

Ocean Springs Board of Aldermen
Special Call Work Session January 16, 2026 - Minutes

Be it remembered that the Mayor and Board of Aldermen of the City of Ocean Springs met in a Special Work Session in the Boardroom at City Hall at 4:30 p.m. on January 16, 2026. A public notice stating the place, date, time, and subject matter of the work session was posted within one hour of the meeting being called, both on the City's website and at City Hall, where it was available for examination and inspection by the public.

Mayor Cox presided. Aldermen Tillis, Stennis, Wade, Hinton, Pfeiffer, and Messenger were present. Alderman Blackman was absent. City Attorney David Harris, Jr., City Clerk Christine Millard, Deputy City Clerk Vicky Hupe, Building Official Darrell Stringfellow, Public Works Director Allan Ladnier, Planning Director Amanda Crose, and Executive Administrator & Public Affairs Officer Laurri Garcia were also present.

No official action was taken during the work session.

The object of the meeting will be any matters pertaining to:

1. At the January 6, 2026, Regular Meeting of the Board of Aldermen, Alderman Messenger, seconded by Alderman Tillis, made a motion to schedule a work session to discuss a potential amendment to the City's Floodway Ordinance to allow construction within floodways when supported by a FEMA issued certificate.

The Mayor called the meeting to order.

The Building Official explained that the City is currently rated a Class 8 under the Community Rating System (CRS) and receives a 10 percent flood insurance discount, with at least 891 Ocean Springs residents required to carry flood insurance. He stated that the City elected to adopt standards exceeding FEMA minimum requirements to obtain the discount. He noted that in 2019, the City was rated Class 6, receiving a 20 percent discount, and that compliance with FEMA minimum standards alone would result in a Class 10 rating with no discount. He further explained that CRS certification is conducted on a five-year cycle. He stated that the City has two primary options: rescinding the ordinance and reverting to FEMA regulatory standards, or pursuing revisions to the flood maps.

Alderman Messenger stated that residents in recently annexed areas of Ward 6, specifically Trout Street, who were previously permitted to build by Jackson County, were denied permits by the City following annexation. She stated that some properties are entirely within the floodway and are not permitted to build or repair homes if damaged more than 50 percent, affecting approximately 30 to 40 residents. Alderman Messenger stated that she researched potential options to offset any loss of CRS points if the City were to allow construction in the floodway with a FEMA no-rise

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certification. She suggested measures such as increasing freeboard requirements, elevating structures 12 inches above grade, requiring additional foundation certifications, and implementing other standards to offset potential point reductions and maintain the current discount.

The Building Official responded that it required approximately eight months to compile documentation and apply the CRS Manual to adopt standards exceeding FEMA requirements and stated that he believes all applicable higher-than-minimum standards have already been implemented. Alderman Messenger requested a list of all standards currently reported so they could be reviewed to determine whether stricter regulations in certain areas could result in additional CRS points. The Building Official also explained the process for applying for a hardship variance.

The Mayor read two emails received from residents. Karen Chewning requested that the Floodway Ordinance not be changed. Lanis Noble stated that floodway boundary placement is inconsistent and that elevation discrepancies exist. He stated that the Tax Assessor's Office advised that changes could require reassessment of affected properties. Mr. Noble suggested two potential options: revising the annexation boundary description from the centerline of the bayou to the southern boundary of the Fort Bayou Floodway, or requiring The Nature Conservancy to remove trees and undergrowth within the floodway.

During discussion, staff explained that FEMA floodplain and floodway boundaries are based on multiple flood event analyses, including 10-, 50-, 100-, and 500-year flood events, and are intended to prevent construction in areas where floodwaters could create structural hazards, debris blockage, or increased flood impacts to adjacent properties. It was noted that current floodway boundaries were largely established following Hurricane Katrina, which represented a worst-case flood event and resulted in comprehensive remapping.

Discussion followed regarding the City's CRS rating, with acknowledgement that FEMA flood insurance rates are expected to increase over time regardless of local rating and that CRS discounts help mitigate those increases. Staff emphasized the importance of being proactive in identifying opportunities to maintain or improve CRS points, noting that FEMA trends indicate rising costs nationwide, with examples cited from Florida.

It was stated that without changes or remapping, the City's options are limited, and that floodway boundary reassessment would be the most effective method to address concerns. Discussion indicated that remapping requests must be made through the State or Federal level, and it was noted that U.S. Representative Mike Ezell is reportedly pursuing efforts to initiate such a review. Aldermen discussed formally requesting a floodway boundary reassessment and encouraging prioritization of the affected area.

Staff clarified that flood insurance requirements are determined by lenders and insurance providers, not the City; however, the City requires construction to meet

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FEMA and City-adopted flood standards, regardless of insurance status, due to adoption of regulations more stringent than FEMA minimums.

The Planning Director discussed a proposed amendment to Appendix A of the Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance to revise the appeal process, designating the Zoning and Adjustment Board (ZAB) as a recommending body and the Board of Aldermen as the final decision-making authority, consistent with other City appeals. She noted that the current language could allow appeals to bypass the Board and proceed directly to Circuit Court.

Additional discussion addressed property valuation concerns, potential reassessment impacts, and timelines associated with ordinance or mapping changes. Staff noted that any ordinance amendments or CRS-related changes would not have immediate tax or insurance impacts and would likely take effect in a future year.

The discussion concluded with consensus to:

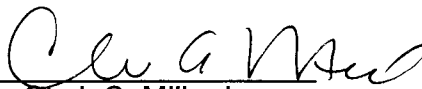
- Further review proposed ordinance amendments related to appeal authority,
- Request a floodway boundary reassessment,
- Continue evaluating CRS point opportunities, and
- Explore additional mitigation strategies, including fortified roof standards, as a potential means to offset homeowner insurance costs.

No formal action was taken.

The meeting ended at 5:27 p.m.



Mayor Cox



City Clerk C. Millard





**Mayor & Board of Aldermen
SPECIAL CALL WORK SESSION MEETING**

Friday, January 16, 2026 @ 4:30 PM

Location: City Hall Boardroom - 1018 Porter Avenue - Ocean Springs, MS 39564

The object of the meeting will be any matters pertaining to:

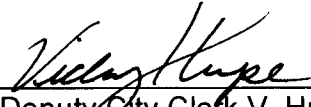
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It was later agreed that the work session will be held on Friday, January 16, 2026, at 4:30 p.m.

This meeting will be a work session only, and no official action will be taken.



Mayor Cox



Deputy City Clerk V. Hupe