

Proceedings of a special meeting of the City Commission of the City of Palatka held on the 5th day of February, 1999.

PRESENT: Mayor Tim Smith  
Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown  
Commissioner George Sanders  
Commissioner Hernan Azula  
Commissioner Ish Edwards

Also present: City Manager Allen R. Bush, City Attorney Edward E. Hedstrom, City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers, City Finance Director Ruby Williams, Police Chief Bill Dolinski, Fire Chief Rudy Howard, Main Street Manager Debbie Banks, and Water, Sewer & Streets Supervisor Sam Willis.

Mayor Smith opened the meeting and read the following call:

TO MESSRS.: MARY LAWSON BROWN, GEORGE E. SANDERS, HERNAN AZULA AND ISH EDWARDS

You are hereby notified that a special meeting of the City Commission is called to be held at the regular meeting place of the City Commission at City Hall, 201 N. 2nd Street in the City of Palatka at 4:30 p.m. Friday, February 5, 1999.

The purpose of the meeting is to consider allowing the Azalea Festival organizers to erect a fence encompassing the riverfront park, going west to 2nd Street, north to Reid Street and south to Laurel Street in the City of Palatka, for the purpose of charging admission to the Festival and for security reasons.

/s/Tim Smith  
MAYOR

We acknowledge receipt of a copy of the foregoing notice of a special meeting this the 3rd day of February, 1998.

/s/Mary Lawson Brown  
COMMISSIONER  
/s/George Sanders  
COMMISSIONER  
/s/Hernan Azula  
COMMISSIONER  
/s/Ish Edwards  
COMMISSIONER

Mr. Bush said this meeting is in response to a request made at the 1/28/99 commission meeting by Wayne Troiano of the Azalea Festival Committee for proposed fencing of the riverfront. A copy of that diagram is attached to and made a part of these minutes. The Commission asked them to check with the Downtown Merchants, Presbyterian Church and the Housing Authority to get their reactions. The Downtown Merchants have sent a

letter stating their objection to the fencing proposal but passed a motion in favor of a revised proposal which essentially leaves the streets west of Memorial Drive out of the fencing. A copy of their letter and diagram is attached to and made a part of these minutes. Fire Chief Rudy Howard voiced his objections to the fencing as proposed for safety reasons. The Presbyterian Church and Dallas are opposed to the fencing as proposed. The number of days the fence would be in place was not given.

Wayne Troiano, Azalea Festival Chairman, said the Festival made some changes to the price structure, which is tied into the fence issue. Admission fees have been dropped to \$2.00, and children 12 and under are still free. They have an extensive list of expenses, which he provided to the commission. They see no other way of getting enough revenue to meet expenses. Mayor Smith asked how much they anticipate in gate receipts. Mr. Troiano said last year the Fla. Times Union and Channel 4 estimated they had between 80,000 and 100,000 in attendance; he thinks that is high and more like 50,000 to 60,000 over four days. If the fencing and admission turns people off, that drops it down to half or less. That's a difficult number to pin down. Mr. Bush asked if they have a budget associated with the project; the list shows contract expenses for entertainment and operations; Mr. Troiano said around \$70,000. The Little River Band costs \$11,500, which is Saturday's main act. This year it is free; in the past they have charged admission. Mr. Bush asked if they tried to itemize where their revenues will come from; Mr. Troiano said the entertainment tent admission usually paid for the concert. T-shirt sales, beer sales, pre-sales of shirts, ride commissions, etc. are all budgeted. Mr. Bush asked if they had an alternative plan other than the fencing. Mr. Troiano said they did. Commissioner Azula asked what those other plans are. Mr. Troiano said that has nothing to do with the fence at this point.

