

The City of Titusville City Council met in special session on Saturday, July 19, 2025, at Titusville City Hall, second floor, Council Chamber, 555 South Washington Avenue, Titusville, Florida 32796. Mayor Connors called the City Council meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Those present in the Council Chamber included Mayor Andrew Connors, Vice-Mayor Herman A. Cole, Jr., Col USAF Retired, and City Council Members Megan Moscoso, Jo Lynn Nelson, and Dr. Sarah Stoeckel.

Also in attendance were Interim City Manager Tom Abbate, Attorney James Stokes (A contract attorney for the City), and City Clerk Wanda Wells.

Mayor Connors requested a moment of silence. He then led those present in the *Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag*. City Clerk Wells read the procedures for public participation.

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Interviews – Final Candidates for the City Manager Position – Mayor Connors advised there were five candidates identified for interviews with City Council at the beginning of the week; however, four candidates had withdrawn their applications. Interim City Manager Thomas “Tom” Abbate was the remaining candidate for the City Manager position.

Mayor Connors further advised that since the events planned for the past week had been previously organized, noticed, and set in-place, the Council would continue with the scheduled events that had been planned. He further outlined the items on the Special City Council meeting agenda.

To begin, a timer was set for thirty (30) minutes. During this period, Council conducted an interview with Mr. Abbate. Council also asked two questions (the same two questions more or less) of Mr. Abbate.

Questions

Member Nelson

- Mr. Abbate had been employed with the City for a number of years. Describe what you would change or do differently moving into the future.
- In terms of the public and with everyone that comes-in, how would you interact with them?

Member Moscoso

- Describe in what ways you are different from the previous City Manager and describe how your leadership would feel different to staff or citizens.
- Have you handled a situation where the staff or community feedback was critical to your making decisions? Additionally, can you name a time when you changed your mind or adjusted course due to this input?

Vice-Mayor Cole

- Describe the procedure you would follow if, for example, the Council directed the City Manager to cut 5% of employees. This was a hypothetical procedural question.
- Council might ask what you can do for us; however, describe what the City Council could do to assist you and the City to operate better.

Member Stoeckel

- With the Council (annually) setting goals, priorities, and the vision for the City, a new City Manager may have their own vision for Titusville, as well as the way in which they lead employees, etc. Describe your vision for Titusville.
- On leadership style, describe your style involving staff, as well your style when working with and for the City Council. Describe how you would handle competing or conflicting ideas from Council Members.

Mayor Connors

- Describe the operational efficiencies you would implement if hired as the City Manager.
- With your (Mr. Abbate) having worked for the City approximately twenty (20) years already, describe your biggest accomplishment thus far.

With the remaining time, Interim City Manager Abbate highlighted additional information on his professional qualifications for the City Manager position.

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Discussion of Next Steps – City Manager Selection Process – Mayor Connors invited the public to speak prior to an upcoming recess that was planned, where City Council Members would meet individually with the City’s Executive Leadership Team (department heads). Mayor Connors did not feel it was appropriate to ask the citizens and public to wait to share their input, due to this segment was estimated to take 50 minutes to one hour to complete.

Six (6) individuals submitted public speaking cards.

Jessie Wright supported Mr. Abbate being hired as the new City Manager for reasons he shared, including his having several recent meetings with Interim City Manager Abbate, Mr. Abbate and the Planning Department making themselves available to meet with him, Mr. Abbate’s experience and working for the City for approximately 20 to 21 years, which he speculated may have been why the other candidates for the position dropped-out, etc. A new City Manager would also have to learn all the new projects coming to the City, hire an assistant City Manager, and City Council should not continue searching for additional candidates.

Stan Johnston distributed information. He speculated on why the other candidates for the City Manager position dropped out, etc. This made Mr. Abbate the top choice and Mr. Johnston supported Mr. Abbate being appointed to the City Manager position. Mr. Johnston also felt that Mr. Abatte had a big job to fulfill.

Daniel Leggett advised that he was a former City employee. He felt the City of service motto was no longer accurate and this was not Mr. Abbate's fault. Mr. Leggett also heard or alleged there were problems that were not being reported to City Council and these would be coming forward. Additionally, Mr. Leggett liked the fact that a former City Manager went into every department to work and understand the jobs of the departments.

