

CLOSING THE LOOP

Q1 2026 TOWN HALL

How Governments Make Decisions: From Idea to Action

BACKGROUND

In 2025, during the City's Brand Refresh surveys and broader community engagement efforts, residents were invited to share feedback not only about the City's visual identity, but also about how they prefer to receive information and engage with their local government.

While many comments focused on branding, a significant number of residents expressed interest in understanding City operations more deeply, particularly how decisions are made, how projects are funded and how public input influences outcomes.

After carefully reviewing and analyzing that feedback, four key engagement themes emerged. These themes directly shaped the City's 2026 Community Engagement Plan.

One of the clearest requests from residents was for more educational, transparent, and interactive forums where they could ask questions, better understand processes and engage directly with City leadership. As a result, a structured Town Hall series was developed to address those interests.

The 2026 Town Halls are intentionally designed to move beyond one-way presentations. They focus on transparency, clarity and dialogue, breaking down complex topics into understandable information and creating space for meaningful public conversation.

This approach reflects the City's commitment to listening first, analyzing what we hear and building engagement opportunities around the topics residents have told us matter most.



TOWN HALL SUMMARY

On Feb. 23, 2026, The City of North Port hosted a Town Hall titled **"How Governments Make Decisions: From Idea to Action."** This session was designed to demystify the local government decision-making process and provide residents with a clear, step-by-step understanding of how ideas move from community input to formal City action.

The presentation walked through the full lifecycle of a City decision, beginning with how issues are identified through resident feedback, staff research, Commission direction, advisory boards and legal mandates. It then outlined the research and analysis conducted by City staff, the drafting of formal recommendations, public engagement opportunities, Commission workshops and deliberation under Florida's Sunshine Law and ultimately formal action through votes, ordinances and budget alignment.

Following this, the Town Hall explored the City's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and used Boca Chica Park as a real-world example of how a project moves from concept to completion.

The goal was to provide transparency into not only how decisions are made, but why timelines and funding structures sometimes require thoughtful, multi-year planning.



PARTICIPATION

Questions and Answers

The presentation was followed by a live Q&A session, where residents had the opportunity to ask questions directly and engage in open dialogue with City leadership.

To uphold our commitment to transparency and “Closing the Loop,” we are sharing the questions and answers in full below. By documenting and publishing this discussion, we aim to ensure that every resident (whether in attendance or not) has equal access to the information shared.

What are we doing about the ongoing issue of speeding in the city?

Traffic enforcement remains a priority for the North Port Police Department. The City covers approximately 104 square miles, and call volumes continue to increase, which means enforcement efforts must be strategically focused. Officers use data and observed trends to identify high-risk areas and target enforcement where speeding and traffic safety concerns are most prevalent.

Residents may not see enforcement on every street at all times, but traffic stops and citations are issued daily across the City. Officers are actively enforcing traffic laws, and residents will frequently see police vehicles conducting traffic stops throughout North Port.

In addition to enforcement, the City is investing in tools designed to encourage safer driving behavior. Beginning in April–May 2026, speed detection devices will be installed in school zones throughout the City. These devices are intended to reinforce safe speeds and improve compliance in areas where protecting children and pedestrians is especially critical.

While enforcement and technology play an important role, traffic safety is ultimately a shared responsibility. Meaningful change also depends on drivers making safer choices and adjusting their driving habits. The City will continue to enforce traffic laws, deploy resources strategically and implement measures that support safer streets for everyone.

Can you explain the City’s approach to e-moto regulations?

The growing use of e-motos (particularly among youth) has become an emerging safety concern both locally and statewide. The North Port Police Department has observed an increase in incidents involving minors operating e-motos, including cases resulting in injuries.

At this time, enforcement authority is largely governed by state law. The City is closely monitoring current legislation moving through the Florida Legislature that may provide clearer regulatory authority and stronger enforcement tools. Until additional legislation is adopted, local enforcement options are somewhat limited.

Public safety remains the priority. The Police Department continues to monitor e-motos activity, educate riders and families about safe operation and respond to incidents as they occur. Once updated state regulations are enacted, the City will evaluate how best to implement and enforce those requirements locally.

The goal is not simply enforcement, but improved safety, particularly for children and pedestrians. As legislation evolves, the City will continue to communicate updates and work toward practical solutions that reduce injuries and promote responsible use.



