

MINUTES
TONKA BAY CITY COUNCIL
SPECIAL WORK SESSION
ZONING ORDINANCE REVIEW
OCTOBER 14, 2025

1. CALL TO ORDER

The work session was called to order at 5:31 p.m.

2. ROLL CALL

Members present: Mayor Jennings and Council Members Broas, Eckland, and Ottum. Also present were City Administrator Holl, City Planner Johnson, and City Engineer Bradford

City Attorney Nason arrived at 5:33 p.m.

3. DISCUSSION TOPICS

Code Revision Impervious Surface Discussion – City Planner Johnson reopened discussion on the impervious surface ordinance as part of the zoning code update. Currently, Tonka Bay’s ordinance limits impervious surface coverage to 25%, reflecting Department of Natural Resources (DNR) standards. However, the City is exploring modifications, as nearby cities have adopted alternative standards and the current requirement has proven restrictive for many properties.

Mayor Jennings provided historical context, noting that prior to 2016, Tonka Bay allowed up to 40% impervious coverage citywide. The City reduced that to 25% to align with state standards, but this change created challenges since roughly two-thirds of lots in Tonka Bay are nonconforming. As a result, many property owners must now seek variances for routine improvements, increasing workload for both residents and staff. A proposed solution is to implement a sliding scale, maintaining 25% for conforming lots and gradually increasing allowable coverage (up to 40%) for smaller, nonconforming lots.

Johnson explained that the draft ordinance includes this sliding scale as an appendix and adds requirements for stormwater treatment plans when coverage exceeds 25%. These plans would be reviewed by the City Engineer, with Council consideration of whether approval should remain at the staff level or come before the Council.

The discussion concluded with Johnson noting that if Council is comfortable, the ordinance language could be revised to allow City Engineer approval of stormwater treatment plans without requiring additional Council review. Council was comfortable with moving forward with the draft.

R-3 Zoning District Discussion -- Johnson explained that the R-3 zoning district presents challenges because its current ordinance language appears inconsistent with both the City's Comprehensive Plan and its practical intent. The R-3 area is small and unique, currently the only R-3 zone in Tonka Bay, and is written to allow densities up to seven dwelling units per acre, with single-family homes permitted and townhomes and quad homes allowed by conditional use permit. However, this density level contradicts the Comprehensive Plan, which designates R-3 areas as single-family residential with a density range of 2.2 to 3 units per acre.

Johnson recommended aligning the zoning ordinance with the Comprehensive Plan to reduce confusion and prevent potential high-density development inconsistent with community character. Increasing density to seven units per acre could attract developers interested in maximizing profits rather than maintaining the area's small-lot, low-density neighborhood feel. Historically, this area once contained a hotel and rental cabins from the early 1900s, many of which became nonconforming residential lots after the hotel burned down.

The discussion raised the question of whether the R-3 district should be reclassified or rezoned to R-1, since both would share the same land use and density standards under the Comprehensive Plan. Doing so could simplify the zoning map and remove redundancy. Johnson noted that additional research and consultation with legal counsel are needed to determine whether a rezoning or comp plan amendment would be required.

Johnson emphasized that the goal is to simplify the zoning code, ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and Metropolitan Council-approved densities, and reflect the community's preference for lower-density, single-family neighborhoods rather than opening the door to higher-density development.

"P" Park District Discussion -- Johnson explained that the existing "P" Park District purpose statement was unclear and outdated. The proposed revision redefines the district as "Public, Institutional, and Park," intended to accommodate government buildings, public facilities, parks, recreation areas, and open space uses that do not fit other zoning categories. Mayor Jennings emphasized the need for stronger enforcement tools to protect public land, citing repeated issues at West Point, where residents have been cutting trees and altering city-owned wetlands. Council discussed the importance of having penalties or cost recovery for damage to city property. The discussion expanded to unauthorized ice rinks being built on city-owned wetlands. City Engineer Bradford and City Attorney Nason confirmed such uses pose liability risks and are generally not permitted in other cities. Council discussed potential educational outreach to inform residents that these areas are not private property and provide Facts and Questions to help inform residents. Staff agreed to research liability, insurance implications, and enforcement options, and to prepare a memo outlining policy choices, possibly allowing temporary recreational use but prohibiting permanent or overnight structures.

Council Member Anderson arrived at 6:35 p.m.

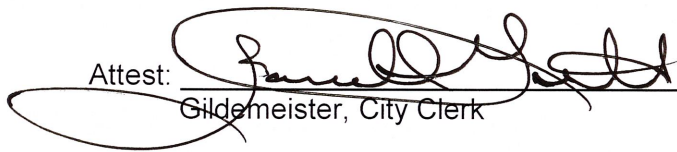
Nason stated she will prepare a draft letter and talking points to address common resident questions about appropriate use of city-owned open spaces, including when to contact police for trespassing or property damage concerns. Johnson clarified that enforcement issues like this fall under trespassing laws, not zoning ordinance language.

Council also discussed removing conditional uses (such as schools or churches) from the newly defined Public, Institutional, and Park District, since those properties are city-owned and unlikely to be sold or repurposed.

Johnson noted upcoming work on the R-3 amendments and upcoming chapters covering performance standards, accessory structures, lighting, solar, ADUs, parking, and landscaping. The zoning ordinance rewrite is about 80% complete, with a goal to finish by year-end. Council briefly touched on allowing chicken and bees and Johnson stated she will also research ordinances on chickens and bees for future discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Attest: 
Gildemeister, City Clerk


Jennings, Mayor