



Contractors working for the City of Palatka pressure washed the roof of the city-owned railroad station last week. The City's Code Enforcement Department cited the City because the roof was dirty and did not meet code.

# Enforcing the Code

## City of Palatka buildings held to same standards as residents

Eddie Cutwright, City of Palatka Director of Community Affairs and Code Enforcement, has decided to hold his bosses accountable. And they are okay with that.

In his role as the director of the Code Enforcement Department, Cutwright and his officers are charged with making sure that properties in the City meet standards set in the City code. These issues include property maintenance, high grass, mold and mildew on buildings, and no junk vehicles in yards.

"I was taught that your house has to be cleaned before you can tell somebody their house is dirty. If we're going to hold the City residents accountable for the deficiencies on their property, then it is only right the City's buildings are held to the same standard."

"So making sure that every City-owned building is in compliance with our rules, and we have several buildings that desperately need that. My initiative is to show the community that we're not above the law."

"We treated the City the same way we treat every

other property owner. One of our code enforcement officers did a visual inspection of our buildings from the street and noted what they saw in a report. The report was then sent to the owner, in this case City Hall. Just like we do for everyone else," said Cutwright.



Eddie Cutwright

City Code Enforcement Officers can only inspect property from the street. They cannot enter the property and they cannot look over a fence.

The City's Code Officers, Christy Lowe and David Green, divided up the 13 municipal buildings for the inspections and found issues with everyone.

"We have created a case on every city property. We found a lot of deteriorating structures. We found a lot of mold and mildew.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Those were my main concerns,” said Cutwright.

“Most of the issues were minor, but every single building had a violation. Some of the buildings, like the Police Department and the Public Works building, had some structural issues that we need to look into. The City Annex had some roof issues. (The roof on the annex partially collapsed last month. Work is under way on the repairs and should be completed this week.) The Larimer Arts Center, Tilghman House and Bronson-Mulholland House also had some structural damage and violations. That is actually a problem because they are in the City’s historical districts,” said Cutwright.

Structures in the City’s North and South Historical Districts have slightly different requirements that must be historically accurate.

Like any other property owner in the City, Code Enforcement sent a letter to the owner of the property, in this case City Hall and the City set out to address the issues immediately. According to Cutwright, the process is that after a complaint is filed, the property owner receives a 10-day or 15-day voluntary complaint notice in the mail. That complaint letter has everything you need to do to come into compliance. Most are simple issues like painting, pressure washing, cutting grass, removing vehicles, or fixing windows. Most of the time, the owner fixes the issue, and the case is closed.

“We do know that certain violations cannot be done in 15 days, but Florida Statute requires us to send that letter out anyway, so we send that letter out. If it’s a major structural issue, you won’t get it down in 15 days, and then after the 15th day, a code enforcement officer will go back out and check unless you called them before then.

After the 15th day, if you are still out of compliance, my code enforcement officer will send you a notice for a hearing, and depending on the docket for the hearings, you might get set for a hearing the next month or the month after that. We have to give you 15 more days to get this and be prepared to come to the hearing. Once you come to the hearing before the magistrate, you get a chance



### Palatka’s most common code violations

- **Unsafe Structures:** Buildings in disrepair, with structural deficiencies, or lacking proper maintenance compromise public safety and detract from the overall aesthetic of the city.
- **Property Maintenance:** Properties with peeling paint, broken windows, or neglected exteriors contribute to blight and decrease the desirability of neighborhoods.
- **Unpermitted Construction:** Failure to obtain necessary permits before commencing construction or renovation projects can result in substandard structures that do not meet safety or building code requirements.
- **Junk Vehicles:** Abandoned or inoperative vehicles left on public streets or private property are not only eyesores but can also attract vermin and pose safety hazards.
- **Inoperable Utilities:** Lack of functioning utilities such as water, electricity, or gas can create health and safety hazards for occupants and violate local housing standards.
- **Vacant / abandon properties**
- **High grass, weeds, and other growth in yard (and swale)**
- **Broken, discolored, and weathered fences.**

to voice your case. And we will present our case. In the end, the magistrate, Ron Brown, will make a decision.

“Once a decision is made and we find out you are in violation of the complaint, we give you a certain time limit, and that would be 30, 60, 90, or 120 days to fix the problem. If it’s a structural issue or permit issue, you can get an extra six months, depending on your permit.

After that, the fines and fees start,” said Cutwright.

Those fees could run to more than \$10,000 or more. If the issue is still not fixed and the property owner has not paid the fines and fees, the City will come back and put an official lien on the property with the Clerk of courts. That could lead to foreclosure.

“The city is not trying to seize anybody’s property, but the end of the day, we want everybody to be held accountable, and we want the City to look nice. Sometimes we have to get a little stern to get that to happen,” said Cutwright, “but we try to do everything in our legal authority to help people. My best advice if you are having issues with code enforcement is to call and talk to us. We really want to help.”

The City is in the process of setting up a program to help residents in need make repairs to their properties.

Although the City is not going to issue fines or foreclose on its own property, the Public Works Department has been working to come into compliance with the rules.

City staff and contractors have been repairing and pressure-washing City buildings for the last several weeks. The Bronson-Mulholland House, Palatka Municipal Airport Terminal, City Hall, Jenkins Community Center, Water Works Environmental Education Center, The Riverfront Taxi Terminal, Tilghman House and the Railroad Station have all been cleaned.

Cutwright said the work would not stop until every City building meets the same standards expected of every other in the City.

“We all want Palatka to be a safe, clean place to live, work, and visit,” said Cartwright, “These rules are not meant to be mean, and we are not just picking on one person or one neighborhood. These rules apply to everyone, including the City of Palatka.”

A list of the most common code violations, the process the City uses to enforce the rules, how to file a code violation and where to get help and answers about code enforcement can be found at [www.palatka-fl.gov/code](http://www.palatka-fl.gov/code).

*Residents can also reach Code Enforcement at 386-329-0100 ext. 331 or [codeenforcement@palatka-fl.gov](mailto:codeenforcement@palatka-fl.gov).*

# New manager Bell starts work for the City

Palatka's new unanimously appointed City Manager, Troy Bell, started work early last Friday, one day after being sworn in before the City Commission the night before.

Bell is one of a select group of city managers who is an ICMA Credentialed Manager, Only 1573 managers of ICMA's 13,000 members are credentialed. Bell came to the city after serving for just under 4 years as the manager of the City of Muskegon Heights manager in Michigan where he conducted his research for work on his PhD and most recently as the Interim Manager for Charlotte MI.

Bell has a long and exemplary history of public service, including being an El Portal Village police officer, Miami Dade County Water and Sewer Engineer, Deputy Chief of Staff for the South Florida Water Management, and working for municipal government management as a Deputy City manager in Washington State and as an Assistant to the City Manager in Beverly Hills, California. Bell was sworn in by St Johns County Commissioner Henry Dean who stated that Bell was his choice for the team and that together with the team they did great things!

Bell also has extensive experience in education and private industry where he worked with the state and local government sectors of IBM as a complex solutions manager. and Bell holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami where he was Student Body President, a master's degree in public administration (MPA) from the City University of New York where he was selected as a distinguished member of the Pi Alpha Alpha MPA honor society., and In 2018, Bell acquired a Master of Finance degree with a 4.0 GPA from the University of Miami while at the same time he simultaneously completed . He has completed the coursework for to complete the steps toward an interdisciplinary Ph.D. at Purdue University in interdisciplinary bridging or overcoming the gap between education and government management in smaller and emerging communities from Purdue University.

Bell says he will work to enhance efficiency, in-



Palatka's new City Manager, Troy Bell,

crease revenue, and improve city services. Additionally, he plans to continue the strides made to promote economic development by creating jobs, supporting new and improved retail, attracting various industries, and working to making Palatka a better place than it already is for all its residents.

I look forward to working hard for the people of this great town. Palatka has a long and rich history and is a community that has so much to offer to its residents and visitors," said Bell, "Over the next weeks, it is of the utmost importance that I will spend time listening, meeting with, and getting to know City Commissioners, staff and residents to introduce myself and hear from them all stakeholders about what concerning the direction they would like to see the City Manager help the City move. and I want to know how we I can be a catalyst so we can all work together to meet those common goals. I want to hear from everyone."

After a 1-year vacancy at Palatka City Hall, Bell replaced City Manager Don Holmes, who retired last year.

Bell can be reached at City Hall at (386) 329-0100 or by email at [Tbell@palatka-fl.gov](mailto:Tbell@palatka-fl.gov).

## Firehouse Subs Foundations donates \$39,000 of equipment to Fire Department

The Palatka Firehouse Sub restaurant staff members hold vehicle extrication tools worth \$39,029 as they stand with Palatka Firefighters in front of their location on State Road 19 on Wednesday, February 14, 2024. The Firehouse Subs Public Safety Foundation donated the life-saving equipment to the fire department, a charitable organization started by the restaurant chain's founders, Chris Sorensen and Robin Sorensen, former Jacksonville firefighters.

The three pieces of equipment are all state-of-the-art, waterproof, and battery-powered. Commonly called 'Jaws of Life' they are used to free people trapped in vehicle accidents.



# Golfing for Good



On Saturday, Feb. 9th, golfers hit the links at the Palatka Golf Club for the 7th Annual Charity Golf Tournament held by the City of Palatka Recreation Department to benefit City youth recreation programs and the City Police Department's Police Athletic League.

"It was a great turnout, nice weather, and everyone had a good time for a great cause," said City of Palatka Director of Community Affairs Eddie Cutwright.

Sixty four golfers playing off 16 teams raised more than \$10,000 for the programs.

Major sponsors for the tournament included the Putnam County Tourist Development Council, CertainTeed, St. Johns Auto Body, the law offices of Ron Sholes, Veritas Steel, and Ancient City Entertainment.

The team of Abner Davis, Lonnie Howell, Mike Fountain, and Brock Buhnerkemper finished first, followed by the St. Johns Auto Body team.



# His business is helping the business of Palatka

Rick Paul calls himself a serial entrepreneur at heart.

After graduating from the University of North Florida, he started and ran a small community newspaper in Jacksonville.

“Being an entrepreneur is a lot of fun. Starting a business is like putting together a picture puzzle, but on the box, there’s no picture. You have to put together many different parts with only a rough idea of how they come together, what it is going to look like, and how to make it your own when you are done.” Paul said, “But when it comes together, it is great.”

After selling his paper and receiving a graduate degree from the University of North Florida, Paul now works at helping others put together the puzzle of starting a new business.

A business consultant for the University of North Florida’s Small Business Development Center or SBDC, Paul’s job is to guide residents of Palatka and Putnam County through the steps of becoming successful entrepreneurs.

“Our mission statement is to help small businesses start, grow, and succeed because when that occurs, then the business owner is going to hire employees. And when they hire employees, the old saying is it raises the economic tide for everybody. Remember that America wasn’t built on Wall Street; it was built on Main Street,” said Paul.

For Paul, Palatka is the perfect place for small businesses.

“I think it’s safe to say 98% of Palatka’s businesses are small businesses, which is fantastic. Small businesses are the bedrock of the American economic engine. You go out on your own to do something that you want to do and be your own boss. But you’re not out to get rich. What you’re out to do is to earn a reasonable living.” said Paul, “And then as business gets better, you hire someone else and grow the business and then someone else, etc. That is the American dream.”

But Paul reminds people that starting a business can be challenging.

“There are a lot of things to know and do in starting and owning a business. There are a lot of steps like licensing, incorporation, taxes, real estate, and employee issues that you have to navigate.” he said, “Decisions you make before you open your doors can mean success or failure. There are 1000 to 2000 decisions you have to make to set up a business. And what I do is I help guide the person through all those steps.”



Rick Paul is a business consultant for the University of North Florida’s Small Business Development Center in Palatka.

The SBDC helps guide hopeful new business owners through preliminary steps like writing a business plan, dealing with licensing and regulatory issues, and finding professional legal and financial advice.

Paul and the SBDC do that at no cost to the hopeful business owner. His services are paid for by the City of Palatka, Putnam County, and the State of Florida.

“Most small business startups have about a 40 to 50% chance of succeeding. But if you have professional help, like through the Small Business Development Center, then your success rate is closer to 85%.” said Paul, “That is why we are here.”

“Every business that becomes a viable entity will eventually pay taxes, employ people who pay taxes, provide services to citizens, make the city stronger, and raise the economic tide for everybody. Having a thriving

small business community is a win for everyone.”

The Small Business Development Center is a national program and has offices in all 50 US states, but to see Paul in Palatka, you must be a Putnam County resident.

For more information, contact Rick Paul and SBDC in Palatka at [r.paul@unf.edu](mailto:r.paul@unf.edu), call (386) 268-1311 or visit [www.unf.edu/sbdc](http://www.unf.edu/sbdc)

## Business Networking Event

**The City of Palatka, Community Redevelopment Agency and Small Business Development Center will hold a free event on Feb. 20, from 4:40 p.m. to 6 p.m. at the Azalea City Brewing Company, 120 S. 7th St. in Palatka. The event is free but please preregister at [www.unf.edu/SBDC](http://www.unf.edu/SBDC) or (800) 450-4624**

# Florida SBDC in Putnam County *Small Business Events*



Hosted by:



## City of Palatka Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) *Business Networking Event*

Please join the CRA Commissioners, the City of Palatka Community Affairs and Planning Departments, the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce, TD Bank, Capital City Bank, Ameris Bank, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC) for a networking event to discuss doing business in the CRA's Business District.

This event will help increase awareness of the CRA, attract new businesses and retain existing businesses, build relationships and support between businesses, city officials and departments, and to increase networking opportunities for small businesses.

Please join us on February 20th at the Azalea City Brewing Company to help build a stronger and more vibrant downtown Palatka!

### *Event Details:*

February 20, 2024

4:30pm - 6pm

Azalea City Brewing Company  
120 S. 7th Street  
Palatka, 32177

**No cost to attend but  
please pre-register!**

### *Register Today!*

[www.unf.edu/SBDC](http://www.unf.edu/SBDC)

800-450-4624

In association with:



The Florida SBDC at UNF is a member of the Florida SBDC Network, a statewide partnership program nationally accredited by the Association of America's SBDCs and funded in part by the U.S. SBA, Department of Defense, State of Florida and other private and public partners, with the University of West Florida serving as the network's lead host institution. FSBDG services are extended to the public on a nondiscriminatory basis. Language assistance services are available for limited English proficient individuals.

# You are invited to a community discussion and visual preference survey

Please join the Northeast Florida Regional Council and the City of Palatka to discuss the community's vision for the upcoming 2045 Comprehensive Plan update

Image from [floridahikes.com/Palatka-Riverfront-Park](http://floridahikes.com/Palatka-Riverfront-Park)

## EVENT DETAILS

### When?

Wednesday, February 21, 2024 at 5:30 p.m.

### Where?

Ravine Gardens State Park  
Roy E. Campbell Civic Center,  
1600 Twigg Street, Palatka, FL 32177

**Please bring your smartphone to participate electronically**



For more information, contact  
Monica Dominguez at [PalatkaPlan@nefrc.org](mailto:PalatkaPlan@nefrc.org)

# Join Our Team - Career Opportunities

The City of Palatka has job openings available for the following positions. If you are interested in any of the following roles, please consider applying:

## **Community Affairs Administrative Assistant**

Under the direction of the Operations Manager coordinates and performs a variety of skilled administrative functions; answers, screens and directs incoming calls to appropriate departments; opens, dispatches, and closes out work orders; provides administrative support to personnel; updates and maintains records and files; orders supplies and uniforms; responds to inquiries and complaints; and performs other related duties as assigned.

## **Aviation Administrative Assistant**

This is a part-time position which provides direct support to the daily operation of Palatka Municipal Airport through customer service and operations assistance. The primary responsibilities include supporting the Administrative/Operations Assistant in maintaining administrative records to ensure operational and financial requirements of the airport are met.

## **Aviation Operations Assistant**

This is a full time position in support of the daily administration and operation of Palatka Municipal Airport providing customer service and administrative assistance.

## **Water Plant Superintendent**

This position oversees the day-to-day operations of the City's Water Treatment Plant

## **Firefighter:**

We are seeking dedicated firefighters to join the City of Palatka's Fire Department and contribute to the safety and well-being of the community.

## **Police Officer:**

Join the Palatka Police Department as an officer and play a crucial role in maintaining law and order within the city.

## **Facilities Superintendent**

This is a full-time position that reports to the Public Works Operations Manager. This position performs by providing general direction, organization, monitoring, and supervision to facility maintenance operations; performs a variety of technical tasks relative to facility maintenance; provides technical assistance to the Public Works Operations Manager. Duties may fall into a variety of trades, including carpentry, painting, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, energy management, life safety and keys/security systems.

## **Facilities Laborer**

The Facilities Maintenance Assistant performs a variety of unskilled and semi-skilled tasks to maintain the City's portfolio of facilities, grounds and infrastructure in a safe and effective working condition

## **Utility Maintenance Worker-Trainee:**

This position involves semi-skilled work in constructing, installing, maintaining, and repairing water mains, water services, fire hydrants, sewer

mains, sewer laterals, manholes, force mains, and valves.

## **Wastewater Treatment Plant Mechanic Trainee**

Under general supervision, performs skilled and semi-skilled work in the installation, maintenance, and repair of plant and/or lift station equipment and electronic components. Provides leadership and limited supervision of junior personnel.

## **Recreation Attendant (Part Time)**

The Recreation Maintenance Technician I will work with a team, Recreation & Culture employees. This is the entry-level class in the Recreation Maintenance Technician series. As a member of the Community Affairs Division, the Recreation Maintenance Technician I perform semi-skilled and skilled tasks in all phases of Recreation, open space, trails, and sports field maintenance. Duties include, but are not limited to, sports fields, and sports complexes right of way, facility maintenance, facility and landscape construction, special event, and facility rental support, cleaning shelters, restrooms, and hand-picking trash in all areas with a focus on highly visible areas like public entrances to Recreation and facilities, parking lots, landscaped areas adjacent to buildings.

*For more information or to apply for any of these positions, please visit [Palatka-fl.gov](http://Palatka-fl.gov).*

