

Minutes of the proceedings of a called workshop meeting of the Palatka City Commission held on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of December, 2007.

Present: Mayor Karl N. Flagg  
 Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown  
 Commissioner Allegra Kitchens  
 Commissioner James Norwood, Jr.

Also Present; City Manager Allen R. Bush; City Manager Select Elwin C. Boynton, Jr.; City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers; Fire Chief Mike Lambert; Planning Director Jim Lee; Police Commander Reno Fells; Planning Assistant Debbie Banks, and Guy Parola, NEFRC

Mayor Flagg called the meeting to order at 5:45 p.m. and read the following call, dated November 29, 2006:

TO MESSRS: MARY LAWSON BROWN, JAMES NORWOOD, GEORGE SANDERS AND ALLEGRA KITCHENS:

You are hereby notified that a workshop meeting is called to be held on Tuesday, December 18, 2007 at the alternate meeting place of the Palatka City Commission, the Price Martin Center, located at 220 N. 11<sup>th</sup> Street in the City of Palatka, to commence at 5:30 p.m.

The purpose of the workshop is to hold Workshop #3 regarding updates and amendments to the City of Palatka Comprehensive Plan.

/s/ Karl N. Flagg, MAYOR

The following Commissioners acknowledged receipt of a copy of the foregoing notice of a special meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of November, 2007:

/s/ Mary Lawson Brown      /s/ James Norwood, Jr.      /s/ Allegra Kitchens

INVOCATION: The Reverend Zion Djatar, Pastor; Emmanuel United AME Church

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE: As a group

Mayor Flagg asked the members of the Commission, City Manager Bush and City Manager Designee to disburse into to the audience and split up among the tables.

Jim Lee, Planning Director, welcomed commissioners, participants and staff. He noted this is the 3<sup>rd</sup> workshop in the process of updating the Comp Plan, and said the NEFRC is gathering the information garnered from study and these workshops, and with their wealth of experience in these matters, will bring an updated comprehensive plan to the City Commission and stakeholders. This is the beginning of the process. Guy Parola

from the Northeast Florida Regional Council will facilitate this workshop. He will make a presentation, followed by individual group discussion and presentation.

Guy Parola, NEFRC, outlined the following components of the workshop via PowerPoint presentation (filed):

- I. **ASSETS** – Mr. Parola said infrastructure, i.e. sidewalks and sanitary sewer, are a tremendous advantage for any area. There are very walkable sidewalks in the community and mostly exist on both sides of the street. This is a tremendous asset. The St. Johns River and linear parks systems are amazing. The City of Jacksonville spent a lot of money putting these types of parks in place. There are two historic residential districts connected to the commercial district through sidewalks. Also, there is a wonderful tree canopy in downtown and the historic districts. There are many active stakeholders in the community. As to financing and design, the government agency essentially has total control over design components.
- II. **HISTORIC PRESERVATION** – Mr. Parola said regulations are already codified in Chapter 54; this is important. They may or may not be sufficient, but they are there. The downtown and business areas already exist as overlays, which provides some entitlement. Both sides of the streets have sidewalks, and the brick roadways are fantastic. The downtown is very pedestrian oriented. The tree canopy provides a great backdrop to a sunny day. It takes decades to get a similar tree canopy.

The map shown on the PowerPoint (filed), which needs to be updated, is the 2<sup>nd</sup> map shown in the land use plan, and it contains the historic districts. The Historic Districts have great street signs and homes. Retrofitting modern conveniences into older homes is somewhat expensive and problematic. The homes in the current historic districts are there through legislation and included in the current Comp Plan. Protection and enhancement of the Historic Properties is found in Chpt. 54 of the Municipal Code, which creates the Historic Preservation Board and Districts. Historic preservation laws are still in effect as written, and there is no inherent disconnect with the Comp Plan. They are readily available. Tonight they need to determine what is missing.

