



**OFFICE OF THE CITY COUNCIL  
RESEARCH DIVISION**

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**SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING RE: TROPICAL STORM DEBBY**

**Meeting Minutes**

**August 4, 2024  
10:00 a.m.**

**Location:** City Council Chamber, 1<sup>st</sup> floor, City Hall

**In attendance:** Council Members Randy White (President), Ken Amaro, Raul Arias, Michael Boylan, Joe Carlucci, Matt Carlucci, Kevin Carrico, Mike Gay, Rahman Johnson, Will Lahnen, Nick Howland, Chris Miller, Jimmy Peluso, Ju'Coby Pittman, Ron Salem

**Excused:** Council Members Tyrone Clark-Murray, Rory Diamond, Terrance Freeman, Reggie Gaffney Jr.

**Also:** Merriane Lahmeur, Maritza Sanchez – Legislative Services Division; Steve Cassada – Council Public Information Division; Mary Staffopoulos, Dylan Reingold - Office of General Counsel; Kim Taylor – Council Auditor's Office; Karen Bowling – Mayor's Office; Sheriff T.K. Waters; Fire Chief Keith Powers; Andre Ayoub – Director of Emergency Preparedness; Anna Brosche – Finance Director; Nina Sickler – Public Works Director

**Meeting Convened:** 10:00 a.m.

President White convened the meeting and Council Member Amaro gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chief Administrative Officer Karen Bowling reported that Mayor Donna Deegan is returning from an out-of-town trip and will be back in the city by this evening. The mayor has declared a state of emergency as of 8:00 a.m. Sunday due to the approach of Tropical Storm Debby. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) began activity on Friday and is mobilizing into full operation today. Jacksonville is not currently under a tropical storm watch and the impact will likely be as a heavy rain event.

Director Ayoub reviewed the weather and path forecast for the tropical storm and the expected impacts in Jacksonville between Sunday night and Tuesday evening. The EOC went to Level 1 activation as of 8:00 a.m. this morning. Three evacuation shelters are open as of this morning – LaVilla Middle School,

Landmark Middle School, and the Legends Center. The Landmark and Legends locations are equipped for special medical needs and are pet friendly. Fire Chief Keith Powers said the declaration of emergency allows the Fire and Rescue Department to mobilize the resources it needs in a timely manner. Emergency response units (urban search and rescue, water rescue, heavy equipment response) are activated and ready for action. JTA is cooperating to assist with evacuations from traditionally flood-prone areas. Council Member Pittman asked for information on how residents of flood-prone areas will be notified about evacuation resources. He noted that the JaxReady app is a source of comprehensive information. In response to a question from Council Member Boylan, Chief Powers said that the 630-CITY information and complaint line is fully staffed and ready to take calls for service needs. Sheriff T.K. Waters said 30 additional officers have been called in to support the normal staffing level. He noted that the JSO non-emergency call line (630-0500) is also a means of reporting downed trees and power lines, street flooding, etc. blocking roadways.

In response to a question from President White about City Hall closure, Ms. Bowling said the team is waiting for the next weather briefing at 11:00 a.m. to make the final decision but anticipates that only essential employees will be working on Monday and a decision about Tuesday will be made later on Monday. She announced that the Supervisor of Elections has postponed the start of early voting until Wednesday. In response to a question from Council Member Salem about how contractors procured by the City to deal with emergency situations (i.e. tree removal) are paid, CFO Anna Brosche said they are paid in cash which is carefully tracked for potential reimbursement purposes. Ms. Bowling said that expenses exceeding a threshold of \$4.57 million make the City eligible for reimbursement from FEMA. Mr. Salem asked for a report to the Finance Committee on total emergency expenditures due to the declaration of emergency after the storm passes.

