

**Proceedings of a regular quarterly the Putnam County/Municipal “Local Government In Cooperation” (LOGIC) Meeting held at the Palatka Municipal Golf Course, 1715 Moseley Avenue, Palatka, on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2002.**

**PRESENT:**

For the City of Palatka: Mayor Karl N. Flagg, Vice Mayor Mary Lawson Brown, Commissioner Hernan Azula, Commissioner George E. Sanders, City Manager Allen R. Bush, City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers, Finance Director Ruby Williams, Police Chief Gary Getchell, Fire Chief Kenneth Venables, Planning Director Adam Mengel

For Putnam County BOCC: Chairman Brad Purcell, Administrator Rick Leary, Public Works Director Bob Merton

For the City of Crescent City: Mayor Frank M. Covington, City Manager Carl Tankersley

For the Town of Interlachen: Mayor Ralph E. Godwin, City Clerk Pam Wilburn

For the Town of Welaka: Mayor Gordon Sands, Police Chief Charlie Piowoworski

The Town of Pomona Park was not represented.

Palatka Mayor Karl N. Flagg called the meeting to order at 11:05 a.m.; Mayor Frank Covington gave the invocation, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Each attendee stood and introduced themselves.

**CITY OF PALATKA**

Vice Mayor Mary Lawson Brown updated the committee on Palatka Riverboat's progress towards obtaining a non-profit riverboat. She said the City of Palatka has been awarded \$600,000 in grants for a ferry-boat operation. As soon as work on the Better Place Plan is behind them, she would like everyone to get involved in coordinating a large fund-raiser for this cause, so that a bigger boat can be purchased. She reported the City has also been granted funds to build a pump-out station for the City Dock. The Putnam County Schools and SJRCC are devising curriculums to teach classes on the boat. They plan on leasing it out for weddings, receptions, parties, etc. as well. They can book events up to five years in advance. Mr. Bush said this is a good tool for nature-based tourism, and everyone should be able to use this as part of a county-wide tourism plan to pull tourists off of the interstates and into Putnam County. Each municipality, including Interlachen (even though they are not on the river) as well as Putnam County, should put together their individual package to add to the total tourism package. Vice-Mayor Brown urged everyone to be creative with their ideas on getting people here and keeping people here to spend their tourism dollars.

Fire Chief Ken Venables spoke about devising new ways to fund fire services, saying he would like to have added some \$400,000 to his budget this year, but realistically cannot do that on ad valorem tax increases. Many property owners in Palatka and in Putnam County pay no property taxes at all, yet they are receiving the same level of service as

the minority of residents that do pay ad valorem taxes. In 1994 Palatka passed an ordinance enabling the City to collect fire and police service fees; similar ordinances were successfully challenged in court, so no fee was ever put in place. A similar tax proposed by the City of Daytona Beach was defeated just last week, due primarily to the excessive amount of the fees, and the fact that there were no exemptions allowed. Their consultant had warned them that non-profits and government entities should be exempted, but they did not heed those warnings. Those entities organized an opposition so effective that instead of passing on a 4 - 3 margin, as expected, it failed with all 7 commissioners voting in opposition. He said that Tallahassee has been charging a fire services user fee on its monthly utility bills for some time. The yearly charge for an average apartment is around \$75.00, with the cost spread out over 12 months' time. This program has proved immensely successful. The City of Tallahassee also provides fire services to Leon County through interlocal agreements. Palatka needs to look at a fee to fund fire services; if they do their homework and present it correctly, it can be done successfully. Per the question, Chief Venables said he has discussed this with the Putnam County Fire Task Force. He hopes to get a consensus on a program that he can present to the City Commission in order to make fire services more cohesive for all of Putnam County.

#### **PUTNAM COUNTY**

BOCC Chairman Brad Purcell updated the Committee on the progress of the Putnam County Better Place Plan. He said citizens rightfully expect their elected officials to work with each other to bring about cooperation between government entities. Twelve hundred people participated in putting together a collective vision during the Putnam County Better Place visioning process. In May, the BOCC put together a 15-year strategic plan based on the results of that process, called the Better Place Plan. This plan includes transportation and tourism, and calls for a transportation hub in Palatka and improved fire services. They hope this will provide an economic engine for developing service areas, while preserving the rural atmosphere of non-service areas. They plan to present their plan to the Palatka City Commission on August 22 in order to get their input on prioritizing the components and their support. At their last meeting the BOCC passed an ordinance placing the Plan on the ballot in the upcoming election. They plan to put together an oversight committee to determine how and where the money will be spent, made up of 15 non-elected representatives from each municipality as well as Putnam County at large. Each municipality will be able to appoint one person to the Committee. The Chairman of the BOCC will be responsible for providing a quarterly progress report to the Oversight Committee. The money this Plan will provide can only be used for capital items, and cannot be used for personnel.

