



## MINUTES

### City of Taft City Council Regular Meeting

Tuesday, March 18, 2025 at 6:30 pm

Taft City Hall

230 Green Ave., Taft, TX 78390

1. Call to order

Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. She announced that Mayor Leonard Vasquez would not be able to attend the meeting due to work commitments.

2. Roll call and certify a quorum

City Secretary Jessica Gonzalez conducted a roll call. Mayor Pro Tem Castillo and Council Members Alonzo Molina, Isaiah Garza and Chris Keeney were present, Mayor Leonard Vasquez was absent.

Also present was City Manager Ryan Smith and City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz.

3. Pledge of Allegiance and Texas pledge

The council led in the pledge.

4. Invocation

Reverend Steve Boettcher led the invocation.

5. Proclamations, presentations and council and staff announcements

a. City Council Announcements

Council Member Keeney thanked Public works for recent cleanup efforts and requested follow-up on a property on Gregory and Industrial and potholes neat the junior high.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo acknowledged the recent data breach, thanked staff for addressing it and urged the public's cooperation and understanding.

b. City Staff Announcements

City Manager Smith thanked Reverend Boettcher for a recent clean up.

6. Citizen Communication

Glen Searcy expressed concern over the recent release of personal information online. Questioned the council's accountability and management, specifically referencing Public Works issues and data breaches.

Marcus Adams criticized the city's handling of the data breach, stating that staff should not be commended for discovering an error reported by a citizen. Recommended offering LifeLock instead of basic credit monitoring. Questioned the employment and compensation of City Manager Ryan Smith, citing past lawsuits and personnel decisions. Also criticized councilmembers for not addressing resident concerns.

Ray Reyes asked who was leading changes to the personnel policy and emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability in city leadership. Urged the council to take action to restore public trust, calling for leadership accountability in the wake of the data breach.

Lucy Lopez Criticized the frequency of Executive Sessions and the council's continued inaction on longstanding issues, including unresolved water billing problems. Called for limiting the city manager's access to legal counsel due to cost concerns and questioned why some agenda items lacked a named requesting party.

Reverend Boettcher Emphasized community unity and faith. Announced a city-wide Easter egg hunt initiative to bring residents together. Encouraged cooperation and optimism amid local challenges.

7. Staff reports and other discussion items

a. Monthly Department Reports

Reports were provide in written form.

b. Update on Water Issues

City Manager Ryan Smith provided the following updates:

- i. Billing Issues: Complaints have decreased. The current issue involves the online payment portal failing to transmit payment data correctly. A new portal was approved by Council and is being implemented, with an estimated start in four to five weeks.
- ii. New Water Meters: The city is working with a financing company to finalize paperwork for purchasing radio-read water meters. Once approved, installation should begin shortly.
- iii. System Transparency: The new meters will provide detailed, 15-minute interval usage data viewable by residents, improving transparency and accuracy.
- iv. Manual Adjustments: Smith explained that meter reads (radio, manual, or estimated) are flagged in the system. Radio-read meters will help eliminate concerns over data manipulation.
- v. Certificate of Obligation: Mayor Pro Tem Castillo asked whether the funding required public notice. Smith clarified that the city used a loan—not a certificate of obligation—so no publication was required.

c. Update on Grants

City Manager Ryan Smith provided an overview of the status of current and potential grants:

- i. MIT-MOD Grant (GLO) – Contract for \$3 million signed. Funds will replace water lines, water towers, and sewage infrastructure on Davis Road.
- ii. Downtown Revitalization Grant – Final approvals underway before contract execution.
- iii. Generator Grant – Currently out for construction bids. Contractors are reviewing sites and preparing proposals to be presented at the next council meeting.
- iv. CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) – Initially applied for a water project; the city may be awarded funding in the second round depending on rankings.
- v. TxDOT Alternative Transportation Grant – Applied for sidewalk improvements. The city met with the local TxDOT office to discuss the project.
- vi. EDA Wastewater Grant – Pre-application stage. A \$2.5 million grant potentially available for overhauling lift stations and the wastewater treatment plant, contingent on anticipated refinery development.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo inquired about the city's grant-seeking process and expressed concerns that similar communities are securing more grants. She requested an opportunity to review future submissions and suggested partnering with the Council of Governments for grant support. Smith confirmed interest in collaboration and noted the lengthy procurement process for hiring grant writers.

d. City Attorney Contract- The Gwosdz Law Firm

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo raised concerns about the high cost of legal services and suggested placing a cap on the use of the city attorney. She questioned whether the budget was amended to cover the overages and emphasized the need to follow the city's adopted budget to avoid financial strain.

City Manager Ryan Smith explained that the city attorney's fees fall under "governmental services," which includes other expenses like insurance and utilities. Budget amendments are typically only made if an entire department exceeds its allocation. The legal fees have not yet exceeded the full governmental services budget.