Why can't the City take out loans, and what impact does that have on long-term planning?

The City of North Port's Charter includes language regarding debt that has historically been interpreted to require voter approval for borrowing, including general obligation bonds. While parts of the Charter reference the ability to incur debt, the long-standing legal interpretation has been that any borrowing must be approved by residents through a referendum.

Over time, the way past referendums were structured (including combining multiple questions or not clearly separating issues) contributed to confusion and, in some cases, a loss of public trust. It is important to acknowledge that mistakes were made in how those questions were presented. As a result, the City's borrowing authority remains limited unless approved directly by voters.

Because of this restriction, the City must often save in advance for major capital projects, including roads, parks and public safety facilities. This means funding is accumulated over multiple years before construction can begin. While this approach ensures strong voter oversight, it can also slow progress in a rapidly growing community.

This structure creates an additional long-term planning challenge: in many cases, future residents benefit from infrastructure funded by past residents who contributed to those reserves. While this demonstrates fiscal discipline, it can also limit flexibility and responsiveness.

City leadership recognizes that before returning to voters to revisit borrowing authority, we must continue rebuilding trust. That means improving transparency, ensuring future ballot language is clear and straightforward, separating questions appropriately and engaging residents early in the conversation.

We acknowledge where improvements are needed. Moving forward, any discussion about debt or financing options will be approached with a commitment to openness, clarity and community involvement. In the meantime, the City continues to plan responsibly through phased projects, disciplined savings, grant funding where possible, and careful prioritization within the Capital Improvement Plan.

What is happening with the parking at Anna Maria Oyster Bar?

The City Commission funded a linear parking improvement project last year. The project will create paved parking across the street from the affected businesses, helping to formalize parking areas, improve traffic flow, and enhance pedestrian and emergency access.

The project has been fully designed and is currently with Purchasing in preparation to go out for bid. The funding has already been approved by the Commission. The City anticipates moving forward with contractor selection soon, with construction expected to begin once procurement is complete, potentially by early summer.



Can you explain the opioid settlement line listed under Special Revenue Funds?

The "Opioid Settlement" line under Special Revenue Funds in the City's budget reflects dollars the City has received as part of nationwide legal settlements with pharmaceutical manufacturers, distributors, and other entities related to the opioid crisis.

These funds are not general tax revenue and cannot be used for unrelated City operations. They are restricted funds, meaning they must be used specifically for opioid remediation efforts. This can include initiatives such as substance abuse prevention programs, treatment and recovery services, public education, mental health support, first responder training and other strategies designed to address the impacts of opioid misuse in the community.

The funds are placed in a Special Revenue Fund to ensure transparency and proper accounting. This structure allows the City to clearly track how the money is received, allocated and spent in accordance with state and settlement guidelines.

The purpose of the settlement funding is to help local governments respond to the long-term effects of the opioid epidemic, strengthen prevention efforts and support community recovery initiatives, while maintaining full public accountability for how those dollars are used.

With the Florida House advancing HJR 203 to phase out non-school property taxes for homesteaded properties, what is the City of North Port's long-term strategy to maintain current levels of service for public safety and infrastructure if this reduction in revenue is approved by voters?

At this time, there is no detailed implementation plan from the State outlining how local governments would be made whole for the potential loss of non-school property tax revenue. For North Port, this would represent a significant financial impact.

Currently, property taxes generate approximately \$38 million annually for the City's General Fund. Public safety alone (including police and fire services) accounts for roughly \$55 million of that General Fund budget. If the proposed change were to reduce City revenues by an estimated \$18 million, it would create a substantial gap between available funding and the cost of maintaining existing service levels.

While the proposal indicates public safety funding cannot be reduced, public safety operations rely on broader City support functions. A reduction in overall revenue would still require the City to evaluate how services are structured and funded.

If approved by voters, the change would not take immediate effect. Implementation would align with a future fiscal year (anticipated FY2028), which provides some time for financial planning and analysis. However, without replacement revenue identified by the State, the City would need to carefully assess its options.

Those options could include operational efficiencies, reprioritization of services or structural budget adjustments. At this time, the State has not provided guidance regarding alternative revenue sources such as expanded sales tax sharing or other mechanisms. The City's priority would be to maintain essential services while remaining fiscally responsible. Should this proposal advance, the City would communicate transparently with residents about impacts, trade-offs and next steps as part of the public budget process.

