

Proceedings of a regular meeting of the City Commission of the City of Palatka, Florida, held on the 24th day of April , 2003.

PRESENT:	Mayor	Karl N. Flagg
	Commissioner	Mary Lawson Brown
	Commissioner	Hernan Azula
	Commissioner	James Norwood, Jr.
	Commissioner	George E. Sanders

Also Present: City Manager Allen R. Bush, City Attorney Donald E. Holmes, City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers, Finance Director Ruby Williams, Police Chief Gary Getchell, Fire Chief Kenneth Venables, Planning Director Adam Mengel, WTP Asst. Mike Bailey, WWTP Supt. Platt Drew, San. & Str. Foreman Ed Chandler, Asst. Golf Pro Claude Connor, Main Street Manager Cathy Nagengast; Code Enf. Officer Debbie Banks.

INVOCATION – The Reverend Bill Wing, Pastor, Dunns Creek Baptist Church

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Commissioner Hernan Azula

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 4/10/03 – Commissioner Norwood moved to adopt the minutes as presented. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion, which passed unopposed.

RESOLUTION – the Clerk read an ordinance entitled AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF PALATKA, FLORIDA, DESIGNATING MAY, 2003 AS FLORIDA STATE PARKS MONTH IN THE CITY OF PALATKA, FLORIDA. Commissioner Brown moved to adopt the resolution as read. Commissioner Azula seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was taken, with the following results: Commissioners Azula, Brown, Norwood, Sanders and Mayor Flagg, yes; Nays, none. Resolution No. 7-104 was declared adopted and presented to (park ranger), Ravine State Gardens.

INTRODUCTION – Major Dean Kelly, newly appointed Undersheriff for the Putnam County Sheriff's Department, introduced himself to the Commission, and offered to work with the City of Palatka in the spirit of cooperation between their respective public safety agencies, saying if there is anything he can help with, please let him know. They take pride in the fact that they work well with all public safety agencies in Putnam County, as evinced by the level of cooperation between departments during last year's Amtrak train derailment. That event is being used as a model for incident command for cooperative emergency response all around the State.

STUDENT OF THE MONTH – April, 2003 – Vice Mayor Brown joined Mayor Flagg in recognizing the following students for academic excellence, leadership, citizenship and attendance at their respective schools:

Jarvis Wright	Beasley Middle School
Lonnesha Kelley	Browning Pearce Elementary School
D. J. Rigdon	E. H. Miller School

- e. Appoint William E. “Chip” Dew as 5th Member of Firefighters’ Pension Board per recommendation from remaining four members of Firefighters’ Pension Board, per ordinance, term to expire January, 2004

Commissioner Azula moved to pass the Consent Agenda as presented. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion, which passed unopposed.

CEMETERY RULES – Melissa Messom, 2400 Crill Avenue; Lillian Messom, 2825 Lundy Road and granddaughter Elizabeth spoke on behalf of the Messom Family. Melissa Messom said they are requesting an amendment to the policy set in October 2002 prohibiting the hanging of ornaments in trees at Oak Hill West Cemetery. They have 151 signatures on a petition asking this change be made (filed). This is hurtful to them, because this is how they express their feelings for the death of their loved one. They aren’t harming anyone. She passed out photos of the tree decorated. They do something different every holiday. She would like to know why this rule was passed. Lillian Messom showed a photo of her daughter, Debbie Brooker, who is buried there, saying this is their way of saying they love her. They never got a chance to see her before she died, as she was life-flighted to the hospital. This helps her and her daughter’s sthree children cope with her daughter’s death. Someone tends this gravesite every day. This is all they can do. It is extremely important to them. What if something else changes? First there was no benches allowed; then they had to lower the slab below ground level, and no one will listen to them. Mr. Hartman told her he did not make this change. They have always had problems with Mr. Hartman. Elizabeth Messom said she wants to know why everyone with a loved one buried at that cemetery didn’t get a chance to vote on this change in the rules. It is not fair that someone has a right to tell a family how to grieve. If a family wants to decorate their family’s resting place, they should be able to.

Mrs. Gaultney 614 Fern Street, said she has known the Messom family for 13 years. She read the minutes from the last meeting where someone said the tree decorations gave the cemetery a Carnival atmosphere. That was the wrong comment to make and unfair. They take care of the gravesite.

Cassandra Borney, 145 E. Grandview, E. Palatka, said her husband has been dead for five months, and said she has never seen anything at that cemetery that doesn’t look nice there. All she was told is they had to put things up by the headboard. They put flowers at the foot of the grave and were told they couldn’t. Her daughters put them there, and that is wrong. That is how they grieve. They should be allowed to do whatever they want; they paid for the gravesite. The City has no right to tell them what they can and can’t do. Everything they do shows their loved one’s personality and way of living. If it is disgraceful, tell them, but if not, leave them be.