Mayor Smith said this issue has generated great public concern and he has had many calls and face-to-face requests to deny the fence, for several different reasons; mostly because of the costs of admissions, community accessibility and community ownership. The City does not run these events and tries not to tell the events how to operate; however, in this instance the Festival is asking for restricted access to public property and this is where the public's arguments begin. He didn't have one person call to say this was a good idea. A two dollar charge is more reasonable, but some people are just opposed to paying any price. Speaking as an ex-Jaycee, they had around 25 people to help organize, and it was a struggle then. He recognizes the Festival Committee's time and work they have invested in this and he understands they are trying to find a way to make this work, but he has to listen to the public. Commissioner Sanders said he has also received numerous calls against this. He knows the Festival Committee has worked very hard on this, but there has been a lot of negativity surrounding this issue. He hopes they can come to some conclusion that promotes a successful event. Commissioner Azula said he has had 28 calls since last night against the fencing. There have been 54 festivals without fencing or admission charges. The main purpose of the Festival is the pageant, so that Palatka can send a representative to the Miss Florida Pageant. Fencing public property and poking holes in the road does not go with the idea of the Festival; the idea of the Festival is so everyone can participate and take advantage of the riverfront. The people of Palatka should not have to pay to go to the riverfront.

Mr. Troiano said he agrees with these things, but there was a past event held at the riverfront which was fenced in; there was no hoopla, no one was against it, nothing happened; there should be minutes of the meeting wherein that was approved. Times change and the Festival needs to change with the times. You have to pay to use Price-Martin and that belongs to the City; you also have to pay to play golf and to see a football game; the golf course and stadium also belongs to the taxpayers. He could go on and on. He realizes this is controversial, but something has got to give somewhere. If they had sufficient support from their sponsors and the community, they wouldn't have to ask for this. There is an important Festival Committee meeting tonight at 6:00 p.m. at the old Teen Town building; he urges the commissioners to attend. Commissioner Edwards said he also has received many calls, all against the fencing. Commissioner Brown said she, too, has had a lot of negative reactions. A question of legality was also brought up. The City wants to have an Azalea Queen to send to Miss Florida, and she knows the Committee has put a lot of effort into this. She had heard the Fall Festival that was fenced went under because of lack of participation. Many people said they could not afford to pay to get in and also pay for their kids to ride rides. She also was concerned about the high-rise tenants. Commissioner Sanders said the Strawberry Festival charges quite a bit for admission; they also have many country music stars. He thinks this merits more consideration. The decision they make tonight will affect future festivals as well as citizens. He wants to come to some medium ground that will be acceptable to all concerned.

Susan Troiano, Azalea Festival Committee member, said the Crawfish Festival in Miami charged \$10.00/day admission and they had minimal entertainment and events. They need more support, or the Azalea Festival may not happen. Mayor Smith said no one wants to see that. Mrs. Troiano said they provide a lot of scholarship money for the contestants, who go on to become doctors, lawyers and other professionals. They put their time and money into this; people don't appreciate what the Festival is doing, but they also don't offer to help out.

Bud Surratt, A.F. Committee member, said he has been involved with this for a long time primarily with clogging, and has been attending the Festival since coming to Putnam County. They have been asked to have their clogging event sanctioned for competition through the National Clogging & Hoe Down Association. It will become a permanent event and will attract teams from all over the Southeastern United States. It is difficult to organize, but will bring a lot of money into the area. The boat races, for example, cost around \$10,000 to put on. It is hard to finance these things without some sort of income control. The Festival tries to provide quality entertainment. They have also started a new 'debit card' system for vendors, and this is where the fence comes in. The fence was a scary issue for the committee, but is something they feel like they have to have for control. Once you get in, everything except rides are free. The \$5.00 charge scared a lot of people, but now that's been reduced to \$2.00. He doesn't believe the citizens of Putnam County fully understand all this. They could try it for one year to see how it works. This is the wave of the future.

Susan Rowe, Executive Director of Palatka Housing Authority, said Mr. Troiano came and addressed their Board in October. At that time the Board had serious concerns about the Highrise being fenced in 24 hrs/day. They had no opinions on the admissions, but only wanted to make sure residents and rescue personnel had access in and out of the Highrise.