In regard to several proposals targeting tax elimination for residents 65 and older, will the City conduct a fiscal impact study especially considering North Port's demographic?

Yes. The City has already conducted preliminary fiscal impact calculations regarding proposals that would eliminate certain property taxes for residents aged 65 and older.

Based on current estimates, the projected annual impact to City revenues would be approximately \$500,000. While that figure is significantly smaller than other proposals currently under consideration at the state level, it is still meaningful and requires careful planning.

As with HJR 203 and other potential changes to revenue structures, the City is actively monitoring legislative developments. Because any approved changes would not take effect until a future fiscal year (currently anticipated around FY2028) the City has time to evaluate mitigation strategies, communicate with the community and incorporate adjustments into long-term financial planning.

What percentage of development plan proposals is the Environmental Advisory Board allowed to review?

Under Chapter 4 of the City Code, the EAB's responsibilities do not include the review of development petitions. Environmental review of development proposals is conducted by the City's Natural Resources Division, whose staff evaluate applications for compliance with environmental regulations, conservation requirements, wetland protections, landscaping and buffer requirements, and other applicable codes. While the Environmental Advisory Board plays an important advisory role on natural and environmental resources, its wildlife habitat, its flora and fauna, and on safeguarding environmental quality for the future, the technical and regulatory review of individual development applications are handled administratively by professional staff in accordance with the City Code.



How long is considered “long term” when submitting ideas for capital development?

For planning purposes within the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP), “long term” generally refers to projects anticipated to occur more than five years into the future.

The CIP is structured to include near-term, mid-term, and long-term planning horizons. Projects identified beyond the five-year window are considered long-term initiatives. Including long-term ideas in the CIP allows the City to forecast future needs, evaluate financial impacts and plan responsibly.

How serious is the City about establishing connectivity between Madagascar and Shipley? Are other avenues being investigated?

Improving roadway connectivity across canals and waterways is an ongoing priority for the City’s Public Works Department. The proposed connection between Madagascar and Shipley is one of several potential bridge connections being evaluated to improve traffic flow and neighborhood access.

The Madagascar connection is currently in the property acquisition phase. The City owns property on both sides of the proposed connection; however, additional parcels are needed to complete the link. The project’s advancement depends on whether property owners are willing to sell. The City actively seeks to acquire strategically located parcels before homes are constructed, as rapid development reduces opportunities for future roadway connections.

In addition to the Madagascar proposal, other connectivity projects are progressing. For example, the Stockton and Caballero connection (located just south of the Madagascar site) is approximately 90% through the design phase. The City owns the necessary properties at that location, and construction is anticipated within the next year.

The City continues to evaluate connectivity opportunities throughout North Port as part of its long-term transportation planning. These efforts aim to reduce congestion, improve emergency access and enhance overall mobility across the community.

Why has the rehabilitation of swales, ditches, and canals decreased so significantly since the second quarter of 2023?

The reduction in swale, ditch, and canal rehabilitation activity since mid-2023 is largely attributable to hurricane recovery operations.

Following Hurricanes Ian, Helene and Milton, Public Works crews were reassigned to support storm response and recovery efforts. These events required significant in-house resources for debris removal, drainage system clearing, roadway repairs and other critical recovery functions. As a result, routine maintenance and rehabilitation programs were temporarily deprioritized to address urgent storm-related needs.

Storm recovery operations are labor-intensive and time-sensitive, particularly in a community with extensive canal and drainage infrastructure like North Port. Reallocating staff to these efforts created a backlog in planned maintenance activities.

As recovery operations stabilize, the City is working to rebalance crew assignments and return to regular maintenance schedules. Rehabilitation of swales, ditches and canals remains essential to stormwater management and flood mitigation, and restoring that work program is a priority moving forward.

Since borrowing requires voter approval, how much debt does the City currently have? And what might the City realistically be able to borrow for if an urgent project arose?

The City currently has approximately \$56–60 million in recently issued debt related to the Price Boulevard project. In addition, there is debt within the Utilities Fund, which is separate from the General Fund and supported by utility revenues rather than property taxes.