- III. **ST. JOHNS RIVER** – Mr. Parola said, referring to River Street and the Riverfront Park, that the public can have the same view as the homeowners on River Street is wonderful. The City actually has road right-of-ways that flow into the river. There is a linear riverfront park system and an amphitheater. The view is very marketable and there aren't many communities that have one. Fred Green Park is very accessible from all parts of the North Historic District. There are many vacant and underutilized properties along River and in the adjoining districts.
- IV. **CHALLENGES FOR DOWNTOWN** - As far as downtown redevelopment is concerned, there is a disconnect between stakeholders. Almost all downtowns have a master plan, but there is a lack of one here. The comp plan does not make it clear what the downtown design system is. There is no concise identity. There are many stakeholders in place, and although they have a similar goal in place, they operate independently.

You don't build a comp plan around code enforcement or zoning regulations. They are enabled by the comp plan. They want to link the comp plan, land development regulations, and downtown master plan so people can go in and know what they can or need to do. They need to decide on how to keep the historic buildings from becoming vacant lots. They have suburban design in urbanized areas. There is nothing fundamental in the comp plan to prohibit or discourage these things (i.e. chain link fence, metal buildings, et.) They want to design the comp plan around existing facades. They don't want suburban development next to nicely renovated facades.

Mr. Parola noted that in the middle of the day there is no foot traffic downtown. There is nothing in the present comp plan that encourages this. The two existing zoning overlays are the downtown and historic districts. If they want a 24-hour downtown, they need a mixture of uses and foot traffic. If he wants to put housing over his retail business, he has to get a special permit. Offices are permitted, but most of the storefronts are retail. They need to encourage mixed use, but this is not encouraged in the present comp plan, which takes precedent if no other plan exists.

**GROUP SESSIONS:** Mr. Parola announced they would be breaking out into small groups. There should be three groups, as there are three maps. Each group should choose a scribe and a spokesperson.

Christy Sanford, 212 Dodge Street, said most of the tree canopy on Hotel Street has disappeared due to storm clearance and old trees that have been taken out, as they are no longer viable. The canopy on the side streets has disappeared. The City has done a great job with trees on main streets, but not on side streets. Mr. Boynton really responded to the Historic Districts in replacing derelict sidewalks. She hopes they can address buffer zones. The areas outside the historic districts don't have good sidewalk systems. The chain link fence at Fred Green Park is a mess and is going to be addressed, but they should put a rule in place to disallow chain link. Busy eateries in downtown attract foot traffic.

Mr. Parola said they will utilize the "stop-start-continue" workshop method. He called for a short break before beginning the breakout groups. Mr. Parola and Mr. Lee then gave directions to the groups for procedure. Mr. Lee said Chapter 54 of the Code outlines rules for the historic districts. They can expand or add to those rules. They need to decide what is working and what is not. Group discussion began at 6:30.

Sessions scheduled:

1. 6:30 p.m.: Are the current historic preservation regulations working? (20 minutes)
2. 7:00 p.m.: What would make downtown Palatka viable? What are the opportunities and challenge to Downtown Redevelopment? (45 minutes)
  - a. Prioritization of opportunities and challenges (three of each)

At 7:40 p.m. Mr. Parola instructed each group to chose a spokesperson and begin their presentations.

GROUP #1 – Guy Van Dorn, Spokesperson, said regarding historic preservation, they need to clarify regulations and architectural standards, appeals of historic board decisions, and review of acceptable building materials that are less expensive and burdensome, but still historically accepted. Also, there needs to be better information regarding restrictions provided to those buying a home in a historic district. If a home is an apartment house, it should be kept as an apartment house. The historic district should be expanded to include downtown. Infill should be encouraged through lesser impact fees and tax abatements.

Things to continue are renovation, brick streets & walkways, landscaping, and registering historic homes on the National Registry.

As to Downtown, they feel it has greatly improved. They need to encourage mixed use, keeping employers downtown, and tie the river to the City i.e. bringing the organic growth of the downtown along St. Johns Avenue towards the River. Murals should be encouraged, as well as creative use of existing buildings. They should devise tax abatement strategies and continue façade renovations. If there was an ‘ombudsman’ helping newcomers assimilate into the City, that would be very helpful in attracting new people to Palatka.

GROUP #2 – Christy Sanford, Spokesperson, said regarding what to cease in the historic districts, they need to strengthen guidelines, demand timely completion of projects, and violations of minimum historic maintenance codes should be enforced. Stop chain link fencing on public and private property. Bring the ‘green book’ (historic guidelines) up to date. Extend the boundary of the historic district to appropriate areas, i.e. Mulholland Park. They need beautification in place of decay. Improve the Riverfront Park and add a magnificent fountain.

