



City of West Orange

City Hall
2700 Western Avenue
West Orange, TX 77630

City Council Budget Workshop

Monday, August 25, 2026	5:00 p.m.	Council Chambers
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COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:		
Randy Branch	Meritta Kennedy	Jay Odom
Michael Shugart, Sr.	Lanie Brown	Gail Langton
APPOINTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:		
Jon Sherwin	Mike Stelly	Theresa Van Meter
David Roberts	Simmie Gibson	
OTHERS PRESENT:		
Jane Branch	Marvin Burke Weems	Richard Bland
Sharon Thomas		

Call to Order

Mayor Branch called the workshop to order at 5:00 p.m. Council Member Shugart gave the invocation followed by the Mayor leading the Pledges of Allegiance to both the United States and Texas flags.

Workshop

Mayor Branch opened the Workshop by reviewing a spreadsheet detailing the deposits and withdrawals from the TexPool Capital Improvement Account. He pointed out that there had been no withdrawals from the account between its opening in July, 2023 and October, 2025. However, during the 2025-2026 fiscal year, \$82,000 was withdrawn to cover the November 28, 2025 payroll and outstanding Accounts Payable; \$82,812.20 was withdrawn to pay for a Ford Super Duty F-450 for the Street Department that had actually been ordered the prior year; and \$150,000 was withdrawn to cover the December 12, 2025 payroll and vacation sales and an employee resignation pay-out. These funds all had to be withdrawn to supplement the General Fund as there were not enough funds in that account to cover these expenses.

The mayor explained that during the October – December time frame each year, available incoming cash decreases drastically.

Mayor Branch then briefly pointed out some things from the year end 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 financial reports. Fiscal year 2024 ended with a net income for the City of \$120,032.65. Fiscal year 2025 ended with a net loss for the City of \$159,039.16. This explains the necessity of using funds from the Capital Improvement Account. He added that so far this year, the City is doing well, with revenue exceeding expenditures by \$174,385.43, however the remainder of August and all of September could affect this.

The mayor then turned the meeting toward his proposed budget. He stated that he had asked all department heads to reduce their budgets as much as possible. Even doing that, however, still resulted in a \$245,162 projected shortfall.

When reviewing the projected revenue, Council Member Brown questioned Chief Stelly on the reason for the decrease in the Municipal Court in regards to the number of tickets written, lower fines, etc. Chief Stelly responded that, by law, he does not “keep track” of the number of tickets written. He added that once a traffic ticket or Class C arrest goes to court, he has no idea what happens to that case. Some tickets may be dismissed and charged administrative fees only, proof of insurance or registration might be provided etc. Council Member (also Alternate Municipal Court Judge) Odom stated that the court does not dismiss any moving violations. Only the officer who wrote the citation or the City Attorney can do that. But many people do request Community Service rather than paying for a fine.

Discussion then turned to the proposed departmental budgets:

General Administration - Mrs. Van Meter stated that Technology & Communications (510-6235) would need to be increased by \$1,200 to cover the costs of the new "forms" update on the City's website.

Building Official – No comments or questions.

Fire Department – Council Member Brown recommended the following changes:

Radio System Fees (512-6224) should remain at the 2025-26 budget of \$6,500 per actual charges from the City of Orange.

Communications Equipment/Supplies (512-6101) should remain at the 2025-26 budget of \$10,000 to cover the cost of eight batteries and one radio. There is only one spare radio at this time and it is an old one. They need one new one on hand in the event that someone new joins the department or if one gets damaged. Mayor Pro-Tem Kennedy questioned if all radios are currently accounted for. She was told that they were.

Fire Prevention handouts (512-6107) - should remain at the 2025-26 budget of \$3,000. These are given out to children during Holiday in the Park and also during the Fire Department's Halloween event. Mayor Branch questioned that there have been no funds spent on these during the current fiscal year. Asst. Chief Gibson replied that he has not yet ordered them this year, but is currently out of supply.

Medical Supplies (512-6113) – should be increased to \$8,000 for cover cost of two AEDs and two first aid kits (per NFPA 1901). Council Member Brown stated that, per NFPA, there is supposed to be an AED and first aid kit on each truck. They will also need to purchase at least one extra set of defibrillator pads. Acadian Ambulance does swap out the fire department's old pads and replaces them with new ones. She added that there are funds available in the current year's budget to purchase one AED and then purchase the second one in the next fiscal year. She stated that the price for two AEDs is approximately \$6,196, while the first aid kits will run about \$250 each.

Uniforms (512-6118) – should be increased from proposed \$2,000 to \$3,000. The firefighters have not had new t-shirts in three years. They wear them under their bunker gear when on calls. This \$3,000 would cover three shirts for each person, and well as the helmet accountability tags on their helmets and their name badges.

Hose (512-6122) – Increase proposed \$2,908 to \$3,000 to cover costs of replacing a few sections of hose.

Software Support (512-6209) – Description line should be changed to "Reporting Software"

Training & Travel (512-6201) - Increase proposed \$4,000 to \$5,000 for EMT training that will no longer be covered by Lamar State College – Orange.

Bunker Gear Annual Cleaning & Inspection (512-6218) - Under NFPA's new code, all bunker gear is required to be inspected and cleaned twice per year (@ \$4,390 each cleaning), and any new sets are to be cleaned before using. This line item should increase from the proposed \$4,700 to \$9,280.

