



Town of Orchid

Wednesday, February 4, 2026, at 9 a.m.

Town Hall - 9301 Highway A1A, Suite 201, Vero Beach, FL 32963

Town Council Minutes

Regular Meeting

1. Call to Order

Mayor Gibbons called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

2. Roll Call

Present

Mayor Robert Gibbons
Vice-Mayor Paul Knapp
Councilmember John Heanue
Councilmember James Raphalian

Absent

Councilmember Daniel McEvoy

Town Staff

Cherry Stowe, Town Manager
Jane Garcia, Town Clerk
D. Johnathan Rhodeback, Town Attorney

3. Preliminary matters; agenda additions, deletions, or modifications

There were none.

4. Public Participation

There was none.

5. Consent Agenda

Approval of the minutes of regular meeting of January 7, 2026

Councilmember Raphalian made a motion to approve the minutes from the meeting of January 7, 2026. Mayor Gibbons seconded the motion.

All Councilmembers were in favor.

6. Councilmember Matters of Interest and Committee Reports

Councilmember Heanue suggested that the upcoming presentations on the Town's Vulnerability Assessment (March 12) and Indian River County's Beach Preservation Plan (April 17) should be emphasized to the community in early outreach efforts by the Town. The Town Manager responded that she would coordinate informative letters on these distinct events with the Orchid Island Golf & Beach Club (OIGBC).



Councilmember Heanue wished to discuss the Council's comfort with the monthly financial reports and invited comments from the remaining Councilmembers. The Town Manager responded to questions about the graphs in the report and about the Town's current financial position against the budget at this point in the fiscal year. All members stated they were pleased with the report's presentation and did not request any changes to the format for future reports.

7. Town Staff Reports

The Town Manager provided updates on the following subjects:

Dune Project: The Town Manager advised that the dune project was underway and remained on schedule, although crews faced challenges with equipment and the delivery of excessively wet sand early in the project. The Town Manager was relieved the recent storm did not require remediation of the portion of the project that was already completed. The beach in Orchid was expected to reopen by Sunday, while the reconstruction of Golden Sands Beach Park was expected to conclude by Tuesday.

University of Florida (UF) Research: The Town Manager provided an update on the UF Center for Coastal Solutions' site visit, noting that researchers conducted mapping using drones. During the visit, residents engaged with the team to ask questions regarding the project's scope. The researchers planned to return for follow-up measurements once the dune repair project concludes. Their expectation was to utilize the data to direct funding from a grant received from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to test nature-based solutions against coastal erosion on the beach in Orchid. Councilmember Raphalian received confirmation that the Town's financial responsibility for the research was none.

Dogs on the Beach: The Town Clerk provided an update of the educational program regarding regulations on the beach, especially as pertain to dogs. She offered information on the number of dog licenses issued in fiscal year 2025-2026, the Public Outreach Reports from the Public Outreach Coordinator, and the amount of trash the Coordinator removed from the beach (a voluntary extension of her service to the Town). She read out a detailed written report from the Coordinator, confirming a great improvement in regard to compliance since the program began. The Town Council agreed the effort was useful and that the friendly, educational approach continued to be appropriate.

Seagrass Planting: The Town Manager reported that AquaTech identified three promising locations for planting and had filed permit applications for these, including one near the community's kayak launch. Following approval, planting would take place over the summer. In response to an inquiry from Councilmember Heanue, the Town Manager confirmed that the planting would not interfere with the use of the kayak launch.

BMAP: Regarding the Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) and following up from the prior meeting, the Town Manager reported that Jim Vitter of the Vitter Engineering Group informed her that past projects appear less promising in terms of meeting Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) credit requirements than hoped. She was awaiting feedback from FDEP before proceeding further with Engineer Vitter.

Meanwhile, the Town Manager continued exploring future projects. She connected with the Sustainable Water Infrastructure Group (SWIG), specialized in nature-based filtration systems. SWIG, whose leadership includes former St. Johns River Water Management



District and FDEP officials, advised they can take the lead on planning and design, obtaining permits and grant funding, and installing, maintaining and monitoring, stormwater filtration systems in Orchid, and would be further helpful in obtaining BMAP credit on the Town's behalf. The group is interested in utilizing Orchid as a small-community model and believes their technology could help the Town achieve the remainder of its required pollutant reductions (94%). She found that expending funds and effort in applying for credit for past projects may not be valuable for this reason. She noted that she and Matt Boyd, Golf Course Superintendent of OIGBC, would be meeting with SWIG and touring the community later this month. Mayor Gibbons expressed support.