As to what to start/continue, Ms. Sanford said the City should plan restoration or renovation of historic buildings. They should begin this process with a needs assessment and determine how much the renovations will cost. They need a feasibility study for a children’s museum or tourism. They need better access to public records, i.e. rules and guidelines that govern the City. They should encourage something other than condos and marinas on the river. For too long the responsibility of taking part in these processes has been solely the responsibility of city administration. Park improvements should continue. Downtown restaurants should have outdoor eating areas. There should be joint public/private partnerships, advertising, low interest loans, continued pursuit of the riverboat, and dissemination of information regarding the enterprise zone. They need to welcome newcomers and facilitate innovative ideas, cooperatives, walking tours, historic signs, art in public places, sculpture, fountains, the use of old buildings for an artists’ mall, educational outreach/satellite programs, court a bookstore, and extend the central business district north to Main Street.

Challenges: Taxes on improved properties are punitive. They need multi-level parking, clean up and façade grants on Reid Street. Like Gainesville, the utility wires should be run underground. They need for code enforcement to work with people that own older buildings. Owner should take more responsibility for their buildings. People need to volunteer more, become more project oriented, and share more.

GROUP #3 - Len Freeman, Spokesperson, said they need to cease peace-mealing infrastructure and develop a plan to update the aged infrastructure. Bring reuse water to the South Historic District. Stop straight pipes running into the river; there is only one baffle system going into the river now. Stop excluding historic properties outside the historic districts. There are numerous historic-type businesses and homes outside the historic districts. Expedite historic board cases through timing of applications and decisions. They need to continue to work towards consistency and determinations by the historic preservation board to get them more in line with historic guidelines.

As to starts, Mr. Freeman said they need more consistency in building architectural décor. They need a theme that also relates to the differences in architectural styles and ages of the buildings. They need consistency of enforcement, or “teeth” in the decisions of the Historic Preservation Board. There are homes that have had ongoing exterior projects spanning many years. In the South Historic District they can use TIF funds to expedite renewal of problem areas by purchasing problem properties, then eliminating the problem and putting them back on the tax roll. This was done with the old Kirby Street Laundry, which was purchased and renovated with TIF funds and now serves as a South Historic District community center. They need to establish goals to identify where the problems are in the districts. Encourage infill wherever economically feasible.

They should continue with sidewalk rehabilitation programs, brick street pavement rehabilitation, maintenance of the tree canopy through a deliberate plan, which will require funding, and better coordination of street sweeping with residents.

As to Downtown, Mr. Freeman said there is underutilized commercial development of the downtown blocks nearest the river. Downtown viability will result from improving the aesthetics/streetscape. They should include mixed-use residential to encourage walking traffic, and there is a need for parking. They don't run out of parking for festivals, as people don't mind walking to festivals, but people don't want to walk very far when shopping. They need some type of transportation between parking and downtown stores.

Challenges are to modify City codes to encourage mixed use residential. They need to look at fire codes, handicapped accessibility, etc. They need a grocery store downtown. They need a rebalancing of office space. They need to get people more condensed into the downtown area, and things like grocery stores will follow. They don't have a problem attracting people to the riverfront; there are 40 – 50 events each year, which is key to developing downtown. They need to find a thematic influence downtown, i.e. niche-type businesses, and get people away from the big-box stores. They also touched

on the Ombudsman idea; they need a central place for people, especially newcomers, to go to get information.

**CLOSING REMARKS:** Jim Lee thanked everyone for their great input. They will be able to bring perspective to the information and begin updating the comprehensive plan. The theme seems to be historic preservation, design, and preserving architectural style to old and new buildings.

Lynda Crabill thanked Jeff Norton for the Price Martin building improvements.

Mayor Flagg thanked Jim Lee and Guy Parola for facilitating this workshop, and thanked all those who came out to participate in the workshop.

**ADJOURN:** at 8:15 p.m. upon a motion by Commissioner Kitchens, seconded by Commissioner Brown

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR