

TERRILL L. HILL
MAYOR - COMMISSIONER

MARY LAWSON BROWN
VICE MAYOR - COMMISSIONER

RUFUS J. BOROM
COMMISSIONER

JUSTIN R. CAMPBELL
COMMISSIONER

JAMES NORWOOD, JR.
COMMISSIONER



CITY of *Palatka* FLORIDA

Regular meeting 2nd and 4th Thursdays each month at 6:00 p.m.

TERRY K. SUGGS
CITY MANAGER

BETSY JORDAN DRIGGERS
CITY CLERK

MATTHEW D. REYNOLDS
FINANCE DIRECTOR

JAMES A. GRIFFITH
INTERIM CHIEF OF POLICE

MICHAEL LAMBERT
CHIEF FIRE DEPT.

DONALD E. HOLMES
CITY ATTORNEY

MINUTES CITY OF PALATKA July 9, 2015

Proceedings of a regular meeting of the City Commission of the City of Palatka, Florida, held on the 9th day of July, 2015.

PRESENT:	Mayor	Terrill L. Hill
	Commissioner	Mary Lawson Brown
	Commissioner	Rufus Borom
	Commissioner	Justin Campbell
Absent	Commissioner	James Norwood, Jr. (GP Business)

Also Present: City Attorney Donald E. Holmes; City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers; Finance Director Matt Reynolds; Interim Police Chief James Griffith; Fire Chief Mike Lambert, Airport Manager John Youell; Projects Manager Jonathan Griffith

CALL TO ORDER ALL TO ORDER: Mayor Hill called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

INVOCATION & PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE – Father John Jacobs, Vicar; St. Peter's Anglican Church

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 6/11/15 – Commissioner Brown moved to adopt the minutes as read. Commissioner Campbell seconded the motion, which passed unopposed.

1. PUBLIC RECOGNITION/PRESENTATIONS

2015 4TH OF JULY FIREWORKS CONTRIBUTORS – Mayor Hill recognized all those who contributed towards the Independence Day/4th of July Fireworks Display. Plaques were awarded to those contributing \$500 or more; Representatives from FP&L, Human Resources Development Services, Bingo Palace, and Palatka Gas Authority were present to accept those plaques. Certificates of recognition were presented to other contributors present.

Public Official Recognition – FLC “Home Rule HERO” Award – Vice Mayor Mary Lawson Brown was joined by her family for recognition. Mayor Hill said Vice Mayor Brown is recognized all over the State of Florida for her contributions to home rule on behalf of municipalities. She was recently recognized as a Florida League of Cities Home Rule HERO at a NE Florida League of Cities Award. Mayor Hill read the award aloud and thanked her for her service. Vice Mayor Brown thanked her family and staff for allowing her to travel and for all they do.

Public Official Recognition – 2015 Institute of Elected Municipal Officials Certification – Vice Mayor Brown said new younger commissioners were elected and took office in January, in order to provide their vision and love for Palatka. Mayor Hill and Commissioners Borom and Campbell took time away from their jobs and families to attend the Florida League of Cities’ Institute for

Elected Municipal Officials for new officials this past January and completed this training. On behalf of the Florida League of Cities, she presented their certificates of completion to them.

2. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jerry Hafner, 122 Hilty Lane, East Palatka, President, Palatka Main Street, said they would like to have an opportunity for their Executive Board to meet with each member of the commission individually so they can provide them with knowledge of how their organization works and what they do for Palatka. He'd like 20 – 30 minutes with each of them. He'd also like to meet with Mr. Suggs. After discussion there was consensus to hold a workshop at 5:00 p.m. on July 23rd in order to meet with all members of the Commission at once.

3. CONSENT AGENDA

- a. **Adopt Resolution No. 2015-11-46** authorizing the Mayor and City Clerk to execute and attest Scherer Construction of N. Fla., LLC's Change Order No. 5 in the amount of \$11,902.78 to extend 3-phase electrical service for Hangar Improvements Project at Palatka Municipal Airport (100% grant funded)
- b. **Reappoint Larry Beaton and Meri A. Rees to the Palatka Historic Preservation Board** as Member Representing the Putnam County Historical Society and Member with Contractor Experience, respectively, for three-year terms to expire June 30, 2018 (incumbents).

