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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2026 | NEWSCHIEF.COM

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New \$21.9M contract boosts police drones and AI tools

Sara-Megan Walsh
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Lakeland police are eagerly embracing artificial intelligence and drones despite a hefty price tag that comes with having the latest technology. City commissioners voted unanimously to approve a \$21.9 million contract with Axon Enterprises Inc. on Oct. 5 that replaces and upgrades the

police departments body-worn cameras, in-car video system and Tasers while adding drones and artificial intelligent software. The new technology is a “game changer for productivity, efficiency, safety and community trust,” Assistant Chief Hans Lehman previously said. It’s also nearly double the cost of the city’s first contract with Axon. The price will be offset with several grants obtained by the police department.

LPD gains remotely piloted drones
The new 10-year contract will provide Lakeland Police Department access to the Axon Air, also called a drone first-responder. Currently, the police department utilizes patrol-led drones, Lehman said, where two officers per squad check out two drones each at the start of their shift
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Under the \$21M contract, the Lakeland Police Department would get two drones that could be stationed around the city to get eyes on the scene before officers and first responders arrive.
DAMON HIGGINS/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS



The independent Royalty Gas & Smoke Shop station on Taylor Road, just west of Interstate 95 in Port Orange, advertises regular gasoline for \$3.95 per gallon midday on Oct. 5, despite several nearby stations having raised prices to \$4.19.
CLAYTON PARK/USA TODAY NETWORK

FL gas prices have fallen, but will trend continue?

Clayton Park
USA TODAY NETWORK

After Florida gas prices climbed to \$4.42 per gallon on Sept. 25, the statewide average price for regular in the Sunshine State has steadily fallen over the past 10 days to \$4.06 on Oct. 5. Is it a temporary reprieve for motorists or a sign of even lower prices at the pump to come? “If you’re in Florida, I hope you filled up last night or first this morning,” wrote Patrick DeHaan, the Chicago-based head of petroleum analysis for GasBud-

dy.com, in a pair of posts on the social media platform X shortly before noon on Oct. 5. “Florida gas prices appear to be rising to \$4.19.” **Some Florida stations hiked gas prices nearly 25 cents**
In the city of Port Orange, just south of Daytona Beach, several stations that had been selling regular gasoline for less than \$4 over the weekend had raised their price to \$4.19 as of midday Oct. 5, including the 7-Eleven off Interstate 95. On Oct. 4 and even early Oct. 5, the

price at that 7-Eleven was just \$3.95. The average price for regular gas in the Daytona Beach metro area which includes Port Orange and all of Volusia and Flagler counties was \$4.08 per gallon on Monday morning. **Where is gas the cheapest in Florida?**
AAA Auto Club on Oct. 5 reported the statewide average price of regular gas had fallen to \$4.06 per gallon, **See GAS PRICES, Page 2A**

Polk picks Taylor as new county manager

Paul Nutcher
Lakeland Ledger
USA TODAY NETWORK

Ryan Taylor was selected Oct. 6 by Polk County commissioners to replace County Manager Bill Beasley, who has announced he will retire in January. Taylor, 52, of Auburndale, who is the current Polk County deputy manager for support and human services, will take over Jan. 16. The vote for him at the regularly scheduled board meeting was unanimous. “I truly appreciate the opportunity and the confidence the board has placed in me,” Taylor said. “I’m grateful for the strong working relationship I’ve developed with each of the commissioners, and I look forward to continuing to work together in the years ahead,” Taylor said from the podium. “I’m equally grateful for the opportunity to continue supporting Mr. Beasley, learning from him, and leaning further into this role as I prepare for what comes next. When the time comes, it will be an honor and a privilege to serve the residents of Polk County in this new role,” he added.

Three decades working in government positions
Taylor has more than 30 years of government experience, according to his LinkedIn page. He started working for the government in recreation in a temporary, part-time role and served as a city manager before he started with Polk County. **See TAYLOR, Page 2A**



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Volume 116 | No. 24
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