Commissioner Azula said there is no Plan in place, no priorities in place, and there have been no good faith negotiations with the City of Palatka. Putnam County has not negotiated in good faith in the past. He cited the Golf Course, Recreation, and Ambulance Services, to name a few. He has received many calls from his constituents on this saying they will not support it unless they see something concrete. He is unable to support it himself unless he sees a clear plan, citing Jacksonville's ½ cent sales tax plan initiative. Chairman Purcell pointed out the differences between the Putnam Better

Place Plan and Jacksonville's plan, saying the funds generated by Putnam's plan will only generate 1/6 of what is needed to fund the entire plan. Any commitment of funds to a certain project will limit them as to what they could do. Citizens want to utilize the money collected for seed and local match money for grants. This plan does not have the same type of flexibility as the Jacksonville plan. The rescue response times in Palatka are still consistently good; their interest is in providing consistently good response time throughout Putnam County. When the response times are no longer good, they will investigate it further. The plan does provide for recreation. The Palatka City Commission can make recommendations as to what improvements they would like to see, and he is looking to them to prioritize projects to allocate funds to. Fire services can also be addressed. They believe this Plan will move Palatka and Putnam County forward, and is the best method for funding improvements. The Statute states that the funds are to be divided by population percentages. He cannot speak for past Putnam County commissions, but they have a whole new management team and they are looking for ways to move forward. The BOCC and the five municipalities will all be expected to make decisions as to how the funds will be allocated. A committee called the Citizens for a Better Place has been formed, whose function is to educate citizens on the components of the Better Place Plan. The Chairperson is Joyce Miller, and they meet once a week.

#### **CITY OF CRESCENT CITY**

Mayor Frank Covington said they are currently upgrading their telecommunications services franchise agreements, and are unable to negotiate for upgrades such as high-speed Internet connection, etc. for inclusion in their service packages. The local provider has informed them that they will not be upgrading their equipment any time soon, saying they cannot afford it. They claim it will not be profitable because the area is so rural. He understands the Chamber of Commerce is looking at a way to get upgraded services to all the municipalities, but they have an immediate need. Right now they are looking at losing at least 3 businesses to areas like Palatka that can provide those services. He would like to find a way for smaller entities to band together and create pressure on telecommunications service providers, or possibly create a "Putnam County Franchise" for these services. There is strength in numbers.

Palatka Mayor Karl Flagg said they should all have their respective attorneys take a look at their existing agreements to determine expiration dates, etc. They could put something together to take to the providers. Palatka Vice Mayor Brown said they should ask their congressional leaders to send representation from Washington to speak to the respective cities about their options. That will get the providers' attention. Putnam BOCC Chairman Purcell agreed to contact local congressional representatives about speaking to the group. Mayor Sands went on to say the cell phone reception in his area, as with most outlying areas, is nearly non-existent. Chairman Purcell said in many cases the providers do not get enough business to warrant upgrades. They are working on ways to provide consistent coverage throughout the County.

## **INTERLACHEN**

Mayor Ralph Godwin said he is thankful for these meetings; he believes they have been very productive, citing the widening of Hwy 315. He and his Council support the Better Place Plan, and he believes everyone else should, also. Co. Admin. Rick Leary helped them to secure a grant to build an amphitheater. They are already booking events for it, even though it has yet to be constructed. He would like to obtain a grant to build a 'magnet building'. They were able to secure a grant to refurbish the Town Hall, which has provided them with a sound community center. Their elementary and high schools continue to receive national and international awards.

## **WELAKA**

Mayor Gordon Sands said when he was first approached about having these meetings, he was pessimistic, but is pleased that they have turned out to be so productive for this area. He cited the cleaning and widening of the roadways in his area. His Council is happy to support the Better Place Plan.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

Palatka Vice Mayor Brown said other elected officials besides the mayors should be included in these meetings. They each have different areas of interest and expertise that can be shared.

Putnam BOCC Chairman Brad Purcell said they need to develop a network of communication between governments, and need more than one avenue of communication. They should utilize whatever media they have at their disposal. They should also work on developing an outreach program designed to reach everyone in Putnam County.

Palatka Mayor Karl Flagg said growth is coming and they all need to be prepared to receive it. They are not proud of their collective crime and health statistics. It will take all of them working together to improve Putnam County. He would like to see an annual Putnam County elected officials' meeting which the public is invited to attend. The school board should also be included. They should not wait until the next quarterly meeting to bring their issues forward. They need to re-gain trust in each other.

**NEXT QUARTERLY MEETING** – Set for October 31, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m., hosted by Putnam County at the Putnam County Board Meeting Room.

There being no further items for discussion, the meeting was adjourned by Palatka Mayor Karl Flagg at 1:15 p.m.

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Betsy Driggers, City Clerk  
City of Palatka

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Karl N. Flagg, Mayor  
City of Palatka