Commissioner Campbell moved to approve all items on the Consent Agenda as recommended. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion, which passed unopposed.

- ## 4. FIRE ASSESSEMENT FEE – Executive Summary Report, Draft Directory Resolution and Critical Events Schedule – Matt Reynolds, Finance Direction, provided a short presentation on the history of the events leading to this presentation. The executive summary in the agenda package describes the "Simplified Fire" method of apportionment and includes several funding examples. Included is a draft "directory resolution." An updated "critical events schedule" was distributed just prior to the meeting (filed).

Mr. Reynolds said the Commission should determine the amount to be levied for both tiers; a per-parcel amount and amount for each \$1,000 of improvement value. The Commission should then pass the Directory Resolution, which includes the amounts determined in Step 1. They should take all actions necessary to hold a public hearing on the matter. The proposed funding level presented for the first year is \$125 per parcel and \$2.46 per \$1,000 of relative improvement value. This would fund a gross amount of approximately 78% of the Fire Department's budget. They must exempt governmental properties. They can also exempt institutional properties such as churches and non-profits. They will need to bill the first year of assessment fees-in house. A 60% collection rate would be a safe number to use, so they could expect to actually receive around \$750,000. If this is adopted, the millage rate may decrease to just below 7 mills in the first year, which would be revenue-neutral. Those amounts are subject to verification and final budget decisions made by the Commission in September. If they place fire assessment fees onto the annual tax bills in the 2nd and successive years, they can expect a 95% collection rate, which will further reduce the millage rate.

A slide was shown depicting the current city ad valorem tax revenues versus what would be paid for the 1st and 2nd year of combined fire assessment fee plus ad valorem taxes for residential and commercial properties. Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of implementing a fire assessment fee, per the slide shown.

Commissioner Brown asked if they can talk with churches and governmental entities to determine if they will voluntarily pay into this fund in order to make it fair for all. They provide services to all of these entities. Mayor Hill said they can begin a dialogue with statutorily exempt entities as well as churches and non-profits to determine if they will help the City move forward

with this. Tonight the question for the Commission is whether they desire to move forward with Attorney Lawson towards the adoption of an ordinance putting this fee in place. They need to be sure they are going to move forward. There isn't a question as to whether the City needs these funds; their millage rate is almost maxed out and the City has incurred significant debt. They need to be proactive in how they deal with revenues. This allows all to equitably share in the funding of these services. They can hold individual conversations with these entities. Discussion ensued regarding calling the exempt entities together and speaking with them as a group versus visiting individual congregations and groups. Vice Mayor Brown said they also need to look at annexing enclaves.

Mark Lawson, PA, Consultant, Tallahassee, Florida, said this is a win-win situation. This is a decision to make a direction to move forward. If they want to move forward they need to notice all scenarios, including institutional properties. Governments aren't susceptible to assessments, but they can enter into Interlocal Agreements. They should do out-reach as it creates buy-in. This can all be done concurrently. They can move forward with the directory resolution and out-reach simultaneously. Per discussion, Mayor Hill said this will apply to all properties, whether vacant or improved. As to the cost to move forward, Mr. Reynolds said Mr. Lawson has provided an estimate of \$65,000 minus the \$10,000 they've already paid for the first portion, which was the "retainer." Commissioner Brown said there is concern over putting this fee on the tax bill. Mayor Hill said they can put together programs for those with true hardships. The overall implementation of the program can be developed going forward. Tonight they need to decide whether or not to move forward. He doesn't want to see any citizen lose their property as a result of the assessment of this fee; they are doing this to create fairness and equity, and put the community on a financially sounder footing.

Allegra Kitchens 1023 S. 13th Street, spoke in opposition of the Fire Assessment Fee. She said she worked for the property appraiser's office for 36 years; she provided examples of millage rates and fees on a \$25,000 parcel, saying this will make tax bills go up. This is a tax and a large number of people don't pay their taxes. Millage has a cap; fees have no cap.