Toni Shifalo advised that possession was nine-tenths of the law and perception was 99% of what went on. She read from a prepared statement that discussed that perceptions varied, including what was reality to barely true. Reality should be based on facts. To this, she ranked a few perceptions in her opinion that ranged from frivolous and inaccurate to mostly factual, including

- Perceptions that Council meetings had become a circus full of grandstanding and rude behavior, but it was citizens coming to Council to express their griefs and grievances
- Out-of-towners and rebel rousers were creating a threatening atmosphere and scaring away others
- Perceptions that a staff member was the Mayor's personal publicity agent
- Perceptions that a Council Member was involved in misconduct during the 2024 elections
- Perceptions on the renewal of the Police Chief's employment contract
- Other perceptions

Ms. Shifalo suggested the City Council re-open the search for a new City Manager, so that change could come to the City.

Dr. Kathleen O'Rourke read from a prepared statement that discussed the Council making the decision on how to best move forward, the basis in which Council previously authorized hiring an outside firm to conduct a nationwide search, selecting a candidate without bias, doing better to improve citizen participation in the search for a new City Manager, having more diverse candidates for a position that may not be best served by an individual with military experience, not reopening the search may be a decision that was based on saving time and money, the job of the City Council was not always easy, putting the citizens needs ahead was what Council signed-up for as elected officials, re-opening the search would be the best decision for the sake of the funding that was set aside to hire the outside firm assisting the City to hire a new City Manager, some Council Members that may have previously indicated they desired suspending the search and hiring Mr. Abbate before he even applied gave a bad impression to the public, etc. In short, Dr. O'Rourke's request was for Council to reopen the search.

Mark Frank was a business owner in Titusville for the last 20 years. He did not agree with others that said there were major problems in the City. Instead, he felt the City Council and the City were running great. He indicated support of making changes for the citizens. Mr. Frank also felt that Mr. Abbate's experience and background was an asset. For these reasons, he supported Council appointing Mr. Abbate as the new City Manager.

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Mayor Connors called for a recess from 1:40 p.m. to 2:48 p.m. During this period of time, City Council Members met individually with the City's Executive Leadership Team (ELT) to ask

questions or discuss Interim City Manager Abbate (Candidate for the City Manager position). Each Council Member would be given ten (10) minutes to individually talk with the ELT.

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Discussion of Next Steps – City Manager Selection Process (Continued) –

At 2:48 p.m., Mayor Connors called the special City Council meeting back to order.

Council discussion ensued.

Vice-Mayor Cole advised that he was conflicted prior to this meeting. He had reviewed all the resumes of other City Manager candidates and made his decision based on reviewing the resumes.

Vice-Mayor Cole advised that he was impressed by Interim City Manager Abbate and the work he had done thus far. Talking to the City's Executive Leadership Team (department heads) about Interim City Manager also helped him decide and learn how Mr. Abbate both manages and leads. This was the direction he wanted to go. At this point, Vice-Mayor Cole advised that the municipality and community needed continuity. Hiring another individual that was not presently working for the City would require taking time to get up to speed.

Member Nelson agreed with Vice-Mayor Cole. If the Council decided to continue the search, the City would not have a new City Manager in place until approximately January or February 2026. She also agreed with Vice-Mayor Cole's comments on having stability, being impressed with Mr. Abbate's outreach efforts with the community, his willingness to engage with the community, being impressed by senior staff's feedback on Mr. Abbate's style of working with the City's Executive Leadership Team to work through or overcome issues, etc.

Member Stoeckel commented on being frustrated with the process and disappointment on the other candidates withdrawing their applications. She had learned a few reasons why the withdrawals may have taken place, which she advised was not Interim City Manager Abbate's fault. Member Stoeckel advised that her frustration was not with or caused by Mr. Abbate. Instead, it was the process that did not turn out the way she anticipated.

Member Stoeckel advised that during the past week, she was contemplating options available to Council. She was also thoroughly impressed by Mr. Abbate thus far, since he accepted the Interim City Manager role. Member Stoeckel advised that Interim City Manager Abbate was listening to the Council's ideas at Council meetings and did not forget them or ignore them. He was also willing to work with all Council and their varying personalities. Additionally, the outside firm that was assisting the City to hire a new City Manager also provided one-year guarantee, meaning that if Council decided Mr. Abatte was not working out in one year, the firm would continue assisting the City to find a new City Manager at no additional cost. Additionally, the cost was not as much as stated or thought by one citizen. In short, Member Stoeckel wanted to move forward with Interim City Manager Abbate for the next City Manager.

