



**CITY OF RICHMOND HILL
MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL**

**Tuesday, February 3, 2026
6:00 PM**

**Richmond Hill City Hall
40 Richard Davis Drive
Richmond Hill, Georgia 31324**

Present from City Council: Kristi Cox, *Mayor*; *Councilmembers:* Cindy Hatala, Kevin Bowes, Van Hunter, and Steve Scholar

Mayor Carpenter called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Councilmember Hatala gave the invocation. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Councilmember Scholar.

APPROVAL OF MEETING AGENDA

Councilmember Hunter made a motion amend the agenda to add an item: Consideration of an appointment of Aaron Kappler, the Bryan County Attorney, as special counsel for an investigation, evaluation, and pursuit of a potential public nuisance and all related matters. Councilmember Hunter cited special circumstances that exist pursuant to OCGA 50-14-1(d)(3) for adding this item. Those special circumstances include new information that suggests a public nuisance exists on the former Caesarstone property involving environmental contamination. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Scholar. Motion carried in the affirmative by all.

Councilmember Hunter made a motion to appoint Aaron Kappler as special counsel with the City Attorney on behalf of the City of Richmond Hill to, jointly with the County, investigate, evaluate, and pursue a potential public nuisance, and all related matters. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Hatala. Motion carried in the affirmative by all.

During the discussion of this motion, County Attorney Aaron Kappler addressed the Council regarding legal protocols and the specific investigation into the property owned by Caesarstone.

Legal Guidance and Property Investigation

Due Process and Neutrality: Mr. Kappler explained that the Mayor and Council are legally required to maintain due process for all applicants. He noted that officials must not prejudge outcomes or disclose their voting intentions in advance to ensure every party receive a fair hearing.

Public Nuisance Process: He detailed the legal framework for declaring a property a "public nuisance" under Georgia State law. A nuisance is defined as a condition that causes harm to the safety, health, or welfare of the general community.

Contamination Concerns: Mr. Kappler highlighted alarming reports of silica contamination, hazardous waste barrels, and elevated arsenic levels (as of February 2, 2026) on the Caesarstone site.

Remediation Strategy: He stated that the entity responsible for causing the harm would be legally required to remediate it. He recommended that the site be protected and preserved until a full assessment confirms it is clean and poses no risk to the public.

Collaborative Action: Mr. Kappler's recommendation involved a joint effort between the City, County, and Development Authority to finalize the investigation and present a solution to their respective boards and constituents.

Mayor Cox stated that the City would issue a joint statement the following day to explain this matter further.

PUBLIC COMMENT

The following individuals addressed the Council regarding the proposed Westwin Elements refinery and other city matters:

- **Chris Black:** Expressed concerns regarding the safety of transporting hazardous materials during hurricanes and questioned the company's past air quality permit denials.
- **Deborah Lee:** Highlighted environmental and health risks, specifically citing concerns about groundwater and air contamination near local schools.
- **Amber Pindell:** Shared research regarding the company's legal history and expressed concerns about property resale values and the impact on the city's family environment.
- **Corey Foreman:** Discussed the PUD (Planned Unit Development) zoning of the property, suggesting the Council has the legal authority to deny refining uses that were not part of the original Caesarstone master plan.
- **Zachary Springer:** Voiced opposition based on the company's history in Oklahoma and argued that the city should not be a "testing ground" for an unproven business.
- **Brian Mann:** Thanked the Council for listening to citizen concerns and fighting for the community.
- **Amy Mitchell:** Reported that a survey of seven local agents suggested property values would decrease if the refinery project moved forward.
- **Jennifer Harden:** Urged the Council to formally oppose the EPD permit application (#29975) before the February 6 deadline.
- **Ben Kirsch (Ogeechee Riverkeeper):** Discussed broader environmental risks, including heavy metal solid waste and trace pollutants in wastewater discharge.
- **Stephen Abney:** Drew parallels to previous community concerns in Waterways and expressed concern over the startup nature of the company.
- **Kerri Cook:** Questioned the job and income promises made by the company, comparing them to unmet promises made to Lawton, Oklahoma.
- **Tom Seaman:** Provided a report regarding his personal research into 2020 and 2026 election system software and data.

- **Debra Power:** Inquired about the responsibility for environmental monitoring of the site and highlighted potential impacts on regional fisheries.
- **Ryan Peters:** Shared internal communications from the City of Lawton regarding building safety and zoning issues at the pilot plant site.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approval to award the purchase of Water System Upgrades Phase 1 (Survey) in the amount of \$118,125. Funds are available in the water and sewer fund and the upgrades are part of the approved capital plan.
- Approval to award the purchase of 2026 Ford F-350 for the stormwater operations in the amount of \$69,517. Funds are available in SPLOST 24-30 and the vehicle is part of the approved capital plan.
- Approval to award the purchase of Caterpillar D3 LGP Dozier in the amount of \$159,870. Funds are available in the SPLOST 24-30 and the equipment is part of the approved capital plan.
- Approval to award the purchase of Mini excavator for the stormwater operations in the amount of \$129,035. Funds are available in the SPLOST 24-30 and the equipment is part of the approved capital plan.
- Approval to award the purchase of Fire Department Vehicles and Equipment in the amount of \$125,193. Funds are available in SPLOST 24-30 and the vehicles are part of the approved capital plan.
- Approval of a resolution to declare certain equipment surplus.
- Approval of City's total project share of \$859,800 for the Brisbon Road (Harris Trail Pedestrian Bridge (per MOU with Bryan County)).
- Acceptance of a Maintenance Bond in the amount of \$1,639,122.64 for Heartwood Ave Extension
- Acceptance of a Performance Bond in the amount of \$583,295.81 for Heartwood POD 4, Phase 1D.
- Acceptance of a Maintenance Bond in the amount of \$1,213,785.08 for River Crossing Townhomes.
- Acceptance of a Performance Bond in the amount of \$2,729,000.00 for Del Webb Phase 3A.
- Second reading/Approval of an ordinance of the Mayor and City Council of the City of Richmond Hill, Georgia amending Chapter 6 – Alcoholic Beverage, Article II – Licenses, Section 6-30. Distance Requirements; and to repeal conflicting ordinances; to provide for an effective date; and for other purposes.

Councilmember Bowes made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Scholar. The motion carried in the affirmative by all.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business was discussed.

COMMUNICATIONS

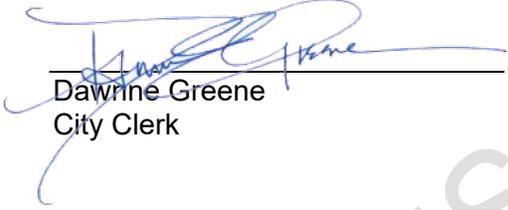
No communications at this time.

There being no further business, the Council adjourned at 6:54 PM in a motion by Councilmember Hatala. The motion was seconded by Councilmember Bowes. Motion

carried in the affirmative by all.

Attest:

Kristi Cox
Mayor



Dawrine Greene
City Clerk

UNOFFICIAL MINUTES