It is important to distinguish between General Fund-supported debt and enterprise fund debt (such as utilities). Utility-related borrowing is typically backed by user fees and does not directly impact property tax-supported operations. The City is currently evaluating its overall financial position, including capital projects and budget forecasts, to determine whether there is capacity to support smaller-scale initiatives within existing revenue structures.

However, the ability to take on additional debt (particularly for large-scale projects) is limited. For example, a major project such as a new Police Department headquarters would exceed what could reasonably be supported under current millage and revenue conditions without voter approval or a dedicated funding source.

Borrowing capacity depends on several factors, including revenue stability, debt service ratios and overall financial health. While the City can evaluate options, any significant General Fund borrowing would require voter authorization, and affordability must be carefully assessed to ensure long-term fiscal sustainability.

Why was the decision made to send a memo to county administration that it was the City's intent to annex 3,100 acres (Winchester Ranch) into the City without discussing it as a public meeting with the commission and without citizen input?

[\(Please note, this question was answered at the Town Hall, this more thorough answer was sent in a follow-up email\).](#)

The correspondence referenced was related to a voluntary annexation petition submitted by a private property owner to the City.

Under Florida Statutes 171.044, voluntary annexation is initiated by a property owner in an unincorporated area who petitions a municipality for annexation. The statute requires that the County be notified prior to the required public hearings on an annexation ordinance. The letter in question was not the formal statutory notice. It was an informal communication ("heads up") to Sarasota County staff indicating that an annexation petition had been submitted and would be brought forward for future Commission consideration. Formal notice will still occur prior to any required public hearings.

Because Sarasota County is a Charter County, additional provisions apply under the County Charter regarding future land use designations outside the Urban Service Area. The Charter requires that the County retain authority over future land use designations in those areas, even if annexed into a municipality. As Sarasota County has not adopted a specific ordinance outlining an implementation process, City and County staff coordinated to determine an appropriate procedural path to ensure compliance with the Charter.

Importantly:

- The City did not file any applications on behalf of the property owner.
- The City has not signed and does not intend to sign any development applications, contracts, or agreements related to the request.
- The purpose of the communication was to clarify procedural requirements and ensure the property owner could pursue due process independently.

The annexation itself has not been approved. An ordinance regarding the voluntary annexation will come before the City Commission at a future public meeting, where it will be discussed openly and residents will have the opportunity to provide public comment before any vote is taken. In short, the letter did not constitute approval, endorsement or a decision. It was part of procedural coordination required under state law and the County Charter to ensure that, if the petition moves forward, it does so legally and transparently.

In regards to Winchester Ranch and the possible annexation, what are the benefits to the community?

The Winchester Ranch development has already received approvals at the County level. Whether the project ultimately develops within City limits or remains in the unincorporated County, development of the property is anticipated to occur.

If annexed into the City of North Port, one potential benefit relates to shared infrastructure and service costs. Many municipal services (such as public safety, road maintenance, and administrative operations) involve fixed costs. As the number of households contributing to those costs increases, those expenses are distributed across a broader tax base. In theory, this can reduce the per-household burden compared to serving a smaller base.

Another potential benefit involves economic activity and commercial viability. The broader Wellen Park area already includes more than 2 million square feet of commercial development, including significant medical and hospital-related space. Businesses rely on a sufficient customer base within a reasonable distance to remain sustainable.

Increased residential density can help support existing businesses, attract new amenities, and expand service offerings for both Wellen Park and the greater South County area.

In addition, annexation allows the City to integrate future development into its long-term planning framework (including transportation, utilities and public safety) ensuring coordination with surrounding neighborhoods.

Ultimately, annexation decisions are made through a public process. The City Commission will consider the request in an open meeting, and residents will have the opportunity to provide public comment before any action is taken.

Who pays for and manages the infrastructure for developments like Winchester Ranch?

Under our development model, much of the infrastructure is initially funded by the developer or through an improvement district. Costs are then recovered over time through impact fees and district assessments as homes and businesses are built and occupied.

This arrangement reduces financial burden on the City's General Fund, as the majority of infrastructure investments are developer-funded rather than tax-funded. While the City maintains oversight and approval authority to ensure standards are met, the capital investment itself is borne by the developer and the district structure.



What responsibilities does the City of North Port have in the schools within our city?

The City of North Port does not have responsibility for the operation, administration or management of public schools.

Public schools within North Port are operated by Sarasota County Schools, which is governed by the elected Sarasota County School Board and led by the Superintendent. The School District is responsible for school operations and daily management, hiring teachers and staff, curriculum and academic programming, school funding and budgeting, school construction and facility maintenance, attendance boundaries and student assignment and school transportation (buses).

The City does not oversee school policies, staffing decisions, or internal operations. However, the City does have certain public safety responsibilities related to schools, including providing school crossing guards within City limits, coordinating traffic control and roadway safety near schools, supporting emergency response and public safety services when needed.

School crossing guard services are subcontracted to a specialized vendor that recruits, trains and manages guards in coordination with the City and the School District.

As a licensed roofing and general contractor in the State of Florida, what is the process to participate in bidding on City projects?

The City of North Port does not maintain a preferred vendor list. Instead, all competitive solicitations are publicly advertised to ensure an open, transparent and fair procurement process. Contractors interested in bidding on City projects should register through DemandStar, the City's electronic procurement platform. Registration is free. Vendors can select their business categories and choose to receive notifications for bid opportunities that match their services.

When the City issues a solicitation, such as a Request for Bid (RFB), Request for Proposals (RFP) or Request for Qualifications (RFQ), registered vendors will receive notification if it aligns with their selected categories.

Each solicitation includes detailed submission requirements, timelines, evaluation criteria and licensing or insurance requirements. Contractors must follow the specific instructions outlined in the solicitation to be considered responsive. The City's procurement process is designed to promote competition, transparency and equal opportunity for qualified vendors.

Following last year's referendum, what is the path forward for funding the Solid Waste transfer station and a new Police Headquarters?

During the prior referendum cycle, voters were asked to consider funding for two major capital needs: a transfer waste station and a replacement Police Headquarters.

For the transfer station, the City Commission has approved moving forward with a funding mechanism structured as an assessment. This assessment is designed so that the cost of the facility is supported by those who directly utilize the service. Because it is a revenue-generating utility-type function, the facility is structured to pay for itself over time based on usage.

The Police Headquarters, however, remains an outstanding capital priority. Unlike the transfer station, a Police Headquarters is a General Fund-supported public safety facility and does not generate its own revenue stream. Funding such a facility requires careful long-term financial planning.

City leadership has acknowledged past criticism that, knowing a new facility was needed, more funding could have been set aside incrementally over time to reduce the burden of seeking a large amount in a single referendum. That feedback was heard and taken seriously.

Moving forward, the City is working to build reserves gradually as projected revenues increase in coming years. The goal is to accumulate a significant portion of the funding in advance so that any future request to voters would be smaller, clearer and more manageable; rather than placing the full cost on taxpayers at one time.

Even amid uncertainty surrounding potential changes to property tax structures, the City remains committed to planning for and delivering a new Police Headquarters. The path forward includes disciplined savings, financial forecasting and transparent public discussion about options before any future referendum is considered.





CLOSING THE LOOP

Thank you for engaging with us. Government works best when it operates in the open and when residents feel informed, heard and respected. This “Closing the Loop” report is part of our ongoing effort to ensure transparency; not only in decision-making, but in how we communicate about it.

This report reflects our commitment to transparency. By documenting the questions asked and the answers provided, we aim to ensure that the conversation remains accessible to all residents and not just those who were able to attend.

We recognize that trust is built over time through consistent communication, accountability and follow-through. That is the purpose of our “Closing the Loop” reports: to demonstrate that engagement does not end when the meeting adjourns.

We encourage you to stay involved. Attend future Town Halls, participate in surveys, review public meeting materials and continue sharing your perspectives. Your voice matters, and it plays a meaningful role in shaping North Port’s future.



“As someone who’s attended many Town Halls over the decades. This one was very informative on many levels, professional and answered questions.”

Town Hall Attendee



“I thought the presentation was very informative and thorough. As someone who held countless town halls they did a good job.”

Town Hall Attendee



“I think the information was helpful and I am happy that the officials gave their time to talk and answer questions for all those in attendance.”

Town Hall Attendee



“It’s easy to feel like things just ‘happen’ behind closed doors, but the biggest takeaway for me was how much they actually rely on us to guide the ship. They went over the whole process of how a resident’s idea can actually become a city policy or a new project.”

Town Hall Attendee