Mayor Flagg said the for the record, the City of Palatka is the steward of Oak Hill and Oak Hill West Cemeteries, and the entire commission and staff are very sensitive to the grieving process. If there were any actions that constituted anything that seemed insensitive to any family, they regret that, but they cannot roll back time. Last Thursday he, Mr. Bush and Mr. Hartman met with the Messom family at Oak Hill West Cemetery, at their request. They authorized the resolution of some of those things, such as raising

the monument slab up so that water won't pool on top of it. Benches were banned by the cemetery committee before that cemetery opened because they interfere with maintenance; later, that policy was changed to allow the purchase of a second plot for a bench placed near the head of the grave. He commends this family for taking care of their gravesite, but the City has a commitment to take care of every gravesite. They graciously and compassionately asked the family to remove the items from the tree; they did not show any disrespect. The City owns the trees and has to maintain the trees. At no time will the City delegate that responsibility to any family. It is important that everyone recognize that when a family is grieving, that is a difficult time for them. Commissioner Sanders said he certainly meant no disrespect by his prior comments, but when this was pointed out, the decorations weren't only on one tree, they were on numerous trees. How this practice started, he does not know, but it was not a comment about any particular family. He has a wife of 61 years buried there, too, and he grieves for her. He visits her grave 3 – 4 times a week. It hurts them all to lose loved ones. Complaints about all the ornaments hanging in the trees was the reason this was brought to the Commission's attention. Mayor Flagg said the family has made a specific reference to Commissioner Sanders' specific use of the term 'carnival' in the 10-26-02 minutes, and asked him to address it. Commissioner Sanders said this was the terminology that was given to him by other people who complained to him about the ornaments hanging in the trees. He did not mean any disrespect to any family. It was descriptive of the twirly birds and the like hanging on several different trees. It was getting out of hand, and moving all around the cemetery. If he offended them, he is very sorry, but he has a loved one buried there, too. The catalyst for this discussion was the expansion of the decorated trees.

Terry Gwaltney, 614 Fern Street, said that comment was very hurtful to everyone involved. He is a public figure and should choose his words wisely. She has more than one family member in that cemetery, and they decorated a tree by his grave, also. Mrs. Lillian Messon asked what happens when other policies are changed or made up. How do they know when something has changed? Mayor Flagg said if they consider making changes in any City cemetery hereinafter, they will have a public hearing. There is no problem with that. It is the City Manager's responsibility to issue any interim directive. Allowing the benches was an enhancement of an existing policy. The tree issue had not come up before, as this cemetery has newer trees that are lower to the ground, and the limbs are accessible to the public. Mr. Bush said they have tried to be liberal with burials in city cemeteries. They do not have as many restrictions as private cemeteries. They have to maintain their cemeteries, and if everything is in line with the headstone, it is much easier to do. They relented on the benches, which were not originally allowed, as long as they are in line with the headstones. The same is true with windchimes and other decorations; as long as they are attached to the gravesite and in line with the headstone, they can be put out. Per the question, Oak Hill Cemetery across the street is much older, and there were no rules there until the City took over the management. All the new gravesites adhere to the city's rules. Every individual who purchases a lot there is given a set of rules. The City reserves the right to make those rules. You learn from your history, and these rules were set for everyone's best interest. No one wants to damage what is placed on a grave, and this minimizes the risk of damage during maintenance.

Mayor Flagg said they need across the board rules, and not just rules for a specific family. He would like to talk about cemetery rules in a future meeting, and revisit those rules. He believes cemetery rules should be posted on a large sign under plexiglass in each cemetery, so everyone will know the rules. Every family should be represented, and not just the Messom family. They will advertise a meeting to look at those rules. Mrs. Messom said if she had known they couldn't have an above ground slab, they would have buried her across the street. She did not receive the rules until after the slab was poured.

Reid Brooker, 117 Seminole Way, said he lost his mom when he was 11. Her dying wish was to be buried by a little tree so they could hang things in it. Stripping that from them would be like stripping the title of Mayor from Mayor Flagg. It is important to them. He has been grieving for her for three years. Mayor Flagg said he empathizes, but he does not believe the parallel he draws between his title and the tree is appropriate; the tree does not belong to the Messom family. It is not on the plot the family owns. They gave his family some options and opportunities so that they can achieve the same effect. The tree will continue to grow and become a full sized tree soon, so the family can sit under the tree and visit those graves in the shade. Mr. Bush will get with them so they can discuss rules for the entire cemetery and not just for the Messom Family, as they represent many families. He asked them to look for press releases letting the public know when this will be agenda for a future meeting. They will get a list of the rules and practices in each cemetery to see what can be done in each, and if rules differ from one to the next.