

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 – CALLED MEETING December 17, 2015; 5:00 p.m.

Proceedings of a Special Called meeting of the City Commission of the City of Palatka, Florida, held on the 17th day of December, 2015.

PRESENT: Mayor Terrill L. Hill
Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown
Commissioner Rufus Borom
Commissioner Justin Campbell
Commissioner James Norwood, Jr.

Also Present: City Manager Terry Suggs; City Attorney Donald E. Holmes; City Clerk Betsy Jordan Driggers; Finance Director Matt Reynolds; Interim Police Chief James Griffith; Fire Chief Mike Lambert; Planning Director Thad Crowe; Grants Administrator Jonathan Griffith

CALL TO ORDER – Mayor Hill called the special meeting to order and read the following Meeting Call, which was issued on December 10, 2015:

**TO COMMISSIONERS: MARY LAWSON BROWN, RUFUS BOROM,
JUSTIN CAMPBELL AND JAMES NORWOOD, Jr.:**

You are hereby notified that a Special Meeting of the Palatka City Commission is called to be held on Thursday, December 17, 2015, at the regular meeting place of the Palatka City Commission, Palatka City Hall, 201 N. 2nd Street, Palatka, Florida, to commence at 5:00 p.m.

The purpose of the meeting is to:

1. Hold a **PUBLIC HEARING on a RESOLUTION** electing to use the Uniform Method of Collection for non-ad valorem assessments for Fire Assessments – Adopt (tabled during regular session 12/10/15 to a time certain of December 17, 2015, 5:00 p.m.)
2. Hear an update on the Police Chief Search, to include the possible appointment of the City Manager's recommended candidate

/s/ Terrill L. Hill
Terrill L. Hill, MAYOR

We acknowledge receipt of a copy of the foregoing notice of a special called meeting on the 10th day of December, 2015.

/s/ Mary Lawson Brown
COMMISSIONER

/s/ Justin Campbell
COMMISSIONER

/s/ James Norwood, Jr.
COMMISSIONER

/s/ Rufus Borom
COMMISSIONER

INVOCATION - The Reverend Ben Tippett, Senior Pastor; Victory Christian Fellowship

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE - Ansley Hall, Boy Scout Troop 235

1. **PUBLIC RECOGNITION/PRESENTATIONS** -- There were none.

2. **PUBLIC COMMENTS** -- There were none

3. **CONSENT AGENDA**

***a GENERAL PENSION BOARD APPOINTMENTS:**

1. **Appoint Skip Lorenzen as Member with Financial Experience** for a two-year term expiring 12/31/17

2. **Appoint Melvin Register as Commission Appointee** for the remainder of a two year term expiring 12/31/16

Commissioner Campbell moved to pass all items on the Consent Agenda as presented. Commissioner Norwood seconded the motion, which passed unopposed.

4. **PUBLIC HEARING/RESOLUTION** electing to use the Uniform Method of Collection for non-ad valorem assessments for Fire Assessments – Adopt – The Clerk read a Resolution entitled A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY OF PALATKA, FLORIDA ELECTING TO USE THE UNIFORM METHOD OF COLLECTING NON-AD VALOREM ASSESSMENTS LEVIED IN ALL OR PART OF THE CITY OF PALATKA, FLORIDA; STATING A NEED FOR SUCH LEVY; PROVIDING FOR THE MAILING OF THIS RESOLUTION; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE. Commissioner Norwood moved to adopt the Resolution as read. Commissioner Campbell seconded the motion. Mayor Hill opened the floor for Public Comment.

Dorothy Myers, 2510 Carr Street, said she thought her assessment was very high at \$344.00 for a house with an extra lot. She asked if the amount will change each year and if it will come with the tax bill. It is an inconvenient time to bill this. To answer her questions, Mr. Suggs said they can look at the parcel on which she is assessed and make sure the calculations are correct. She is being assessed for each parcel. She can make payments on it as long as it is paid in full by May 1. They cannot assess residences not inside the City Limits; the County has a Fire Assessment in place for County residents. Mayor Hill asked her to meet with the City Manager if she has further questions concerning her assessment.

