

LAKELAND CITY COMMISSION

Strategic Planning Retreat

April 23, 2026

Day 1 – Afternoon Session

The Lakeland City Commission met at the RP Funding Center for the Strategic Planning Retreat. Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley and Commissioners Terry Coney, Guy LaLonde, Ashley Troutman, Mike Musick, and Stephanie Madden were present. Commissioner Chad McLeod was absent. City Manager Shawn Sherrouse, Finance Director Mike Brossart, City Attorney Palmer Davis, and City Clerk Kelly Koos were present along with Deputy City Manager Rob Hernandez, Assistant City Manager Ashley Stathatos and all department directors.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

High-Level Department Survey Findings

Ms. Gould reviewed:

- Department Head Survey
- Priorities in 2025
- Priorities Carry Over Year to Year
- Barriers, Obstacles, and Needs

Commission comments on Department Survey

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley:

1. Workforce development is a universal Polk County theme. An exciting opportunity would be to have departments work together to fill their gaps.
2. Department priorities not aligning well is on the Commission.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde: There are many different types of infrastructure and workforce is one of them.

Commissioner Stephanie Madden: Upcoming retirement losses seem insurmountable. Maybe the City needs a second-tier leadership development plan.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman: This goes back to the misalignment discussion. Maybe there is an opportunity for some communication alignment.

Commissioner Terry Coney has been back home now for 12 years. He thought the City was doing a great job internally. We have a new Communications director. The previous director built it from the ground up. We are making plans for retirement of directors in Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts. They are working on succession plans.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley referenced a book *Radical Candor*. She did not want anyone to lose sight of the fact that there are strong assistant directors and staff and that is where they want to be. We need the strong seconds and thirds. We need to support and to celebrate all the staff. Staying in a number 2 position does not mean that they are not superstars. All roles are important to how we serve.

Focus Area Deep Dive #1: Infrastructure

Ms. Gould reviewed:

- Department Priorities
- Commissioner Interviews
- SWOT on Infrastructure

Commissioner Dialogue on Priority Setting for Infrastructure

Commissioner Mike Musick: How are we going to talk about projects without talking about budget?

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley: Can we agree to prioritize a list of projects with the knowledge that some things will be cut when it comes to budget time?

Commissioner Ashley Troutman: Anything that keeps citizens safe is top priority. We also need to focus on things that keep us open for business. Third, we need to ask what makes us a desirable community.

Commissioner Stephanie Madden: We made a purposeful decision not to leave others behind while moving our city forward. We focused on affordable housing and it is not a top priority now. We must talk through this and make sure we are not getting off track. Infrastructure is now number one. Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts is not number one but that does not mean we do not like Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde: We have a lot of issues coming up dealing with wastewater. Those expenses do not get cheaper each year. We must consider new load generation and our internal infrastructure. We also must consider the senior hub and PAL (the Police Athletic League).

Commissioner Terry Coney: Talking about priorities for infrastructure. This is important before we get to budget. Cities are not for-profit entities. We are a service company.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley: We must have a plan and a priority to attract dollars. The hard part about infrastructure is the funding is in buckets. We must be shovel ready for when the funding becomes available.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman: User fees could be a funding strategy. A Strategic Plan is a living document that should be changed and updated as the City takes shape.

Ms. Gould: Development should pay some of the burden for the infrastructure. How would we define infrastructure?

Commissioner Ashley Troutman: Infrastructure is the unsexy part of government. Infrastructure is anything that keeps our citizens safe, open for business, in a desirable community.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde: Infrastructure is water, wastewater and stormwater systems, road infrastructure.

Commissioner Terry Coney: Infrastructure is those things that we do not think about but expect for our quality of life which includes roads, power, water, sewage, and garbage pickup. We just expect it to work. If these things do not work, there is no quality of life.

Commissioner Mike Musick: Infrastructure is the bones or muscles behind the activity. If he had to pick the top items he would say fix the roads and move pedestrians safely. He would ask staff what is the top priority. The main complaint he gets is people sitting in traffic.

Commissioner Stephanie Madden could not improve on the department priorities on page 54. Those priorities cover everything.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley and Commissioner Mike Musick agreed.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley: Roads are made for safe travel, not speed. As you grow as a community, you lose speed. When you go to big cities, you do not get in a car you walk because that is faster. Roads with utilities above and below ground are infrastructure.

Commissioner Mike Musick: Most of the department priorities are things that we cannot fix alone. We find ourselves needing funding from other entities. Stormwater and base load generation are the only things we can fix on our own.

Ms. Gould clarified that the priorities identified by the departments made sense. How does the Commission give them the autonomy to do the things and come back with activities?

Commissioner Stephanie Madden said the challenge with trails is that they are not contiguous because they are funded in patches.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman asked Ms. Gould to ask the question again.

Ms. Gould: Are there things we could prioritize to bridge the gap while waiting on the multimodal center? Is that something you want to ask staff to prioritize?

Commissioner Ashley Troutman: We have had the catalyst plan, downtown west and downtown east. How do all these plans work together?

Commissioner Mike Musick: To have stuff in layers is good but a clear focus is important so staff can know what they should really work on. We need to tell staff where we want them to focus.

Commissioner Terry Coney: We have had a lot of plans. If connectivity is important around Bonnet Springs Park, are we ready to prioritize the pedestrian bridge for access? How are we prioritizing? You must plan for the expensive projects.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley thought clear direction was important. We have had a lot of plans. Things overlap. The City Manager is good at asking what is the directive. The Squeeze was a collective initiative amongst many partners. When we are setting priorities for infrastructure, they all overlap. How do we set the priorities for the most urgent needs. Everything on Page 54 (Department Priorities) are important.

