The City Commission of the City of Fernandina Beach, Florida, met on Tuesday August 29, 2017 at 6:00 pm in the City Hall Commission Chambers. Present were Mayor Robin C. Lentz presiding, Vice Mayor Len Kreger, Commissioners John A. Miller, Tim Poynter, and Roy G. Smith. Also in attendance 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 DOWNTOWN PARKING: Police Chief James Hurley gave a detailed Downtown parking presentation, prepared by the Downtown Parking Committee members comprised of Police Chief James Hurley, Stormwater Manager Mr. Andre Desilet, Community Development Department Senior Planner Ms. Kelly Gibson, Facilities Maintenance Director Mr. Jeremiah Glisson, and Streets & Parks Maintenance Director Mr. Rex A. Lester. An eight question survey was sent to the downtown merchants which received seventy-seven responses. Highlights included paid parking questions; 47% support and 53% would not support paid parking downtown. 66% of respondents are in favor of more public parking lots, 36% want more on street parking, 33% want increased parking enforcement and 26% want paid parking for prime spaces. The survey was mailed to 805 respondents of those 53% are City residents, 70% Amelia Island residents and 88% Nassau County residents, the remainder being from outside the area. The majority of respondents favor additional parking lots or on street parking, 75% would not be willing to pay for prime parking. In the last several years City staff has increased downtown parking by adding two compact vehicle spots, seven loading zones were converted into seventeen parking spots after 5pm, the Nassau County Courthouse now allows parking in their fourteen space lot and the Nassau County Health Department allows parking in their eighteen spots after 5pm. North 2nd Street has eighteen spots, the Broome Street parking lot has twenty-four spots and City Hall has twenty eight spots after 5pm.

City Stormwater Manager Mr. Andre Desilet, taking into account the 2000 Walker Parking Study, noted 678 parking spaces in the Central Business District and 164 at the marina for a total of 842 parking spots. The peak parking demand is Noon on Saturdays which leaves a deficit of twenty-seven spaces. This can create delays and frustration for patrons. Walking distances from parking lots range from 400 to 1600 feet.

Facilities Maintenance Director Mr. Jeremiah Glisson presented options for paid parking including meters and standalone solar powered kiosks that integrate mobile phone applications with a “pay by plate” paperless option. Parking garages can be costly and range in millions of dollars to construct. Projected cost to implement paid parking in the Central Business District is approximately $450,000. An average revenue projection for paid parking is $420,000. After consulting with other cities the uniform response is paid parking equipment pays for itself in approximately nine-eighteen months and is beneficial.

Commissioner Miller asked a series of questions regarding abandoned paid parking programs, flexibility of fees and enforcement times. Mr. Glisson responded to his knowledge no cities have abandoned their paid parking programs and there are fee and enforcement time options to accommodate “grab and go” for shopping situations. Flexibility and tweaking the program during the inaugural year to acclimate staff and the community would be an adaptive process. Police Chief Hurley clarified the presentation before the City Commission is a prompt for direction and action from the Commissioners.

5. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Fernandina Main Street Director Mr. Jeff Kurtz, 715 Centre Street, thanked the Downtown Parking Committee for their thorough research and comprehensive presentation. Mr. Kurtz stated, on behalf of the Fernandina Main Street board, they are in favor of code enforcement of the current three hour parking limit

downtown as prime spaces are often occupied by employees rather than patrons and questioned whether enough time has been dedicated to parking enforcement in order to effect change. Police Chief Hurley questioned the wisdom of forcing people out of town after parking for three hours. If staying four or five hours is an option without penalty when a meter is available, the current parking Ordinance allows for the successful challenging of parking tickets. Police officers serving as parking code enforcers is not necessarily the most optimal use of Police Department personnel.

Mrs. Joan Bean, 141 N. 15th Street, commented parking meters were tried years ago and removed from downtown. Small business owners have numerous expenses and deterring the public from coming downtown could be detrimental. As a part of downtown who struggles, paid parking is an issue that is opposed.

Mr. Lynn Williams, 1899 S. Fletcher Avenue, kudos to Police Chief Hurley and Mr. Desilet for finding extra spaces. Paid parking would be a "great human crime" that will not work as advertised and will be fraught with issues. However, the paid parking kiosks would work well at the beach.

Mr. Allen Mills, 1425 Broome Street, remembers the downtown parking meters and is opposed to reinstalling meters due to his fishing business and employees who use the downtown lots and do not have smart phones to connect to automated kiosks. If paid parking is approved, designated parking for boat slips is needed.

Mr. Philip Chapman, 2120 Florida Ave, if the deficit of parking spaces it only twenty-seven at peak times why is metered parking necessary. Paid parking would change the charm of downtown. Has the Tourist Development Council weighed in on this subject? Downtown as a whole should be reviewed including rebuilding the marina. The Commission has spoken in the past of connecting the dots, what dots will connect to make downtown better by installing parking meters.