Member Nelson offered a possible solution to give Mr. Abbate a two-year contract, perhaps with an extension of two additional years, but also an opt-out clause if something happened and Council felt it was necessary to terminate the contract.

Member Moscoso expressed appreciation to Interim City Manager Abbate. She advised that he stepped into the Interim City Manager role when the City needed leadership and he had done a fantastic job. Interim City Manager Abbate had also been extremely professional and helpful. He also made her first year serving on City Council much easier.

Member Moscoso felt that expanding the search for a new City Manager was fair to Interim City Manager Abbate. This allowed the Council and/or the municipality to be open and eventually, if the Council selected Mr. Abbate for the City Manager position, it was her hope that Mr. Abbate would step into a permanent role and have done so with public confidence. This would also facilitate allowing the Council to compare him to other candidates for the City Manager position. Having only one candidate, in her opinion, was not a choice; therefore, Member Moscoso desired re-advertising and continuing the search. Additionally, Member Moscoso advised that she wanted to put into the record that nothing nefarious was going on with this process. Interim City Manager Abbate was following the (prescribed) process. It was just the case or situation that the other candidates that applied for the position dropped out. For these and other reasons, Member Moscoso advised that she was more comfortable continuing the process to search for candidates for the City Manager position. She also understood this would delay the process, but it was important.

Mayor Connors advised that when the City Council recently searched for a new City Attorney and did not use an outside firm, the City received nine applicants and four of these were deemed qualified.

Concerning the City Manager position, Mayor Connors advised that the City used an outside firm to search for candidates. Approximately 60 applications were received and nine were deemed highly qualified. For whatever reasons and external factors, eight of the qualified candidates recently withdrew their applications. Mayor Connors advised that he reviewed all of the other 59 applications and resumes and compared them to Interim City Manager Abbate's application. He also advised that at the beginning of the week, the Council had the opportunity to invite anybody to interview, which the Council declined and decided to move forward as scheduled. These matters were not in the Interim City Manager Abbate's control.

Mayor Connors further advised that during the last four months, the Council was having a "working interview" with Interim City Manager Abbate. Mayor Connors felt that Interim City Manager Abbate was performing well working with the public, staff, and the Council. He also had the utmost confidence that Interim City Manager Abbate could do the job. Additionally, he acknowledged Member Nelson's suggestions and advised that if Council wanted to put a term on the Mr. Abbate's contract, he could support this suggestion.

Per Member Stoeckel's request, Human Resources Director Joe Denaro and Attorney James Stokes discussed her questions on typical provisions included in contracts for the City Manager position, whether certain benefits were guaranteed to the position in the event the Council terminated the City Manager's contract, etc.

Vice-Mayor Cole did not feel it was necessary to set term limits on the City Manager's contract, due to by a vote of three Council Members, the Council could terminate the contract.

Member Stoeckel agreed with Vice-Mayor Cole and further, she commented on Interim City Manager Abbate's care and desire to serve the City. Member Stoeckel advised Interim City Manager Abbate did not apply for the reason or stepping stone to his career advancement. Plus, the Interim City Manager had indicated that he was okay with the same pay as his current salary. Member Stoeckel advised that Interim City Manager Abbate seemed to have pure intentions.

Member Stoeckel agreed with Member Moscoso that ideally, the City Council would have liked to have more qualified candidates to interview and she weighed this information. She also felt the caliber of Interim City Manager Abbate as a professional and person was evident, because he was selected as a final candidate for the City Manager at the City of Cape Canaveral; however, Mr. Abbate withdrew his application from Cape Canaveral and took the risk and outcome of not knowing whether he would be appointed as Titusville's next City Manager. This showed his care and passion for Titusville. She desired providing stability. Member Stoeckel also advised Mr. Abbate was willing to move to Titusville (a requirement). An additional concern was what if the Council decided to continue the search but did not get as qualified candidates as Mr. Abbate. If he went elsewhere, the Council might miss the opportunity to retain or appoint Interim City Manager Abbate as the new City Manager. Additionally, Member Stoeckel commented on using these concepts to support her desire to appoint Interim City Manager Abbate as the next City Manager.

