

The City Commission of the City of Fernandina Beach, Florida met in a Workshop on Tuesday, April 4, 2017 at 5:00 pm in the City Commission Chambers. Present were Mayor Robin C. Lentz presiding, Vice Mayor Len Kreger, Commissioners John A. Miller, Roy G. Smith, and Tim Poynter. Also present were City Clerk Caroline Best, City Manager Dale L. Martin and City Attorney Tammi Bach.

Mayor Lentz called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

4.1 WATERFRONT CONSULTANT AGREEMENT: Mayor Lentz explained this workshop was called for the City Commission to discuss the draft proposal for the waterfront development projects.

City Manager Dale Martin introduced the City's new Public Information Officer, Mary Hamburg. City Manager Martin remarked that after having several discussions about the waterfront with the Commissioners and realizing the differing views of scope and cost it is evident more direction is needed in order to move forward. Recognizing that the Commission is dedicated to the waterfront projects, City Manager Martin recommended it be removed from the forthcoming 6:00pm City Commission Regular Meeting in an effort to determine what is needed for development.

Mr. Greg Bryla, Orlando, Florida, a Principal with Dix+Hite Landscape Architects along with Ms. Beth Lemke of Planning Solutions, 206 N. Beach Street, Daytona Beach. Mr. Bryla stated as per the guidelines of the Request for Proposal (RFP), the designed plan was presented to the Commission. In the past week, a plan has been crafted outlining the steps needed to be taken to move forward. The goal is to evaluate and validate current data, facilitate public workshops and present deliverables of completed Dix+Hite projects for an open, vetted, transparent process to circumvent any "surprises". Using bite size tasks to glean deliverables requiring Commission approval to keep everyone current and move forward toward the August 15th deadline as per the RFP.

Vice Mayor Kreger shared that out of twenty area parks the Fernandina Beach river park is ranked #5 overall and #1 in best maintained. It is not necessary to reinvent the city. This waterfront project has morphed into a massive project although the original intention was to only look at the marina and waterfront. Considering the project redundant work, another consultant is not necessary. A small consulting project is needed that's specific and separates North Front. Stormwater and engineering should not be a part of this project. The Commission needs to come together with a realistic consensus and move forward.

Commissioner Poynter stated he is looking at the project as an overall downtown, marina, parking plan. As downtown gets busier, even in the off season and with an influx of new residents, it's important to look ten-fifteen years from now. The vision is a more comprehensive plan with better community involvement. Comparing Jacksonville Beach, which started phase one improvements ten years ago and is just starting phase two, is a great example and the direction that he envisions for the City. If nothing is done, as in past years, failure is inevitable. The health of a downtown is the health of a City. It works from the inside out.

Commissioner Smith asked Commissioner Poynter for clarification and if envisioning this plan is to be from 8th Street to the waterfront? Commissioner Poynter answered yes and he does not advocate for parking along the waterfront, the most valuable piece of property. Using St. Augustine as an example, Commissioner Poynter noted there is a move to have fewer cars downtown and have free

shuttle services which bus visitors into downtown from the outskirts. Here in Fernandina Beach, weekends often have cars in gridlock downtown and there are more people walking on the sidewalks and it's becoming its own pavilion. The City is getting a new eighty room hotel, twenty-five new townhouses and there is development all around with nothing being done to plan for the influx of traffic. A five, ten or twenty-five year plan is needed.

Commissioner Smith stated having lived in South Florida, there is no traffic (in Fernandina Beach) compared to that area. There is an uncertainty as to how much more the City can develop and if a point will be reached where the City can no longer accommodate more tourists, which could be a good thing. The traffic is not as bad as people say.

Commissioner Poynter disagreed and asked if the traffic could be bad ten years from now. Commissioner Smith responded "Personally, no". In ten years this town should not become a St. Augustine, which is too commercialized now.

Ms. Lemke interjected that the discussion is helpful and offered this could be a limited plan with a different scope or it could be comprehensive. The team that developed the request for proposal has expertise in different areas and is able to connect the dots in this process and that tends to be more successful rather than putting band aids on different issue areas. The process is to guide the Commission and the public to move forward utilizing the expertise of the experienced team who has invested deep thought into what would work and be the best plan for the City. Connecting the dots yields the best results.

Mr. Bryla remarked the entire City is not going to be reworked; the focus is on the waterfront. Identifying catalyst projects that will contribute to growth in later years will be identified. The team will validate what has already been done and guide the Commission in understanding the scope. Seeing the big picture and how it all connects, noting the study done for the 18,000 lineal feet of sidewalks in the past that could be incorporated or implemented. Ms. Lemke noted connections that take views, parking, and traffic will all be taken into consideration.

Vice Mayor Kreger reiterated lots of studies have already been done and not implemented. It's the responsibility of the City to implement those things. Noting a better 1/8 of a mile of waterfront is what's desired here, in other towns, there are beautiful waterfronts that have parking because the issue is people not wanting to walk. The Northeast Florida Regional Development will give free economic development models. The argument is that the City could do the waterfront development without a consultant as it is costly, the issue is not about it being looked at, it's who is looking at it.