Commission discussion ensued regarding alternative collection methods. Mr. Larson said they can bill property owners during the first year by direct-mail. Tax bill methods can be used in subsequent years. Tax bills are the most efficient and fair way to do this. He knows of no one who has lost a property due to fire assessment fees. The tax bill collection method was designed to be more equitable for property owners. It is the best method. Commissioner Borom spoke in favor of adopting a fire assessment fee as it is a way of distributing the cost of fire services fairly and equitably. Commissioner Campbell said they need to educate citizens in a way that it is understandable. They have made some very tough decisions, and they are citizens as well. They are taking everything into consideration.

The Clerk read a resolution entitled A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF PALATKA, FLORIDA, ACCEPTING THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PERTAINING TO THE APPORTIONMENT OF SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS TO FUND FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES AND FACILITIES; AUTHORIZING INITIATION OF THE PROCESS NECESSARY FOR CITY COMMISSION CONSIDERATION OF THE IMPOSITION AND COLLECTION OF SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS TO FUND FIRE PROTECTION SERVICES AND FACILITIES; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE. Commissioner Campbell moved to adopt the Resolution as read based upon "a net amount of approximately \$1,376,370.00, through the imposition of such assessments generally apportioned in the manner set forth in the Executive Summary and any addendum at a rate of \$125.00 per tax parcel (Tier 2) with the remaining additional amount funded by a rate of \$2.46 per \$1,000 of relative improvement value (Tier 1)." Commissioner Borom seconded the motion. There being no further discussion or public comment, a roll-call vote was taken, which yielded the following results: Commissioners Borom, Brown, Campbell and Mayor Flagg, yes; Nays, none. The Resolution was declared adopted.

5. **BAOSHAN, CHINA DELEGATION & Proposed Official Visit** - Sharon Buck, 610 S. 14th Street, said in March the City was approached by the City of Baoshan, China to establish a cultural relationship with Palatka through an "official visit." They have been working to obtain visas for entrance into the US. They should be here next week. As of last week they changed their position and now want a 3-year "letter of commitment" from the City of Palatka to engage in a working relationship with them. She and Vice Mayor Brown contacted the League of Cities, who expressed concern over the procedure used. Sister Cities in Washington, DC also confirmed this is not the normal method of establishing sister city relations. Baoshan now wants to go back to the "cultural and friendship" relationship. It is not normal to push this hard this fast. Their itinerary has changed dramatically. They will be flying into Orlando, driving to Palatka to attend a banquet and photo session, will be driving back to Orlando the same day, and then flying to Washington DC to meet the Chinese Ambassador. They plan to leave DC and fly into Canada, who has not yet issued visas. She has done due diligence and it is her opinion that the City of Palatka should not enter into any sort of obligatory agreement at this time. She is requesting they write a polite letter breaking off relations. Commissioner Campbell moved to rescind the sister city designation and invitation. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion.

Mayor Hill said he's discussed this with Ms. Buck as well as the City Manager; there are many "red flags" going up on this. Commissioner Brown suggested they invite Enterprise Florida to advise them on how to handle this type of invitation. They can contact the national sister cities' organization to determine how best to move forward in such matters. Discussion ensued on reaching back out to Palatka's sister city in Palatka Russia. Ms. Buck said there have been delegations visiting Palatka Russia, and Ken Mahaffey has been extensively involved with those visits. There being no further discussion or comment, the question was called and the motion passed unopposed.

Discussion ensued regarding reciprocal visits between Palatka's former Mayor Tim Smith and Palatka, Russia's Mayor's visit to Palatka. Commissioner Brown said Palatka Russia is in Siberia and they have nothing Palatka, Florida can market, so their exchange is mostly friendship. She reiterated her suggestion to contact Enterprise Florida and the national sister cities organization. There was consensus to send a letter breaking off discussions immediately. Mayor Hill thanked Ms. Buck for the hours and zeal she put into negotiating this matter.