City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz stated that no contract modification is necessary to limit fees. The city controls legal costs by choosing when to request his services. He does not see many repetitive inquiries but is open to providing training where appropriate. He noted he would be training the Building and Standards Commission the following day.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo also reiterated the need for better internal processes and questioned why legal consultation is being used so frequently. She requested a financial report on legal expenditures for the next meeting.

e. Youth Council Initiative

Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo proposed creating a Youth Council to engage local students in civic leadership and educate them on municipal government functions. The initiative aims to involve youth in city discussions and decisions affecting their future, foster leadership skills and civic responsibility, encourage collaboration between the city and school district, and serve as an advisory body that reflects the perspectives of young residents.

Council members expressed support for the idea, highlighting the importance of positive community involvement and improving the city's image for future generations. There was also discussion about involving parents and the potential for broader community participation.

A motion was made by Council Member Molina to move forward with the Youth Council Initiative, seconded by Council Member Keeney. The motion passed with the following vote: Molina, Garza, Keeney and Castillo voted Aye; Mayor Vasquez was absent.

8. Executive Session

At the request of Police Chief John Landreth, the personnel matter involving his position was held in open session.

Police Chief John Landreth began by stating that this was approximately the eighth or ninth time his employment status had been discussed in Executive Session. He expressed frustration that his prior offer of a two-year contract—at no raise, without benefits—was ignored by the Mayor and never placed on a Council agenda. Chief Landreth emphasized that there had been no complaints against the Police Department, no accidents involving officers, and that he had faithfully carried out his duties, including working patrol shifts and managing cases.

He acknowledged hearing claims that the Council had "lost confidence" in him, but stated he had never been arrested or disciplined in his 30-year law enforcement career until now. He stressed that he has never targeted staff unfairly and holds everyone to the same standards, referencing his past prosecution of a fellow officer. He defended his actions as efforts to maintain accountability.

Council Member Chris Keeney stated that he had lost confidence in Chief Landreth's ability to lead the Taft Police Department and made a motion to terminate his employment.

Members of the public voiced strong objections to the motion: Lucy Lopez and Marcus Adams criticized the lack of transparency and documentation and demanded that any decision to terminate be substantiated with clear reasons.

A resident called the motion "spineless" and requested that Council Member Keeney elaborate on the reasons for loss of confidence.

Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo emphasized the need for a fair and documented process, especially regarding employment decisions. She reiterated that the Council should not take such action based on personal feelings or vague statements.

Chief Landreth added that no efforts had been made to mediate or resolve any concerns, and that documents had been added to his personnel file without his knowledge. He expressed that if the Council wished to terminate him, they should do so, but he would not compromise his principles. He also referenced a recent incident in which he personally intervened during a house fire when no fire department response was available—an example, he said, of his commitment to the community.

Council Member Keeney made a motion to terminate Police Chief John Landreth's employment, seconded by Council Member Molina. The motion failed with the following vote: Molina and Keeney vote Aye; Garza and Castillo voted no; Mayor Vasquez was absent.

Before council convened in closed session, the Council briefly continued discussing the grievance matter listed under Item 10(a)(ii)—a grievance filed by Chief Landreth against City Manager Ryan Smith, City Secretary Jessica Gonzalez, and City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz.

Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo acknowledged the grievance item and asked Chief Landreth whether he wished to present it publicly or in Executive Session. Chief Landreth indicated that he was open to discussing it publicly and had nothing to hide.

City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz advised the Council that because the grievance involved legal matters—particularly Chief Landreth's pending lawsuit against the City—it was not appropriate to discuss the grievance in open session. He cited attorney-client privilege and stated that the subjects of the grievance (Smith, Gonzalez, and himself) could not publicly respond to the allegations without Council first waiving that privilege, which had not occurred. He strongly recommended that the grievance be heard in Executive Session to protect the legal position of the City and the rights of all parties involved.

Chief Landreth responded, clarifying that he had not filed the lawsuit—stating instead that the City initiated legal action by failing to follow its own policy when complaints were filed against him. City Attorney Gwosdz corrected the record, noting that the lawsuit, titled John Landreth v. City of Taft, was indeed initiated by Chief Landreth.

Chief Landreth also questioned a perceived double standard in how grievances were handled. He referenced a prior incident involving a complaint against him and another officer that was investigated by the attorney without ever being placed on an Executive Session agenda—implying that he was being treated unfairly compared to others.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo reiterated the importance of proper process, clear documentation, and fairness in handling all personnel matters. She voiced concern that inconsistent treatment and lack of written records could place the City at risk, both legally and ethically. She reaffirmed that these matters warranted private discussion under the law.

After this clarification, City Attorney Gwosdz formally advised that the Council recess into Executive Session to hear the grievance, allow responses from the individuals named, and deliberate confidentially. Council agreed.

The City Council recessed into executive session at 7:37 p.m.

- a. Section 551.074, Personnel Matters involving the appointment, employment, evaluation, reassignment, duties, discipline, or dismissal of a Public Officer or employee or to hear a complaint against an officer or employee, including but not limited to:
  - i. Evaluation of City Manager Ryan Smith
  - ii. Grievance against City Manager Ryan Smith, City Secretary Jessica Gonzalez and City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz
  - iii. Police Chief John Landreth
- b. Section 551.071, Consultation with attorney on matter involving pending or contemplated litigation or other matter in which the duty of the attorney to the governmental body under the Texas Disciplinary Rules of Professional Conduct clearly conflicts with the Open Meetings Act.