In addition, Member Stoeckel questioned how many candidates would want to come interview at Titusville after talking to some of the recent candidates that withdrew their applications. She also reported that the outside search firm had reported that only once and in a worst-case scenario, the firm was only able to recruit two qualified candidates for the position at another city. This was not the norm for the outside firm, who was normally able to attract and recruit a higher number of qualified candidates. At this special City Council meeting, one candidate remained. To this, Member Stoeckel was worried for the caliber of candidates the City might attract after what was presently happening. She also felt Interim City Manager Abbate would do an excellent job and that he would move the City in a positive direction, etc.

Motion:

Vice-Mayor Cole moved to appoint Mr. Thomas (Tom) Abbate as the City Manager. Member Nelson seconded the motion and the roll call vote was:

Member Moscoso	No
Member Nelson	Yes
Mayor Connors	Yes
Vice-Mayor Cole	Yes
Member Stoeckel	Yes

The motion carried, 4-yes to 1-no.

City Manager Abbate expressed his appreciation and thanks to all the Council Members.

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Agenda Addendum Item – Discussion of the City Attorney Position – City Manager Abbate advised that the individual that Council selected as the first choice for the City Attorney position at the special City Council meeting on July 12, 2025, was pursuing another career opportunity and declined the opportunity to negotiate a contract with Titusville.

City Manager Abatte advised that also at the special City Council meeting on July 12, 2025, Council ranked and made a second choice for an individual to serve as the City Attorney, if the first choice could not fulfill the position. A ranking for the third and fourth choice was not made.

To the above, staff sought Council direction and offered the following ideas:

- Authorize staff to negotiate with the second candidate that Council previously ranked for the City Attorney position
- Begin a new search for the City Manager position
- Appoint Attorney James Stokes (currently working under a temporary contract) as the Interim City Attorney, to which Mr. Stokes did not indicate having an interest in this idea

Member Nelson desired negotiating with the second-ranked candidate. Vice-Mayor Cole agreed.

Member Stoeckel desired adding the addendum item to the agenda for the regular City Council meeting of July 22, 2025 at 6:30 p.m., due to this item was added as an addendum and noticed to the public a little more than 24-hours prior to this special City Council meeting (a policy in the City's Charter indicated Attorney Stokes).

Vice-Mayor Cole and Attorney Stokes discussed whether the rules permitted Council to make a decision at this meeting or wait until Tuesday, July 22, 2025 at 6:30 p.m. The answer was yes. A decision could be made at this meeting. The contract would also be placed on an upcoming City Council meeting agenda, if the second-ranked choice accepted the position.

Vice-Mayor Cole desired “putting the wheels in motion” and moving forward on negotiating with Scott McHenry.

Motion:

Member Nelson moved to appoint Scott McHenry as the City Attorney and authorize staff to negotiate or discuss the terms of an employment offer with Mr. McHenry. Vice-Mayor Cole seconded the motion.

Two individuals submitted public speaking cards on the addendum item.

Jess Wright suggested allowing Mr. McHenry (the selected candidate) to sign an initial job offer contract to offer assurance to the candidate the job was theirs. Then, further negotiating the terms of a final employment contract.

Stan Johnston apologized for calling for point-of-order earlier in the meeting. He acknowledged the addendum item was added to the Council agenda and that having a speaking card on file was part of the public participation procedures.

The roll call vote was:

Member Nelson	Yes
Mayor Connors	Yes
Vice-Mayor Cole	Yes
Member Stoeckel	Yes
Member Moscoso	Yes

The motion carried, 4-yes to 1-no.

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Petitions and Requests from the Public Present – Stan Johnston advised that he distributed a card with information on it earlier in the meeting. He felt the City was guilty of numerous crimes, specifically related to how anyone could build a dam immediately downstream of houses already in the 100-year flood plain. He counted 10 instances of obstructions of ditches and dams. At these locations, per Mr. Johnston, there were

- No surveys of the properties or the wetlands
- No calculations for compensatory storage
- No contact with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- No calculations for the 100-year flood plain
- Violations of City Code Sec. 12-11

Mr. Johnson questioned what the City was doing about these matters. He felt these issues were deliberate violations. Mr. Johnston also felt these issues originated or began in 1985 and it was causing an issue with trust, etc.

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With no further business to discuss, the meeting adjourned at 3:14 p.m.

Andrew Connors, Mayor

ATTEST:

Wanda F. Wells, City Clerk