Robert Bronkema, Pastor; First Presbyterian Church, said based on the latest information they had on the proposed fencing, their Board passed a motion to oppose the fence, as a matter of principal, whether on or off their property. As proposed, it was exclusionary and prejudicial against the poor. In light of this new information, the Board would need to meet again to reconsider the issue, since the admission price has been dropped to \$2.00 and there is no charge for rides. Mr. Troiano said the rides are contracted and there will be a charge.

Cheryl Mack, A. F. Co-Chairman, said if the community feels a sense of ownership in the Festival, then they should help take care of and maintain the Festival. They need help. She invites all the commissioners and concerned citizens to help out by volunteering to work with them on the Festival. This discussion comes down to phone calls the commissioners have received, and that is what they will base their decision on; not on what they feel to be right and good for the Festival, but what is good for their political careers. Commissioner Brown said she thought this was a Jaycees affair until recently. They are here to take care of the needs of the City and they volunteer for many things when called upon. Politically, they all have to run for office. They were put there by the people, and she is concerned about what is good for the majority of citizens. She not only receives calls, but also gets out and polls people as to their concerns. People who might come in and spend money on rides won't have that money if they pay it in admissions. Ms. Mack said last year the concert alone cost \$16.00 per person, but this year it will be free, allowing more people to enjoy it for a \$2.00 admission. More people will be able to attend more functions. People can either sit on their back porches and complain, or get off their porches and help out. Commissioner Brown said most organizing usually boils down to just a few people doing all the work, no matter how many people you have to help. Ms. Mack said this Festival brings a lot of revenue in and is good for the City. Unfortunately, many of the businesses that reap big benefits from this Festival are cutting back on their sponsorships. This fencing is their only option, short of abandoning the Festival and handing it over to anyone who wants to do it.

Barry Cantrell, 142 Underwood, said everyone has had good points. The profits from this Festival should go into local charities located in Putnam County, like the Boys' Ranch. He has been an organizer in the past. He is opposed to the fencing because this is a privately run organization sponsoring a public event with the blessings of the City of Palatka; this is not the Jaycees or a not-for-profit organization. The organizers work hard, but there is no accounting provided on where the funds go. They have offered a budget of around \$50,000. There are many sources already in place that generate profits. A festival means something open to the public. The volunteers should come from Palatka and not Jacksonville.

Betsy Driggers, 102 Canal Drive, East Palatka, said she will volunteer herself, her husband and 17-yr old son to work the Festival. She would support any workable method for raising money, and appreciates what they have done with the Festival. She wouldn't have a problem paying the admission fee, but some families would.

Allegra Kitchens, 1027 S. 17th Street, said the Commission is the guardian of public property. She has a problem with charging admission to public property. Price-Martin and the Golf Course were not set up for free admission. She hopes the Festival will continue. The pageant will be at the Ravines this year and she hopes it will continue. The Commission should not allow a private organization to charge a fee for access to public property.

Susan Troiano said the Azalea Festival Scholarship Pageant is part of the Azalea Festival; if the Festival does not happen, the Pageant will not happen. Several years ago, they came to her husband for help with a 'dying' festival; they have brought it back to life, and they need help to continue it. This is not the type of 'thanks' they thought they would get. Mayor Smith said they are not questioning the Committee's hard work and dedication; they are speaking only to the fencing issue.

Cheryl Mack said she would like to speak to the admission issue. No one has a problem paying to get into the Putnam County Fair. No one questions it. They are only asking for \$2.00. The people voicing complaints probably pay to get into the Fair, or Dallas (a local club), or wherever they have always had to pay an admission charge. This is not economically impossible. There is no difference between the Festival and the Fair.

Wayne Troiano said they took over this Festival, which had just about died. The community wanted boat races, so they brought back the boat races. He hears opposition to the fencing everywhere he goes, but once he explains it to people, they understand. To address the accountability issue, as with any business, their books are not open to the public. The Jaycees' charter was dissolved three years ago. Putnam County Scholarship Foundation, a non-profit organization, was formed for no other reason than to help girls with scholarships through pageants. When the Jaycees lost their charter, they started from scratch on this. If you join the Committee, you can look at the books. The Festival has made money only one year, which they used to pay off past debts. He appreciates any comments he receives, negative or positive. Commissioner Brown said she would like to know if anyone in the room has changed their opinions since they have been here.