Mr. Louis Goldman, 23 S. 6th Street, meters would not personally affect his family however if meters are installed up to 5th Street this will push traffic to 6th and 7th Streets. A neighbor who lives on 6th Street got a ticket for parking in front of his home. The presentation showed towns that have meters but not small towns that don't have meters. A possibility for an extra parking lot would be the Baptist Church parking lot.

Ms. Marisol Triana, 344 Tarpon Avenue, owner of Hola Cuban Café located at 117 Centre Street, parking is a big concern and a big thank you goes out to Police Chief Hurley for enforcing the three hour parking limit as it moves employees to other spots and opens parking for customers. Business owners believe it is unfair to institute paid parking that will directly impact them. Nickel and diming patrons will drive business away and put business owners at a disadvantage and should not be done at their expense.

Mr. Todd Duncan, 515 S. 5th Street, thanked the Police Department for their increased presence and enforcement. Local employees violate the three hour limit and comply when they see a Police Officer. Having open, convenient spots for paying customers keeps businesses downtown.

Mr. Coleman Langshaw, 308 S. 15th Street, noted parking is a supply and demand situation. When there is more demand than space, the turnover rate is not great. Focusing on peak demand times, the beach parking issues and enforcement is a critical piece. Looking at why other communities, national and state parks etc. have had successful paid parking is important. Exemptions for City residents and having marina customers paying dockage fees are options that could be explored. Tax paying City residents technically pay for parking currently and this should be a shared burden especially at peak times.

Vice Mayor Kreger believes the survey speaks for itself in that the majority do not want paid parking downtown. When residents are asked for their opinion the Commission should listen. The Commission should continue to explore increasing parking spaces.

Commissioner Poynter added parking vacillates between being an issue and a non-issue. Exempting residents compounds the problem and will detract from revenue. There are only a handful of times when parking is an issue. Turnover is critical and if parking is not available walking is an option. Keeping downtown operational is costly to the City and residents and currently visitors do not contribute to help defray costs and is a point that should be considered.

Vice Mayor Kreger added St. Simons Island does not have paid parking nor do small towns along the Gulf Coast. Commissioner Smith noted 75% of respondents were from the south end of the island and would not want to pay for parking.

Commissioner Miller was surprised the survey results indicated nearly half the downtown merchants are in favor of paid parking. What will prevent employees who can afford parking to continue to occupy prime spaces? Burdening downtown businesses is a concern and will be a problem if business revenues drop because of paid parking.

Mayor Lentz agreed with different aspects of the debate however citizens who are opposed to paid parking continue to implore the Commission to resolve the "parking problem". Having abundant free parking with paid premium parking would be a beneficial balance. Commissioner Poynter concurred and detailed the numerous areas of free parking which surround the premium paid parking of Centre Street. Commissioner Smith concurred with Commissioner Poynter but was concerned about employees capitalizing on the free parking. Mayor Lentz clarified employees should be parking to keep premium spaces available for paying patrons. Balancing free lots with paid lots and spaces needs to be determined.

Mayor Lentz thanked the Downtown Parking Committee members and City Manager Martin for the detailed presentation and diligence is researching the parking options. Commissioner Poynter noted if there is not a consensus, a change from the three hour parking limit to two hours is proposed. Mayor Lentz polled the Commissioners for who was in favor of premium paid parking. Vice Mayor Kreger urged caution and believes it is prudent to wait for the larger survey results. Commissioner Poynter agreed to wait for the larger survey results although the Ordinance needs to be reviewed. Police Chief Hurley added that volunteer and other programs could be considered in an effort to free up parking spaces if revenue is not a consideration.

Mayor Lentz noted it was not about revenue, except for funding equipment but about solving the parking issues and making changes including reconfiguring parking lot E and revising the parking Ordinance to reflect a two hour parking limit, a change from the current three hour limit.

Vice Mayor Kreger acknowledged City staff for the impressive, quality work they do and added they can do a lot more.

City Manager Martin shared that the randomly mailed survey to 1500 city residents from the National Research Center typically has a return survey rate of 15-30% however City residents have exceeded that reducing the margin of error to 4% down from 5%. Results are anticipated at the end of September.

Mr. Chris McComis, 506 S. 14th Street, believes this to be ridiculously crazy and as a former Californian who witnessed wear and tear on meters due to salt air this should be taken into consideration.

The consensus of the City Commission was to direct City Manager Martin, City Attorney Bach and Police Chief Hurley to meet to discuss and address the parking Ordinance issues and present alternatives along with the National Research Center survey results in an October City Commission Regular Meeting.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:23pm.

ATTEST:

Caroline Best

CAROLINE BEST
City Clerk

JOHN A. MILLER
Mayor-Commissioner