Allegra Kitchens, 1027 S. 12th Street, said the Commission can defer payments for the assessment on the tax bill. They can't allow people to do the "five payments" plan if it goes on the tax bill. If people can't pay their tax bill people will lose their properties. She distributed information found in Statutes and on the Property Tax bill and read it aloud into the record concerning payment of taxes and assessments (filed). Special assessments are subject to collections just as delinquent taxes are. She asked that the City continue to bill the assessment separately. Mayor Hill said you can make quarterly payments to the tax collector. Commissioner Kitchens confirmed this, saying this increases the tax bill and quarterly payments.

There being no further public comment offered, the public comment portion of the hearing was closed.

Mr. Suggs confirmed that they will be required to pay a fee associated with having this Assessment bill by the Tax Collector's Office. They paid a fee to a third party provider to send

out this year's bills. If the Commission is not willing to take the extra step to enforce this, the City will not receive the funds. By placing it on the tax bills, the percentage of collection will increase. If the City continues to process the bills, people can ask for a hardship deferral from the City Manager. They can still do that even if it is on the tax bill. They can turn those deferrals into the tax collector before April 1st, who will then send out a new tax bill. The only thing that's changing is the deadline for deferral, which will be March 31st, and there will be four payments instead of five. The City should do its due diligence to educate the taxpayers.

Commissioner Borom noted although there are now four quarterly payments instead of five, property owners are now getting an entire year to pay, instead of five months. Mayor Hill said the main purpose of breaking out this fee is to reduce the millage rate and create relief for the citizens. They held numerous meetings on this and explained that everyone will take a hit the first year. This is an equitable way to distribute the responsibility for paying for the services received. The uniform method of collection creates the best opportunity for collection. One way or another they will have to pay someone to send these bills out. Hardships apply to a very small portion of the community. They are "holding the masses hostage" for a small percentage of people being that fall below poverty level. If the millage rate is dropped next year, they won't seek extra money on the other end. They want to give people relief from year to year by decreasing the millage rate going forward.

Mr. Suggs said he has met with the Property Appraiser and Tax Assessor and worked through these issues. This resolution gives the City the opportunity to utilize the "uniform method of collection" as defined by Statute. There are still issues to be worked out with the County officials. They need to get this resolution passed so they can continue with the process.

Commissioner Norwood said he attended a Fire Assessment workshop at the FLC conference this past August. He asked at that workshop whether any properties have been taken due to the assessment. The League and consultants said there have been no properties taken away. It can be taken away. If people don't pay their taxes, they can purchase those tax certificates on their own property. Whether you have the assessment fee attached or not, any individual has the potential of someone purchasing their tax deed. They need a uniform way of collecting this fee. If they don't have anything in place other than liens to collect the fee, they will always be in court and it will always be adversarial. They want to avoid that. Either way you do it, someone will object. The best way to do this is through the tax assessor's office, wherein people will have seven more months to pay it. People can still apply for a hardship deferral.

Mayor Hill said there wasn't this much dialogue when the City was raising the millage rate each year. This is an opportunity to provide relief over the long run. Either way there is a potential for people to lose their homes if they don't pay the tax bill. Commissioner Borom said he also attended the Fire Assessment Fee workshop at Conference and heard them say that no citizen had lost their home due to the fee. Discussion ensued regarding the Florida Administrative Code regarding removing the assessment fee from individual properties, which is allowed. Commissioner Campbell said the grief seems to have been created by what people perceived as lack of notice on the fee. Whatever they decide tonight, they need to look at sending communication directly to the citizens instead of relying on television and newspaper. Mayor Hill said they can visit sections of the community to explain the process and purpose.