Vicki Cavey, Interim CEO of the JEA, said the utility's EOC has been activated and over 200 employees and contractors, including 20 downed tree removal squads, are standing by ready to respond as the storm passes. Mutual aid agreements are also in place with other jurisdictions to share resources as needed. Customers can call 665-6000 to report service issues to JEA. Public Works Director Nina Sickler said her department has been in storm preparation mode since last Friday clearing storm drains and inlets and is ready to tackle debris removal, traffic signal and sign issues, and other impacts. Portable pumps are ready to deploy to respond to any flooding issues. In response to a question from Council Member Lahnen about waste collection, Ms. Sickler said crews would be out early Monday morning to get as much collection as possible done before the weather gets too bad. Depending on how the weather turns, Tuesday collections may be pushed back to Wednesday and remaining days in the week pushed back by another day as well.

Deputy School Superintendent Dana Kriznar said the school district is opening 2 of its schools as emergency shelters. Classes have not yet started but 14,000 district employees were set to begin preparations Monday for school to start on August 12th; a decision will be made later today about their status for tomorrow. Chris Geraci, Chief Safety and Security Officer for JTA, said the transit systems are currently in full operation until it is deemed unsafe to do so. JTA will have resources ready for free rides to evacuation shelters. The St. Johns River Ferry will be governed by the authority of the U.S. Coast Guard about when to cease operations and a berth has been secured in Green Cove Springs should the ferry need to be relocated for its safety. Citizens can call 630-3100 with any questions regarding transportation issues. In response to a question from Council Member Arias, Mr. Geraci said that the public can ride any regular bus route that goes to an evacuation shelter for free during an evacuation, and there will also be 4 designated pick-up sites to provide rides directly to shelters.

Karen Bowling said the next City Council information availability will be a conference call on Monday morning at 10:00 a.m. In response to a question, Mr. Ayoub reviewed the three evacuation shelters and their opening time at 5:00 p.m. today. In response to a question from Council Member Howland about

how a declared state of emergency can be terminated, Mary Staffopoulos of the Office of General Counsel said a mayoral declaration of emergency could contain an automatic termination provision (which the present declaration does not), the mayor could terminate the declaration at her discretion when she feels the emergency has passed, and the Ordinance Code provides that the City Council may terminate a declaration by adoption of a resolution. Mr. Howland noted that the Code confers a tremendous amount of discretion on the mayor during the period of the declared emergency and said the Council should be wary of foregoing too much of its normal authority. Council Member Johnson asked about when the constitutional officer offices will be closed and said he has urged the Supervisor of Elections to request the state to allow the county to extend the deadline by which voters must request a vote-by-mail ballot by 2 days to August 10<sup>th</sup> in recognition of the impact of the storm. Ms. Bowling said the administration will be coordinating with the constitutional officers following the next U.S. Weather Service update at 11:00 a.m. prior to making the public buildings closure announcement for Monday at 1:00 p.m. today. Council Member Pittman asked about the entities that provide feeding programs for the homeless and whether their employees should come to the shelters on Monday. Mr. Ayoub said a representative of the homeless service providers is part of the emergency operations team and will be conveying that information to those providers when a decision is made later today.

City Council Director Peggy Sidman said that if the decision is made to close City Hall on Monday, the Council's Monday committee meetings will be moved to Wednesday. If the building is closed on Tuesday, that day's committee meetings would be moved to Thursday, which would impact the Finance Committee budget hearings already scheduled for Thursday.

At Council Member Howland's request, Ms. Staffopoulos described a state statute which limits local declarations of emergency for purpose of seeking state or federal reimbursement to 7-day, renewable increments.

In response to a question from President White, Ms. Bowling said there is a 99.9% certainty that the 11:00 weather briefing will not reveal any major change in conditions and therefore a Monday closure of city government except for essential personnel is highly likely.

Council Member Arias asked if there is a mechanism for the City government to mandate closure of private businesses by City order. Ms. Bowling said she was not aware that the City had ever made such an declaration and could not imagine a circumstance where that would be considered.

**Meeting adjourned:** 10:36 a.m.

Minutes: Jeff Clements, Council Research Division

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