The City Council reconvened in open session at 9:04 p.m.

A motion was made by Council Member Keeney to deny the grievance against City Manager Ryan Smith, City Secretary Jessica Gonzalez and City Attorney Thomas Gwosdz, seconded by Council Member Garza. The motion passed with the following vote: Molina, Garza, Keeney and Castillo voted Aye; Mayor Vasquez was absent.

9. Action items

- a. Approve Ordinance 2025-1305 adopting the City of Taft Personnel Policy

City Manager Smith stated that Mayor Vasquez would like to be present and asked for this item to be tabled for another meeting. Mayor Pro Tem Castillo agreed and skipped over this item.

- b. Approve Resolution 2025-1302 declaring a unified commitment to the development of regional water supplies and expanding the Port of Corpus Christi authority to include additional representation from the Coastal Bend

Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo introduced the item, explaining that the resolution involved a unified commitment to developing regional water supplies and expanding representation on the Port of Corpus Christi Authority Board.

City Manager Ryan Smith noted the resolution was drafted by Representative Abel Herrero and provided to the Council in their packets. It aims to address the region's growing water crisis through collaboration among local governments. He explained the resolution combined two issues: Formation of a regional water alliance and expansion of the Port Authority's board to include representatives from Portland and Port Aransas.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo expressed serious concerns about the loss of San Patricio County's voice in decision-making. She explained that under the revised structure, San Patricio would no longer have two representatives—instead, one representative each from Portland and Port Aransas would be added. Castillo warned this would reduce influence from smaller communities like Taft, even though local residents would still be subject to increased water rates resulting from regional projects.

She emphasized that San Patricio County residents deserve representation in decisions that could raise utility costs and affect long-term planning. She also stressed the importance of transparency and municipal input in large-scale water projects.

Council Member Isaiah Garza noted the urgency of the water issue and agreed that more research and community input were needed. He supported further regional cooperation but echoed that each city needs to understand how the decisions could impact their residents.

City Manager Smith stated that while the issues of water supply and port representation were combined in the resolution, they were functionally separate. He also shared that the matter had been discussed at a recent Mayor's Coalition meeting, where opinions varied and no formal consensus was reached. He indicated that the resolution was likely the start of ongoing collaboration rather than a final decision.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo proposed the possibility of hosting a town hall meeting to involve residents in discussions about water security, future rates, and governance.

No action was taken.

c. Approve a letter of support for the cleanup of Veterans' resting place at Lamas Cemetery  
Mayor Pro Tem Castillo introduced the item, stating that several community members had reached out regarding the deteriorating condition of Lamas Cemetery, specifically where veterans are buried. She described the area as unfit for those who served honorably and emphasized the need for respectful and dignified upkeep.

Mayor Pro Tem Castillo read the full draft letter of support, which highlighted the community's concern for the cemetery's condition, acknowledged the importance of providing veterans and their families with a well-maintained final resting place, and requested collaboration from the San Patricio County Veterans Affairs Office to support cleanup and improvement efforts.

She reiterated that this was not a funding request, but a symbolic and formal show of support for those efforts and an appeal for broader cooperation in honoring veterans.

Council Member Garza made a motion to approve the letter of support, seconded by Council Member Molina. The motion passed with the following vote: Molina, Garza, Keeney and Castillo voted Aye; Mayor Vasquez was absent.

d. Approve the use of the Alvarado Center for private events  
Mayor Pro Tem Elida Castillo introduced the item, explaining that the request to use the Alvarado Center (Senior Center) for private events had been brought back for Council consideration following community interest.

City Manager Ryan Smith provided details, noting that while the center had previously been used for public activities, allowing private rentals raised a few logistical considerations, such as, locking the kitchen area to prevent cooking and reduce liability (as is done at the Kiva Hut), and securing storage areas within the building, particularly a back room without a current barrier, where supplies are kept.

City Manager Smith recommended adding a lockable barrier to secure city property during private use. He also confirmed that such facility use is not unusual and similar rules exist at other city-owned buildings.

Council and staff discussed occupancy limits and the need to coordinate with the fire marshal to enforce safe capacity, as well as deposit and rental forms. Council suggested updates to clarify renter responsibility for damages and ensure clear communication of expectations.

Council Member Isaiah Garza emphasized that while the facility should be available to the community, it must be respected and treated as a public asset. Renters should be held financially responsible for any damage.

Council Member Garza made a motion to approve the use of the Alvarado Center for private events, seconded by Council Member Molina. The motion passed with the following vote: Molina, Garza, Keeney and Castillo voted Aye. Mayor Vasquez was absent.

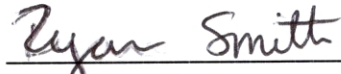
#### 10. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the council, Mayor Pro Tem Castillo adjourned the meeting at 9:19 p.m.



Elida Castillo  
Mayor Pro Tem

Approved on: 11/12/25



~~Jessica Gonzalez~~ Ryan Smith  
City Secretary  
Manager