5. CITY MANAGER & ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

Police Chief Search Update & recommendation of appointment – Mr. Suggs said interviews were held today with the finalist candidates for Chief of Police. The interview committee consisting of Warden Edward Griffin, Dick Schauland, Matt Reynolds, Don Holmes and he interviewed four candidates today. There was a unanimous decision to recommend the appointment of Lt. Jason Shaw, currently with the Palatka Police Department. Commissioner Norwood moved to concur on

the City Manager's recommendation and ratify the appointment of Lt. Jason L. Shaw, Sr. as Chief of Police. Commissioner Campbell seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was requested and taken, which yielded the following results: Commissioners Borom, Brown, Campbell, Norwood and Mayor Hill, yes; Nays, none. The motion was passed unopposed.

Jason Shaw, Appointee, Chief of Police, thanked the Commission for the opportunity to participate in the process. He has wanted to lead the Police Department for a long time. Mayor Hill said he has worked his way up from the bottom. He came here to play basketball for SJRCC and became a part of the community. He has worked tirelessly with young people. They are proud of him and are looking for great things from him. They believe he is capable of leading this organization.

Mayor Hill commended the Committee and especially Mr. Suggs for doing a fine job of interviewing candidates. It was a difficult choice amongst four very qualified finalist applicants, all of which were fully vetted. He thanked Putnam Correctional Institution Warden Griffin for his service, who was present and stood for recognition, noting he is committed to serving this community. He thanked Mr. Reynolds and Mr. Holmes for their work and noted PCSO Captain Dick Schauland also did a great job.

6. COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Commissioner Brown said she has been here quite some time and has seen some good and bad decisions. She will ask questions of the Commission because they represent all citizens, from the richest to the poorest. She enjoys working with them all. They have met tough challenges. She is proud of them all. The City Manager has met the challenge. She wished a happy holiday to all.

Commissioner Norwood said he is thankful for the City and the new Commission, which has met many challenges and made tough decisions. All departments have stepped up and met new challenges. The City is cleaner. He hopes the City will reap the benefits of those decisions in the coming years. He is excited about the future of Palatka. He believes the new Police Chief to be progressive and pledges his support. He congratulated the City Manager who has continuously met challenges with solutions. Staff and citizens have stepped up and gotten on board with this Commission's initiatives.

Commissioner Borom said he is extremely pleased with the progress they've made this year. They had some tough choices and decisions to make and met all challenges. They have set the vision based upon the Mayor challenge to them and the community. Going forward they can achieve greatness.

Commissioner Campbell said he is grateful to be in this position, seeing the progress the Community has made from being a "dying" community to being a "happening" community. He is pleased that the newly appointed Police Chief is familiar with the City and its citizens. This is what set him apart. He will do his best to support him and his vision. He is grateful for the City Manager and Staff. He would do it all over again as it has made him a better person. He is seeing the "return, renew, commit" platform coming to life. He thanked the Committee for their service.

Mayor Hill said this is a working Commission. They have met more than any commission has met, but they are also listening in an open manner. It is important that people feel that they are listening to them. They will continue to be open and transparent. Last Saturday the newspaper ran an article regarding the Commission and Manager going to Florida League of Cities conferences, which 411 cities attend, and other training opportunities. This scrutiny makes no sense to him; the article made no mention of the sacrifices they make to do their job. A recent

conference he attended with the National Bar Association cost \$5,000. This type of scrutiny is uncalled for and insulting. He is very frustrated with what is going on. The newspaper is writing articles with a goal of creating strife. They need to talk about what is going on that's good in Palatka. He wants to talk about Palatka Pride and how they can be a better community.

Mayor Hill said they had a great time with employees at the City-wide Christmas Party. This created an opportunity to bond. The Palatka Daily News needs to write an article about the 5,000 pounds of trash they've picked up this year. Even the City Attorney has been out there picking it up with them. They want the Community to move forward and be proud of where they are. They don't need to give any additional ear to anything negative.

7. **ADJOURN** – There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 5:50 p.m. by Mayor Hill.

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 206.105