Property Tax Legislation: Statewide legislation regarding property tax reform is progressing, with Governor DeSantis indicating a willingness to call a Special Session if the Regular Legislative Session does not produce a final ballot initiative. The Town Manager recently attended a local City Managers' meeting, during which it was discussed that Vero Beach and Sebastian would hold public meetings within their communities to educate their populations on how property tax revenue is utilized. While the Town Manager offered a similar outreach effort for Orchid, it was noted that the Town has an excellent email list with many residents engaged in the Town's communications and that education via email was favored. A follow-up meeting involving local City Managers, their Attorneys, and County Officials to address property tax impacts is scheduled for the end of February 2026, and the Town Manager would report on it at the next Town Council meeting.

DOGE: The Town Manager briefed the Town Council on the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) report, which audited 13 cities and counties and ostensibly identified significant fiscal waste. A key recommendation in the report suggests that municipal reserves should not exceed 10% of the expenditure budget, a standard that would be problematic for Orchid's current financial management strategy as a vulnerable, coastal community. The report asserts that local governments maintain excessive reserves and also aims to highlight a high degree of service duplication across jurisdictions. These findings are designed to challenge existing local government structures.

Conferences: The Town Manager requested feedback on her proposed attendance at three professional conferences this summer, hosted by the Florida City and County Management Association, the Florida Government Finance Officers Association, and the Florida Shore & Beach Preservation Association. While the total costs would result in a \$1,500 budget overage across two line items, Mayor Gibbons supported the expenditure, noting that with a small staff, these events are vital for staying informed on municipal trends and coastal management, particularly in the current legislative environment. The Town Council reached a consensus to approve attendance at all three events.

Election Update: The Town Manager listed several statistics pertinent to the Town's upcoming Special Election on the comprehensive update of the Town's Charter; 531 registered voters (16 new since November), 135 active requests for Vote-by-Mail ballots, and 56 such ballots already cast ahead of the first Canvassing Board meeting on Friday for the Logic & Accuracy Test of the voting equipment. Mayor Gibbons highlighted the ease of the Vote-by-Mail process. Councilmember Heanue attested to the simplicity.

Regarding the local election that will follow in November, the Town Manager explained that the seats currently held by Mayor Gibbons, and Councilmembers Heanue and Raphaelian would be up for election. While the official qualifying period begins in



April, eligible residents may establish their candidacy prior to that. Mayor Gibbons reaffirmed he would not run for reelection. Councilmember Heanue advised of his intent not to seek reelection either. Mayor Gibbons encouraged Councilmembers to get the word out about the Town Council election, noting the community has many talented and intelligent people who may be interested.

Form 1: The Town Manager referred to the Town Clerk's email of the day prior encouraging the Town Council to file their annual Financial Disclosure Forms, as the Florida Commission on Ethics' portal had recently opened. Form 6 legislation remained stalled.

Local Planning Agency: The Town Manager informed the Town Council of the resignation of Mr. Danielsen from the Local Planning Agency (LPA). She noted that the two alternate seats and all other seats of the LPA remain filled. It was agreed that Mr. Danielsen's seat will remain unfilled until January 2027.

Streetlight Emergency: The Town Manager reported an incident where Indian River County Utilities required immediate access to a leaking water main directly beneath a streetlight. Blais Electric promptly made itself available and removed the streetlight, but was unable to remove the concrete base. Fortunately, Guettler Brothers Construction, engaged nearby with the Town's dune repair project, assisted as a favor to the Town and removed the base. To respond more efficiently to such emergencies in the future, the Town Manager suggested establishing an interlocal agreement with the County to authorize such work to be conducted directly by Utility Department personnel and equipment if it occurs in other locations within Orchid, particularly after hours as this instance had.

Streetlight Request: A resident on Westwind Court requested an additional streetlight at the end of the cul-de-sac, and the Town Manager presented an overhead view of the proposed site which was vetted by the Town's electrician. She advised that the preparation, installation, parts, and painting of a new streetlight in this location would cost approximately \$11,000 and would necessitate boring underneath a different resident's driveway. She noted that the Town had not previously heard concerns regarding the lighting on this street and that the streetlights here were placed at the same interval as elsewhere in the community. It was agreed that the Councilmembers would inspect the cul-de-sac at night before the next meeting to determine the need for another streetlight at that location.

8. Confirmation of next meeting date and adjournment

Mayor Gibbons announced the next meeting is scheduled for March 4, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

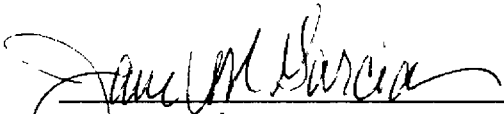
Mayor Gibbons made a motion to adjourn.

Vice-Mayor Knapp seconded the motion.

All Councilmembers were in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:38 a.m.

These minutes were approved at the regular meeting of the Town Council on March 4, 2026.


Jane Garcia, MMC
Town Clerk

Town of Orchid