Mayor Branch stated that, as a municipality, West Orange is not required to follow NFPA guidelines, which are not "rules" or "law." He agreed that they are good guidelines, however they are geared toward full-time, paid departments...and the City of West Orange simply cannot afford to follow all of their guidelines. The mayor stated that a washer and dryer for the bunker was purchased for the department and has been being used. He added that he felt they were also capable of inspecting the gear. Asst. Chief Gibson responded to the mayor, saying that if the department does not follow NFPA guidelines, and something happens to a citizen or member of the fire department, that liability would fall back on the mayor and council. The mayor responded that he was not telling them not to protect their people, and the guidelines are good to follow IF you can afford to follow them and he does not think the City can afford to follow every NFPA guideline.

Mayor Branch stated that he feels the NFPA guidelines are something that the Council needs to discuss further with legal counsel.

Asst. Chief Gibson asked Mrs. Van Meter if the firefighters would be covered by insurance if they end up getting cancer from a fire call. She responded that they have coverage through

VFIS and the TML Intergovernmental Risk Pool. She added that she does not know the details of the coverage, but they do have coverage.

Breathing Air Compressor/Cascade Service (512-6219) and System Maintenance & Testing/SCBA (512-6220) should be combined into one line. Council Member Brown increased that from a total of \$3,482 to \$3,500.

Alternate Dispatch Service (512-6223) had been decreased from \$1,700 to \$700. Council Member Brown stated that this invoice was just paid (due in November 2025) and it was \$775. The \$700 should be increased to \$775.

Mayor Branch then reminded everyone present that before any grants are applied for, the grant application must be approved by Council. That would enable the City to be prepared for any grant matches that may be required.

Mayor Branch then explained that Traylor & Associates, Inc. will possibly begin a new program in that, for a monthly fee (\$2,000 he believes), they will search out and procure grants for cities. These are not the same type of grants as the ones they administer for West Orange currently. Council Member Brown asked if the fee for this service could be worked into the grants they obtain. The mayor responded that that was not possible. This would be the first time they have tried a project like this. Mayor Branch felt that the city would know within the first twelve months if the program would be beneficial to the city, and worth the monthly fees paid.

Council Member Brown questioned the possibility of setting a ceiling on a grant match that could be applied for without bringing it to Council first, and if the turn-around time for the application is time-constrictive. Also, there are some grants that only accept a designated number of applications. Those received first would have first consideration. Council Member Brown stated that this was something for Council to think about and discuss further at a later date.

Sanitation Department – The number of employees paid from this department was questioned. Mrs. Van Meter responded that there is one full-time and four others who have a percentage of their pay charged to this department, based on the work they are doing.

Mayor Branch also stated that there are no salary/wage raises in this proposed budget.

The decrease in the health insurance line was then questioned. Mrs. Van Meter explained that there is one less full-time employee's coverage charged to the Sanitation Department, and that employee also had dependent coverage, with 60% of that being paid by the City.

Humane Department – Council Member Brown questioned the increase in the Equipment Repairs/Replacement line (514-6103). Mr. Sherwin explained that these funds will be used to do work at the shelter.

The increase in the Training & Travel (514-6201) expense increasing to \$2,000 was questioned. Mr. Sherwin explained that Animal Control Officers (ACO) must be certified. The increase in the budget will enable Mr. Sherwin and one other employee to be trained in this position in order to cover should the ACO be off or out for any reason.

Police Department – Council Member Brown stated that the proposed budget is almost the same as the current budget. There were no questions posed by Council regarding this department.

Municipal Court – Council Member Odom explained that Training & Travel (516-6201) was increased to cover the costs of annual training requirements for the judges. He did not think the State was paying as much toward this as they had in past years.

Street Department – Council Member Brown questioned the \$25,000 budgeted for Capital Outlay. Mr. Sherwin responded that that expense was "going away." Mayor Branch explained that he has told the department heads that if something comes up that they have to have, he would bring it to Council for a possible budget amendment.

The mayor stated that this is really a "bare-bones" budget. A great deal of work has been done to cut it and still be able to operate the city. Revenue historically decreases in October, November and December. He then said that once the city gets through December, Council will better be able to tell how this budget will work out.

Mr. Sherwin explained the increase in the Equipment Repairs/Replacement line (517-6103). Rather than purchase equipment that is only needed once or twice per year, he plans on renting

it. For example, he will have to rent a "stand-up" skid steer to get into the new concrete ditch to clean it.

Parks & Facilities - Mayor Branch explained that the \$200,000 grant to the city from Golden Triangle Polymers has been put in the TexPool Designated Grants account. His plan is to use these funds to cover the mandatory match should the \$300,000 parks grant be approved. He added that \$350,000 would not complete everything he would like to see done in the parks, but it would go a long way – new playground equipment in both parks and a walking path and exercise stations in Caffey Park.

Maintenance Shop – No comments or questions.

Mr. Marvin Weems spoke from the audience, asking if the city had approved the purchase of another fire truck. Mayor Branch responded that a \$300,000 grant has been received and the city will be adding some to that to cover the entire cost of the truck. He is in hopes that money generated from the sale of the old truck will cover most of the city's portion of the payment. He added that this was too good a deal to pass up.

With there being no further discussion or additional questions pertaining to the proposed budget, the mayor moved on to his announcements.

Announcements

Mayor Branch made note of the following:

1. Public Hearing on Proposed 2026-2027 Budget – Thursday, September 10, 2026; 5:00 p.m. (A vote on the proposed Budget will be taken at conclusion of hearing.)
2. Public Hearing on Proposed 2026 Tax Rate – Thursday, September 10, 2026; 5:15 p.m.
3. Council Meeting – Monday, September 14, 2026; 5:00 p.m.

Adjournment

With there being no further business before Council, Mayor Branch adjourned the workshop at 6:19 p.m.



R R Branch
Randy Branch, Mayor

ATTEST:

Theresa Van Meter
Theresa Van Meter, City Secretary