Commissioner Miller reflected that four years ago Mr. George Sheffield asked that a park be built before he dies and if something isn't done it won't happen. Watching the everyday occurrence of more traffic flow downtown, there isn't a parking problem there is a walking problem. It's important to listen to the experts who understand traffic flow patterns and what is needed.

Commissioner Smith refuted that tourism wouldn't grow rather that tourism should be stopped from growing to prevent the City from becoming a St. Augustine or Hilton Head Island. Maintaining the sense of our City and believes most people do not want it to develop in that way. Commissioner Miller noted there are checks and balances in place with historic restrictions, height limits, etc. which are great and unlikely to allow Fernandina beach to become a St. Augustine or similar.

Commissioner Poynter stated people will still be coming to Fernandina Beach. With 40,000 new houses being constructed in Nassau County, they will visit our City. The numbers have increased over the last ten years and it's about planning for the future, if it's not controlled the public will park wherever they want. The reason a consultant is advocated for is because City staff is inundated trying to stay on top of current projects, nor does the City have the resources i.e. software, expertise etc. to implement a plan which is why it is favorable to use someone outside of the City.

Mayor Lentz interjected that her own list coincided with the elements in the draft plan however the cost invoked sticker shock, although she is in favor of using an outside source to assist us and be an objective consultant to facilitate the vision while looking at the plan as a whole and process it in phases.

Vice Mayor Kreger responded the failure to implement plans has nothing to do with the consultants who have been hired. Working on enforcing parking, installing signage, etc. city staff doesn't need to write anything as it's already been written. A priority should be dealing with parking on Sadler Road and the beaches. It was obvious from day one that the consultants would cost a lot of money. From his perspective the scope and the cost are high and the city, with a big staff including two engineers and the community development team, should be using these resources rather than go to a third party to tell us what we already know. Consensus is needed to move forward and there is uncertainty at this stage for proceeding.

Commissioner Poynter countered that it's beneficial to spend money wisely at the beginning then other things will work out to move forward. Without looking at just the waterfront, it would be nice to have a plan. Rhetorically why doesn't the Commission move forward, is it because there isn't buy in from the community because the Commission hasn't given good reasons to move forward or because there is yearly turnover of Commissioners. An overall plan that could encompass twenty years to avoid randomly spending money that could adversely affect another area in the next few years.

Vice Mayor Kreger stated the original goal was the waterfront and marina. In the park masterplan it talks about a premium upgrade. Hurricane Matthew occurred and interrupted plans. A twenty year master plan is not bad however, the whole City including the beaches should be included in the goals and capital improvement plan, the waterfront shouldn't be tied up in a twenty year plan. Vice Mayor Kreger stated he believes the waterfront development plan/projects should go to referendum the reveal with certainty what the public thinks. Mayor Lentz suggested that it could go to a referendum. Vice Mayor Kreger asked if the waterfront could be worked on, that it's not lack of a plan that previous Commissions didn't implement it's a myriad of problems including the people. If the Commission wants to do a big waterfront plan than it should be done.

Commissioner Poynter responded that the latest discussions to dredge the south end of the marina and expand to the marina to the North end, does not eliminate the silting problem, trying to open Alachua Street was attempted five years ago. The issue with Forward Fernandina is that there were too many things on the plate, it encompasses too much, and it's too broad and needs to be narrowed down. The waterfront and downtown is all encompassing and needs to be factored in along with parking, an overall plan is needed.

Vice Mayor Kreger remarked that putting in a nice park this year could be done without having any significant impact. The purpose of this discussion is to see where this is all going. There has been a lot of public input which has included uncertainty in the big picture.

Mayor Lentz returned to her list and remarked one project leads to another including moving the marina north would change the layout, affect stormwater, have a need for Alachua Street to be open, etc. All the projects are tied to together due to a ripple affect which supports looking at it holistically. Having a park with a beautiful view in lieu of parking is favorable.

Commissioner Smith remarked parking lot C and D need to stay, there is plenty of grass and park. Parking on Front Street is not necessary if the other lots are utilized. Store owners and employees could park there rather than monopolizing premium spots. A linear park similar to the waterfront in St. Mary's Georgia would be optimal. Parking needs to remain. Moving forward on a plausible, reasonable level is the goal.

Commissioner Poynter noted the Commissioners all have their own ideas and it would be helpful to for the Commission and community to have a plan from professionals who can demonstrate to opponents why it's important to embrace this plan. It's important to have a reasonable, plausible plan to present on a referendum if it is expected to pass. As of now there is not an informed decision.

Ms. Lemke noted that having heard that the scope is likable and the price needs to be reviewed. Mayor Lentz replied yes however cheaper. There may be an opportunity to incorporate City staff and offset costs.

Commissioner Smith added the waterfront area north of Brett's Waterway Café restaurant has water rise and tidal action on Front Street, money will need to spent on engineering to even make it plausible to construct in that area. The consultant's price does not include plans for that.

Mayor Lentz asked that City Manager Martin work with the Dix.+Hite consultants on projects pricing and return to the City Commission with something they can agree on.

Ms. Lemke stated she is a problem solver and is a planner, that she enjoys taking elected officials through a process, if we do this plan for the city and you don't build it I will take it personally and desires to the projects she is involved with to fruition.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:58 PM.

ATTEST:



CAROLINE BEST
City Clerk



ROBIN C. LENTZ
Mayor-Commissioner