorize the City Manager to contract services with Catalyst Communications.

Moved by: Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson

Seconded by: Commissioner Watt

Motion Passed (5-0)

Roll Call Vote:

- Commissioner Watt - Yes
- Commissioner Bigelow - Yes
- Commissioner King - Yes
- Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson - Yes
- Mayor Commissioner Vaughan - Yes

7.2 APPOINT an applicant as Alternate Member #2 to the Board of Adjustment and Appeals for a three-year term, to expire June 30, 2029

Motion: Appoint Vicki Goonen as Alternate Member #2 to the BOA for a three-year term.

Moved by: Commissioner Watt

Seconded by: Commissioner Bigelow

Motion Passed (5-0)

Roll Call Vote:

- Commissioner Watt - Yes
- Commissioner Bigelow - Yes
- Commissioner King - Yes
- Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson - Yes
- Mayor Commissioner Vaughan - Yes

Continued Budget Item: APPROVE Resolution 2026-14; Establishing the proposed millage rate for FY 2026/2027

(Continued from Budget Work Session Meeting on July 14, 2026 at 5:00 p.m.)

Presented by: City Attorney Maggard and City Manager Henderson

Staff Presentation: City Attorney Maggard read the title of Resolution 2026-14 establishing the tentative millage rate for fiscal year 2026-2027. He noted by statute that the rollback rate of 1.6838 mills must be read aloud at the meeting. The proposed rate of 1.73 mills exceeds the rollback rate by 2.74%, which is characterized as the percentage increase in property taxes tentatively adopted by the City Commission.

Motion: Hold the mileage rate at its current rate for the fiscal year 2026-2027, 1.7300 mills; the 1.73 mills exceed the rollback rate of 1.6838 mills by 2.74%, which is characterized by the percentage increase in property taxes tentatively adopted by the City Commission

Moved by: Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson

Seconded by: Commissioner Watt

Motion Passed (5-0)

Roll Call Vote:

- Commissioner Watt - Yes
- Commissioner Bigelow - Yes
- Commissioner King - Yes
- Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson - Yes
- Mayor Commissioner Vaughan - Yes

8. NEIGHBOR'S FEEDBACK

Beth Flynn: Asked about the fees for Catalyst Communications. Administrative Director Robin Gomez clarified that the fees presented in the budget were \$5,000 per month or \$60,000 per year beginning October 1, 2026. Ms. Flynn also emphasized the importance of not losing sight of recycling.

9. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson: Requested expanding the city's no-smoking ordinance to include the beach and sand areas. Currently, the city ordinance prohibits smoking of all tobacco products at parks but does not include the sand or beach. Administrative Director Gomez clarified that state statute allows cities and counties to adopt ordinances prohibiting cigarette smoking, vaping, and e-cigarettes on beaches, but cigars cannot be prohibited due to lobbying efforts.

Mayor Commissioner Vaughan: Indicated he has a list of future items but will cover them with City Manager Henderson at a later date. City Manager Henderson confirmed that items from that meeting will be brought back before the Commission for discussion.

10. NOTED ITEMS : None

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Vice Mayor Commissioner Wilson, which was seconded by Commissioner King, to adjourn at 8:51 p.m.

ATTESTATION

These minutes constitute a true and accurate summary of the proceedings of the City Commission Regular Meeting held on Tuesday, July 14, 2026.

8/19/2026
Date Approved

Lorin A. Kornijtschuk
ATTEST: Lorin A. Kornijtschuk, City Clerk

[Signature]
Mayor Commissioner Vaughan