Ms. Gould: The Commission needs to identify the big bold things that are cross cutting for staff to focus on. The Commission can create KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and the departments can give updates. That can be how you measure. What is more important, connectivity or congestion?

Commissioner Terry Coney: As we stand today do we consider Lakeland a world class community? How do we prioritize things to get us there? From a mission standpoint, do we have an exceptional quality of life? If not, how do we get there?

Commissioner Stephanie Madden: We need access to the trails network. She wanted access to the Parks, Recreation and Cultural Arts trails network part of infrastructure. We are making strides to parks and trails but we need connectivity. The frustrating part is the way funding is so piece meal. We must act when our partners offer the money.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley wanted connectivity to be the #1 infrastructure priority.

Commissioner Mike Musick liked the focus on connectivity. He would fix existing infrastructure then add on.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman defined infrastructure as anything that keeps us safe, open for business in a desirable community. Connectivity keeps us safe. Open for business is utility capacity and rehabilitation.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley: When you are adding a new connection you can add a sidewalk when you are working on underground infrastructure. Sometimes connectivity is part of infrastructure.

Commissioner Terry Coney we have the railroad coming through here. That is what helped build the community. We must reach out to partners to get everything done. We need our partners' cooperation. That is a piece of the puzzle we must work out.

Break: Recess at 3:16 p.m. and reconvene at 3:26 p.m.

Focus Area Deep Dive #2 - Public Safety

Ms. Gould reviewed the Department Priorities and asked Emergency Operations Center (EOC) Manager David Cox to come forward and discuss the EOC Functions.

David Cox reviewed his EOC Peer Comparisons. A copy of his presentation is on file in the agenda packet. An EOC is a building with an ability to respond, like a police or fire department. Mr. Cox suggested building away from City Hall so it could serve as a backup if necessary. Relying on the County is only good for a hurricane. If it is a local event they may not stand up.

Shawn Sherrouse explained the hangars at TigerTown were built before hurricane-resistant building codes so they could not serve as an EOC. We have created almost a false sense of security because we have been successful with the EOC and hurricanes. It is the unknown emergencies that worry him because it takes so long to pop up a unified EOC.

Commissioner Terry Coney: Do we have a timeline that we are looking to make this happen? Shawn Sherrouse said no, we are in the early stages.

Commissioner Terry Coney: When there was that shooting on Idlewild and 11 people were shot, how was that handled? Shawn Sherrouse responded through the Lakeland Police Department.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde: We had over 90 medical calls at SUN 'n FUN in over an hour. An EOC does need to be built from scratch.

The group discussed a spot on the south side of the airport for the fire department.

Commissioner Interviews:

Ms. Gould reviewed Public Safety's SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), which she built out of the Commissioner Interview comments on public safety.

Focus Area Deep Dive #2 - Public Safety – Part 2

Emerging Technologies in Law Enforcement

Assistant Chief of Police Hans Lehman presented. He recently attended the Axon conference. A copy of his presentation is in the agenda packet.

Commission discussion

Commissioner Mike Musick: Could there be a problem down the road being committed to one company? What is your professional opinion about software upgrades?

Assistant Chief Lehman: You could compare it to Microsoft versus Apple. They started out with just body cams. The nice thing is everything is in one spot for the officer. This eases their workload and keeps officers from having to log into 5 different systems.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman asked about a robotic dog.

Assistant Chief Lehman responded that Hillsborough County has one of those. They are mainly for entries. You can mount cameras. Some bomb units use those too. It is another tool in the toolbox but is not a force reduction tool and would not replace a K9.

Commissioner Terry Coney: Can drones be used for speed control?

Assistant Chief Lehman has not seen anything from the state authorizing that use.

Priority Setting for Public Safety - Commissioner Dialogue

Commissioner Mike Musick looked forward to seeing more information on the items presented.

Commissioner Guy LaLonde strongly supported any initiative that would be a force multiplier.

Commissioner Terry Coney asked Chief Sammy Taylor what is the latest on lighting in neighborhoods? Chief Taylor said the lighting helps prevent crime. The more lights the better.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley's only concern with Axon is that the PalmPilot was great until the Blackberry and the Blackberry was great until the iPhone.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman thought keeping citizens safe is the government's number one job. It is important to have an EOC and thought they should stay on the cutting edge of technology.

Day 1 Synthesis and Closing Reflection

Commissioner Mike Musick wished when we were talking about infrastructure he had asked department heads to come up and tell them what is on their radar right now. We could have saved some of the conversation. Our team is already working on projects. He would have preferred to hear from department directors. Today was super

informative. He tends to be budget focused. He hoped the public picked up on the Commission's congeniality.

Commissioner Ashley Troutman liked the idea of revisiting Mission, Vision, Values because of listening to the community and this body. We need to add connectivity to those statements.

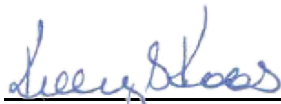
Commissioner Guy LaLonde liked that they came together as a commission.

Commissioner Terry Coney liked the inclusive process. He wondered about getting the message out more through communications.

Mayor Sara Roberts McCarley liked the funnel and that language. She liked today because they had time to talk as a commission. She wondered if they muddied the water more for staff today. It is hard to get your arms around priorities. She was looking forward to tomorrow. We live in a collegial city. Our staff is very collegial and welcoming to the Commission and each other. We should not take that lightly or for granted. There are many other locations that do not enjoy that option.

Ms. Gould thanked the Commission for their time and attention today. They will start tomorrow at 8:00 a.m.

The meeting adjourned at 4:49 p.m.



Kelly S. Koos,
City Clerk