6. **POLICE CHIEF SEARCH** – City Manager Terry Suggs said he'd like to move forward with advertising the position of Palatka Police Chief. He is seeking advisement on the time frame and method of search. Mayor Hill said by Charter the Police Chief comes under the supervision of the City Manager and ultimately it is his decision. The Commission doesn't have the authority to usurp the Charter. If he wants assistance in dealing with this, and wants to put a committee together, he can make that recommendation. Mr. Holmes confirmed that the Charter states the Police Chief is appointed by the City Manager with concurrence of the Commission. Discussion ensued on the merits of appointing a search committee versus handling interviews in-house.

Kenny Downs, 2020 Ashebrooke Lane, Palatka, said as the new commission took office, the former police chief resigned. James Griffith was appointed Interim Police Chief. He's had a 7-month Probationary Period. The Staff is much more pleased now and they have better working relationships with other law enforcement agencies. Interim Chief Griffith has proved himself and it would be an insult to go out and look to hire someone that is an unknown factor. Interim Chief Griffith has been here for many years and has been training for that spot, which includes FBI Academy. The community is pleased with the job he's done and doing. It would build unity in the community. He is the man for the job. He is currently doing the job.

Allegra Kitchens, 1027 S. 12th Street, concurred with Mr. Downs. She said every police chief was appointed by the Commission until the appointment of Chief Getchell. James Griffith has

made a good Police Chief; he is well respected, liked and supported by the Community. He should be appointed Chief of Police. Consensus to meet with the City Manager before a decision is made.

7. CITY MANAGER & ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Mayor Hill welcomed Mr. Suggs to the City Commission, noting he has just completed his first week with the City.

Mr. Suggs said he has spent considerable time meeting with Mr. Reynolds and going over the budget and Fire Assessment Fee. He looks forward to getting to know the Staff, commission and members of the community. He urged all not to hesitate contacting him by email, phone or personal visit.

Mayor Hill congratulated Mr. Reynolds on the nice front-page article highlighting his service as Finance Director.

Mayor Hill said City Attorney Don Holmes has done a great job during the interim period between City Managers. He has put out many "fires" and has taken on many tasks without billing for them. He thanked Mr. Holmes for his service and involvement in the community. These last six months he has been invaluable to the community.

8. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Borom welcomed Mr. Suggs.

Vice Mayor Brown also welcomed Mr. Suggs and congratulated Mr. Holmes for keeping them informed and out of trouble. She said City Staff does an excellent job of coming through for them as a team.

Commissioner Campbell said he is happy and excited about the future of Palatka. They have seen the community come together in various ways, to stand together in solidarity, clean up the community, and mentor children. His visit to the River Center generated much excitement within him. He will keep bringing up the cemetery in order to address concerns. He has had more concerns come up via email which are really disturbing. Mayor Hill said Ms. Driggers has been working with the City Manager on suggestions for moving forward with the cemetery.

Mayor Hill said they hold their community clean ups on the 3rd Saturday of each month beginning with July. Next Saturday they will meet by the Armory next to Forrester Field. They want to create partnerships to clean up parks and improve properties for citizens through painting and community partnerships.

Mayor Hill said the country has been divided and much hurt has been created. On July 4th they had a very patriotic celebration attended by over 20,000 people, and it was a true depiction of the community and how close-knit they are. Palatka is evolving in many ways and they are surpassing stereotypes. He hopes citizens continue to come together during times of need. They won't always agree, but they are making decisions that are in the best interest of the community. He was overwhelmed at the showing of community spirit at the fireworks display. He thanked all parties who participated in making that happen.

9. ADJOURN – There being no further business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m. upon a motion by Commissioner Campbell.

ANY PERSON WISHING TO APPEAL ANY DECISION MADE BY THE CITY COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO ANY MATTER CONSIDERED AT SUCH MEETING WILL NEED A RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS. AND FOR SUCH PURPOSE MAY NEED TO INSURE THAT A VERBATIM RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS IS MADE, WHICH RECORD INCLUDES THE TESTIMONY AND EVIDENCE UPON WHICH THE APPEAL IS TO BE BASED. FS 286.105