Bob Rundle, Manager, Ravine State Gardens, said people used to not have to pay to get into the Gardens, but now they do, and folks still don't like it. The State sets the fees, and their entrance fees do not cover their expenses; at best they only cover 40% of their operating expenses. Even though the fencing is different, he would support it. If the fairgrounds were in Palatka and not East Palatka, the whole conversation would probably never have come up. If the community had a few days to digest the \$2.00 fee, they may feel differently.

Robert Bronkema, Pastor; First Presbyterian Church, said his Board may consider changing their motion to oppose the fence in light of this new information. Mayor Smith asked him to clarify that one of their reasons for opposing the fence was exclusion due to economic factors. Rev. Bronkema said yes, but that now changes with the \$2.00 fee.

Brenda Bridges, 131 S. Ocean Avenue, San Mateo, said she is a festival committee member, attends First Presbyterian Church, and owns a business in the community. She gets two calls a day from different organizations wanting support; they try to support as many as they can. They are trying to keep this Festival for its historical value. They realize this town does not accept change eagerly, and in fact fights it everyday. They work long hours with no pay, not to put money in their pockets, but to continue the Festival. They don't like the admission fee issue, but it will enable them to pay the bills. The Children's Miracle Network has offered to help for a portion of the gate. It will make the Festival self-supporting.

Mayor Smith asked for a motion. Commissioner Azula made a motion to deny the request to fence the waterfront. Commissioner Edwards seconded the motion. Mayor Smith said he has changed his mind about his opposition to the fencing, and he appreciates that they have reduced their fee to \$2.00. If this is a hindrance, he suggests they 'donate' 100 tickets to the Christian Service Center to distribute to needy families. Most of the Churches in the community support this organization. \$2.00 in this day and time is not a hardship for most people in this community. When he talked about community ownership, he spoke about those who have also worked on and chaired those committees. He does not want to minimize anyone's contribution to the event. He will vote in opposition to the motion, as he feels \$2.00 is a reasonable fee. He has a problem with folks in the community who want to criticize, but who don't want to serve, not just with this Festival, but any community-driven organizations. If you're not willing to get involved, soften your criticisms. Commissioner Brown asked what they need volunteers for, and for how long. Ms. Mack said they could volunteer for 2 hours selling soft drinks, if they desire. Commissioner Brown said people don't realize how much volunteer time they donate to the community. She doesn't mind volunteering, and spends much of her time doing so. She appreciates all the work they have done and realizes their task is not easy. She hears input from citizens all hours of the day and night, and gives them as much time as they need. Commissioner Sanders said he has also changed his position inasmuch as they have reduced their admission fee. Many other events charge more than \$2.00; this is not unreasonable. Commissioner Azula said he feels the issue is fencing the people's property, not admission charges. This is a City park and belongs to the people. If they want to pay to get into the entertainment tent or go on a ride, that is their decision.

Otha Powell, 2508 Moseley Ave., asked if the motion is on the originally planned fencing or the fencing proposed by the Merchant's association. Mr. Bush said if the motions fails and someone makes a motion to approve a fence, they would specify what they would approve, along with other issues. (There was discussion on the proposed fencing submitted by the Azalea Festival and the revised proposal submitted by Chief Howard and the Downtown Merchants.) Commissioner Brown said they can't just fence people in or out of the Highrise. Mrs. Troiano said Blue Crab barricades off that street and no

one is allowed in due to the congestion. They are being penalized for doing what other festivals do without question. Mr. Bush said they only have barricades there for vehicular traffic.

Pam Parrish said many people have children who may not want to hang around with their parents, and the fence would serve to provide safety and reassurance for parents.

There being no further discussion, the motion passed 3 to 2; opposed by Mayor Smith and Commissioner Sanders

There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned.

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR