



**CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
AUGUST 4, 2020, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
SUMMARY OF COUNCIL ACTION**

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watford called the regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on Tuesday, August 4, 2020, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast 3rd Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida. Pursuant to Executive Order No. 20-69 issued by Governor DeSantis on March 20, 2020, and extended by Executive Order No. 20-179 effective July 29, 2020, the meeting was conducted utilizing communications media technology (CMT) as provided by Florida Statutes 120.54(5)(b)2, by means of Zoom.com Meeting ID 2459713294. The Host computer was operated by Executive Assistant Brock. The video and audio files were retained as a permanent record. The invocation was offered by Mayor Watford, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by City Clerk Gamiotea.

II. ATTENDANCE

Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Council Members Wes Abney, Monica Clark, Bob Jarriel, and Bobby Keefe were present in the Chambers.

CITY STAFF: City Clerk Lane Gamiotea, City Attorney Carlyn Kowalsky, City Administrator Marcos MontesDeOca, Police Chief Bob Peterson, Public Works Director David Allen, Deputy City Clerk Bobbie Jenkins, General Services Coordinator Patty Burnette, Finance Director India Riedel, and Executive Assistant Robin Brock were present in the Chambers. Fire Chief Herb Smith was absent; Fire Captain Lalo Rodriguez was in attendance.

III. AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Mayor Watford asked whether there were any agenda items to be added, deferred, or withdrawn. New Business items D, E, and F with Exhibits 4, 5, and 6 were added by the City Attorney.

B. Council Member Jarriel moved to approve the agenda as amended; seconded by Council Member Keefe.

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

C. There were no agenda item forms or comment cards submitted for public participation for any issues not on the agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A motion was made by Council Member Keefe to approve the consent agenda items **A through B** [July 21, 2020, Regular meeting minutes; Temporary Street Closing for a portion of Southwest 3rd and 4th Avenues between North and South Park Streets from 5:00 P.M. September 4 through 7, 2020, for the annual Okeechobee Main Street Labor Day Festival, as provided in Exhibit 1]; seconded by Council Member Jarriel.

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

Item C was removed from the consent items for discussion. The current Landscape Contractor is the low bidder and being recommended for award. Council Member Clark asked whether the various complaints and issues with them had been addressed. After a brief discussion, it was clarified that all items of concern were addressed or clarified within the new contract. **A motion was made by Council Member Jarriel to award Okeechobee Landscape Maintenance and Installation Bid No. PW 02-11-07-20 in the amount of \$46,195.00 to JMC Landscaping Services, Inc. (as provided in Exhibit 2); seconded by Council Member Keefe.** This is a one-year contract with a one-year renewal. Bids were also received by TWQ, LLC for \$57,067.50, and Nunez Lawncare and Landscaping for \$53,800.00.

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

V. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Mrs. Jennifer Tewksbury, Executive Director of the Economic Council of Okeechobee (ECOK), presented the 2020 Vision for Okeechobee's Downtown FLAGLER PARKS, and explained over the last year the ECOK has worked with landscape professionals, many local stakeholder organizations, and elected City officials in the development of a Conceptual Redesign Plan. Through this, the City has the opportunity to preserve cherished elements of local history, celebrate agricultural heritage, create a continuous and consistent sense of place, and truly begin to invest in over seven acres of priceless green space for the benefit of current and future generations. From the beginning, the intent of this initiative has been to establish a unified vision for the future of our centrally-located FLAGLER PARKS; a vision which reflects our character as a community, is conducive to multiple types of downtown events, and which draws residents and visitors alike to the area. The Plan does not address specific financial obligations, parties responsible for completion, or details related to the full scope of the various projects presented. The following provides a summary of the information presented.

Park 1 City Hall Plaza, located between Southeast 2nd and 3rd Avenues (Block P of FLAGLER PARK), celebrates the history of the City and its incorporation in 1915. Markers should be placed to denote the first City Council meeting held on July 13, 1915, with Peter Raulerson as Mayor, Henry Chandler as City Clerk, and Council Members L.M. Raulerson, W.L. Coats, Dr. Roy Darrow, Smith Drawdy and C.L. Hatch. A stage with a paved Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible seating area at the center of this park will provide a more permanent location and stately presence for both smaller community events and larger events, attracting visitors from surrounding areas. Lawn seating beyond the low seat wall may be used for concerts or larger community ceremonies. Sidewalks in this park are recommended to be redesigned to mirror the other FLAGLER PARKS with historic crisscross pathways. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of City Hall Plaza; establish live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; replace light posts with taller, more stately posts to match the rest of FLAGLER PARK; use landscaping to screen unsightly utilities; relocate small chickee to Seminole Square for consistency and functionality; provide shade for seating areas by either structures consistent with nearby architecture or shade trees; create more comfortable and usable seating patterns; update damaged trash receptacles and other outdated hardscape; remove the existing unhealthy plant material.

Park 2 Veterans Memorial Square, located between South Parrott and Southwest 2nd Avenues (Block E of FLAGLER PARK), honors our nation's military Veterans and memorializes the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in our United States military. A large arched sign at the entrance of this park is recommended to announce the Downtown FLAGLER PARKS of Okeechobee at our main thoroughfare. A new layout would provide functional seating areas at memorial monuments while redesigned landscape screens provide privacy for reflection. New landscape beds along the perimeters of the park are recommended to provide structure, serve as noise buffers, and provide a barrier to safely separate children from adjacent traffic. The center of the park may be left open to accommodate displays and events. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Veterans Memorial Square; complete live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; create a more usable plaza layout for veteran and memorial events; consider bronze monuments honoring soldiers as educational focal points; utilize landscaping to create more privacy from the roadway traffic and for noise reduction.

Park 3 Speckled Perch Square, located between Southwest 2nd and 3rd Avenues (Block L of FLAGLER PARK). Okeechobee is renowned for our world-class bass fishing and has even been recognized as the "Speckled Perch Capital of the World." This park is intended to celebrate our outdoor lifestyle and the unique wildlife native to Okeechobee County. A traditional fountain or an interactive water feature for children located at the center of the park is recommended to serve as the main focal point. Life-size bronze art depicting native Florida wildlife is recommended to be placed at the central water feature and other prominent locations throughout the square.

NEW BUSINESS ITEM A CONTINUED: Restroom facilities are recommended at the east end of the square with easy access from the adjacent Veterans Memorial Square. The majority of the park is designed to remain open for festivals and events. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Speckled Perch Square; complete live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; replace outdated and inconsistent site furniture with one cohesive style throughout all parks. Select furniture to reflect the style of the newly designed parks and to serve the different functions of each park square; create a larger, more usable central plaza; create stronger hardscape connectors.

Park 4 Seminole Square, located between Southwest 3rd and 4th Avenues (Block G of FLAGLER PARK), will be dedicated to the Seminole Tribe of Florida and its historic influence on Okeechobee County. Existing chickees are recommended to be incorporated in the new park layout. The addition of a larger chickee structure will offer more opportunities for larger events or may serve as a covered seating area. The smaller chickee from existing City Hall Plaza may be relocated here to be incorporated with an open courtyard in the center of the park square. Life-size bronze sculptures of historic Seminole figures are recommended to be incorporated in the landscape to resemble a traditional Seminole camp. This would be designed to educate visitors of the Tribe's history and influence in Okeechobee. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Seminole Square; establish live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; screen all existing utilities with cohesive landscaping; remove small aluminum gazebo; redesign square to give chickees a purpose as an integral part of the space; place park furniture (tables and benches) more purposefully; work directly with Seminole Tribe of Florida to ensure historic accuracy.

Park 5 Settlers Square, located between Southwest 4th and 5th Avenues (Block A of FLAGLER PARK), will be dedicated to the historic leaders, businesses and events responsible for shaping Okeechobee into the community it is today. A flagpole is placed at the center of the park at the central plaza dedicated to Colonel R.E. Hamrick. Additional bronze markers are recommended to be placed at prominent locations within the square to highlight the first settlers and businesses of the community, including: Peter and Louisiana Raulerson; Dr. Anna and Dr. Roy Darrow (Park Drugs); Dan McCarthy (first grocery, feed and hardware stores); Lewis Raulerson (Raulerson's Department Store); and Henry Flagler, who recognized the prime location of Okeechobee County halfway between coasts and adjacent to a major body of water. Early boosters envisioned Okeechobee a metropolis and massive rail hub, a "Chicago of the South." Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Settlers Square; establish live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; redesign plantings around existing gazebo to open views and incorporate in new park layout. On nearby South Park Street: redesign low maintenance, simplified, cohesive corner landscape islands; remove diseased and unhealthy queen palms for more shade trees appropriate for the space along the entire South Park Street in the Downtown District.

Park 6 Cattleman's Square, located between Southwest 5th and 6th Avenues (Block L of FLAGLER PARK), intends to celebrate the rich agricultural heritage of Okeechobee County. The park layout and landscaping fully supports Okeechobee Main Street's Cattle Drive Sculpture project as the prominent focal point of the park square. The project includes life-sized bronze sculptures of a horse and rider, a calf, dog, six head of cattle and a cowboy on a fence. This permanent art display will be installed at the center of the park. Each figure will be strategically placed within a natural landscape to resemble early cattle grazing in Okeechobee County. The art installation is scheduled to be complete by 2021 to celebrate Florida's 500th anniversary of cattle first arriving in 1521. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Cattleman's Square; establish live oak tree border along the perimeter of the square; add flag holders to light posts for seasonal or event flags for this park square and along the remaining squares for consistency; relocate/remove concrete pads which aren't conducive to the art installation or functional for seating arrangements; relocate existing palms to create more attractive groupings.

NEW BUSINESS ITEM A CONTINUED: **Park 7 Butterfly Square**, located between Southwest 6th and 7th Avenues (Block F of FLAGLER PARK), provides a whimsical play area for children. Strategic landscape designs blend the colorful butterfly art displays with the "old Florida" aesthetic of the remaining parks to establish a cohesive presentation of the entire area. The existing butterfly garden and playful sculptures are recommended to be surrounded by a creative native play space incorporating natural landscape elements and native vegetation. Seating areas should be placed under new tree canopies around the play area. Restroom facilities are recommended to be located at the East end of the park with easy access from the adjacent Cattlemen Square. Added landscape buffers around the park serve as a barrier between active children and nearby traffic. Additional recommendations: create memorable park entrances at each corner of Butterfly Square; create usable, comfortable seating areas for parents and children; redesign pathways to celebrate historic crisscrossed layout as in remaining park squares; remove existing dead and diseased plant material; screen unsightly views with strategic landscaping.

Public feedback was collected while the Plan was on display online through the ECOK's official website, at Indian River State College on January 15, 2020, and for multiple weeks at the Okeechobee County Courthouse. The majority supported a unified Plan. Comments received included but were not limited to: the provision of shade to make park use realistic in Florida weather; concerns with ongoing and professional maintenance of the public's investment over the long term; location and placement of weapons and artillery in Veterans Memorial Square. Substantial support was provided for different placement of artillery relative to appropriateness and functionality of the space. In contrast, comments were also received which were not in favor of moving or adjusting the placement of artillery under any potential circumstance. Concerns relative to ongoing maintenance of restrooms. In contrast, many were in favor of public restrooms especially when considering downtown events. Safety and security for children, especially in the designated play areas. Drivers speeding on North Park Street/SR 70 was noted many times as a high concern. Concerns relative to Christmas decorations in the parks, though seasonal celebrations are not addressed in this conceptual redesign. The Plan has been directly communicated with and supported by the following local stakeholder organizations: Okeechobee Main Street, Okeechobee Main Street's Arts & Culture Alliance, Fine Arts Club of Okeechobee, Okeechobee Historical Society, Chamber of Commerce of Okeechobee County, Seminole Tribe of Florida, Okeechobee County Tourist Development Council, Okeechobee County School District, Indian River State College, Okeechobee County Economic Development Corporation.

It was also pointed out that a recommendation to adopt and implement a centralized beautification Plan for the City is recommended by the community's Economic Development Plan as publicly proposed and adopted in 2018 by the POLICOM Corporation, which states: "To improve the general appearance of the core center of the City of Okeechobee, a central beautification program should be initiated. Most successful small economies have taken this initiative to demonstrate to out-of-town companies the community takes pride in itself." The ECOK requested the City post a Request for Qualifications to begin the early stages of the Plan. Mrs. Tewksbury then introduced the Mr. Mike Flaugh, Landscape Architect, who explained his concept for creating the Plan. He encouraged the Council to use this as a basis to generate interest and implement a method to complete each park in phases.

Mayor Watford and each Council Member stated their appreciation for this Plan and the efforts that went into it. After discussion, **the consensus of the Council was to tentatively accept the Plan with gratitude, for Staff to move forward with providing a recommendation on creating a Citizens Advisory Committee to ensure the Plan's fruition, and to prepare the Request for Qualifications. The matter may be discussed during budget review. Additionally, see Council Member Clark's section under Council Comments.**

- B. A motion was made by Council Member Clark and seconded by Council Member Keefe to read proposed Ordinance No. 1215 by title only, regarding Abandonment of Right-of-Way Petition No. 20-001-AC/SC submitted by the property owner Mr. Omar Abuaita.**

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

Attorney Kowalsky read proposed Ordinance No. 1215 by title only as follows: "AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA; VACATING AND ABANDONING CERTAIN RIGHTS-OF-WAY BEING AN UNIMPROVED PORTION OF AN ALLEY, 20-FEET IN WIDTH, LYING BETWEEN LOTS 1 THROUGH 10 AND LOTS 17 THROUGH 26, OF BLOCK 39, CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 5, PAGE 5 OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA; TOGETHER WITH AN UNIMPROVED PORTION OF NORTHWEST 10TH STREET (f/k/a SIXTEENTH AVENUE), 100-FEET IN WIDTH, LYING BETWEEN LOTS 1 THROUGH 10, OF BLOCK 39, AND LOTS 17 THROUGH 26, OF BLOCK 28, CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, ACCORDING TO THE PLAT THEREOF AS RECORDED IN PLAT BOOK 5, PAGE 5 OF THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA (APPLICATION NO. 20-001-AC/SC); DIRECTING THE CITY CLERK TO RECORD THE ORDINANCE IN THE PUBLIC RECORDS OF THE CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT IN AND FOR OKEECHOBEE COUNTY, FLORIDA; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

Council Member Clark moved to approve the first reading, and set September 3, 2020, as a Final Public Hearing date for proposed Ordinance No. 1215; seconded by Council Member Jarriel.

Mayor Watford yielded the floor to Mr. Ben Smith, Senior Planner with LaRue Planning and Management, who explained the Technical Review Committee, the Planning Board and Planning Staff have all recommended approval. The property surrounding these rights-of-way was approved for a Rezoning (No. 19-006-R) to residential multiple family (RMF) and a Future Land Use Map Amendment (No. 19-005-SSA) to multi-family residential (MFR), for a proposed apartment complex project. Should the right-of-way abandonment be approved, it is recommended that the rights-of-way be zoned RMF with a MFR future land use. Letters from surrounding properties approving the abandonment, as well as utility approval letters have been received. Mayor Watford opened the floor for public comments. Mr. Steve Dobbs, 1062 Jakes Way, was in attendance on behalf of the petitioner, and was available for questions.

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

- C. City Clerk Gamiotea recommended the Council consider rescheduling the November 3, 2020, Regular City Council meeting due to it being General Election Day. After a brief discussion, the consensus of the Council was to reschedule the meeting to Thursday, November 5, 2020, at 6:00 P.M.**
- D. ITEM ADDED TO AGENDA: Attorney Kowalsky explained due to the extension of the Florida State of Emergency by Governor DeSantis to September 1, 2020, the Local State of Emergency should be extended as well. Copies of proposed Resolution No. 2020-11 were distributed at the beginning of the meeting. A motion was made by Council Member Abney, and seconded by Council Member Keefe, to adopt proposed Resolution No. 2020-11.**

Attorney Kowalsky read proposed Resolution No. 2020-11 by title only as follows: "A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA EXTENDING THE PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY DUE TO CORONAVIRUS DISEASE 2019 (COVID-19) THROUGH SEPTEMBER 1, 2020; PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE."

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

- E. ITEM ADDED TO AGENDA: Attorney Kowalski explained the example letter included within Exhibit 5 is being suggested by the Florida League of Cities to formally request Governor DeSantis extend the option for local governments to hold virtual meetings, pertaining to the public health concerns of COVID-19, indefinitely or a specific date. **A motion was made by Council Member Clark to authorize Mayor Watford to send a letter formally requesting Governor DeSantis to extend the option for local governments to hold virtual meetings indefinitely or until Executive Order No. 20-69 and its extensions are rescinded; seconded by Council Member Keefe.**

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

- F. ITEM ADDED TO AGENDA: Exhibit 6 was distributed and contained a sample letter directed to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and Federal Government to release emergency funding to municipal governments with a population of less than 500,000 to help mitigate expenditures, and current and future losses experienced by the community from COVID-19. Those with a population of 500,000 or more were direct beneficiaries of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. Attorney Kowalsky suggested the Council authorize the Mayor to send this letter to both agencies on behalf of the City. **Council Member Keefe made a motion authorizing Mayor Watford to send these letters formally requesting the release of emergency funding for municipalities (as recommended and provided in the Exhibit); seconded by Council Member Jarriel.**

VOTE: Ayes-Mayor Watford, Council Members Abney, Clark, Jarriel, and Keefe. Nays-none. Motion Carried.

VI. COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Jarriel expressed his appreciation for the joint effort to beautify the City. He was also glad that the community was not impacted by a hurricane over the weekend. Mayor Watford verified that all Council Members received updates from the County Emergency Operations Center regarding the hurricane.

Council Member Keefe requested an update from Code Enforcement be included on the next meeting agenda. Police Chief Peterson responded he would email the update he received earlier in the day. Council Member Keefe thanked him, and noted the agenda item would not be required.

Council Member Clark asked the Council to consider creating a design standard for the historic downtown area in conjunction with the FLAGLER PARK project. It was agreed this would be a separate item for the potential committee to address.

- VII. There being no further items on the agenda, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 6:49 P.M. The next meeting is a budget workshop scheduled for August 12, 2020, at 5:00 P.M.


Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Mayor

ATTEST:


Lane Gamiotea, CMC, City Clerk

Please take notice and be advised that when a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, he/she may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. City Clerk media are for the sole purpose of backup for official records of the Clerk.