



MINUTES

City Commission Workshop: Downtown Redevelopment Project

10:00 AM – Monday, January 13, 2025 – City Hall

Call to Order: 10:00 a.m.

Acknowledgement of Quorum and Proper Notice

PRESENT: Commissioner George Asbate, Vice Mayor Gary Ashcraft, Commissioner Michael Holland, Commissioner Emily Lee and Mayor Willie Hawkins

1. Workshop Item with Discussion and Direction

1.1 Introductions

Tom Carrino, City Manager, explained the plans for the day. He indicated they would discuss the master plan and downtown redevelopment in the morning with the departmental reports in the afternoon. He announced that Mike Goman with Goman and York would provide a presentation as part of the morning session.

1.2 Presentation by Mike Goman with Goman + York

Michael Goman, Principal, Goman + York Property Advisors, LLC, provided an overview of his personal background and experience as well as that of his company. He commented on commercial real estate investment and development. He reviewed Goman & York's types of clients and the services they typically provide for each type of client. He explained they are typically brought in to consult on large, complex projects and cited the work products they provide including RFP's, RFQ's, development agreements and public participation. He cited examples of stalled or failed projects due to market and functional obsolescence and highlighted issues with eminent domain and contentious land-use issues.

Mr. Goman provided an overview of the industry sector, including central business districts, remote working, conversions of existing buildings and issues with aging buildings. He commented on vacancy rates, leases, the number of government owned buildings and reduced property values. He noted the number of government employees now working primarily from home resulting in a reduction in the required office space. He commented on reduced retail activity and e-commerce noting that shoppers still prefer physical stores. He cited changes in the Florida retail industry noting retail sales, average wages, reduction in the shopping centers, and food and beverage industries. He commented on the changes in regional and community malls. He cited some of the pressures including pricing, staffing shortages, increased costs and reduced operating hours.

Mr. Goman reported on the single family residential market and single family build for rent growth. He commented on the supply and demand with a focus on affordability and outgrowing apartment style living. He cited multi-family development with apartments and commented on affordability and construction costs. He discussed the growth in the self-storage and issues in the warehouse industry. He reviewed his "watch list" including offices, malls, dining, and issues with older hotels and apartments. He commented on

projects with inexperienced sponsors and questionable market dynamics or projections. He explained how they can assist with these situations. He stated cities need to pay attention to older assets and their decreasing values. He reviewed how the current conditions reached where they are now, including trends starting in the 1990's with older properties in trouble, Covid-19 contributing to worsening conditions, tech driving remote working resulting in too much office space. He commented on the renovation of existing office buildings where possible and stated "We're not overbuilt; we're under-demolished."

Mr. Goman reviewed some predictions, including end of a short and shallow slowdown, growth in sunbelt markets, narrowed availability, market uncertainty, cost volatility, interest rates, cost of debt/equity, and flight to quality of markets and products. He explained the moderating of the financing environment with focus on conversions of obsolete properties, increased interest in suburban and low interest in urban, improved market for project financing, and possible reduction in interest rates in 2025. He commented on additional changes to finance. He noted changes expected with retail and restaurants with a greater focus on free-standing retail and curbside pickup. He commented on the investor's view of Florida and stated the market is perceived as a competitive environment.

Mr. Goman reviewed development and redevelopment opportunities. He indicated the following as fundamentals: 1) Need for research with a thorough and supportable understanding of the market; 2) Careful conceptual planning; 3) Need for community engagement; 4) Mitigation of risk; and 5) Access to debt/equity. With redevelopment, he noted the importance of buying at low cost per square foot and mitigation of risk. He highlighted opportunities in Florida with retail/food and beverage, jobs and population growth; apartments with substantial demand for upscale, amenity-rich projects with job growth and locations near highway/transit corridors; and industrial options driven by available labor and near similar uses with highway and transportation nodes. He also commented on conversions of existing malls and office campuses to other uses and construction of new hotels and the conversion of older assets to affordable residential.

Mr. Goman discussed the market profile for the City of Eustis with community profile and trends. He noted access to market data and tools important to communities and businesses. He highlighted the value of these tools to mitigate risk and determine what the market will and will not support. He commented the use of drive time analysis to determine trends and activity. He stated that Eustis uses ESRI to show the retail activity of stores. He noted a Tapestry Segmentation analysis of the N. Eustis Street area, Drive-Time, and LifeModes to identify the market in specific areas. Mr. Gorman noted the accuracy of data with five, ten and fifteen minute drive-time descriptions with Tapestry. He commented on traffic counts and stated that traffic counts are critically important in the analysis particularly from a retail standpoint to predict the sales profitability. He indicated a lot of businesses are only interested if the traffic counts are over 20,000 per day.

Mr. Goman reviewed the importance of data and the basics of attracting CRE investment which is analytical and data driven, including avoiding faulty assumptions. He highlighted being prepared to be pro-active, knowing the market, anticipating the response, barriers both financial and regulatory, updating zoning and permitting criteria to be swift, simple and certain, and telling an investment story.

Mr. Goman reviewed the process of understanding the industry and the disparate views of the community vs the developer's goals. He noted community lifestyle concerns with

traffic, fit with "character of the community," and fiscal and economic impact. He reviewed developer goals and opportunities that are primarily quantitative with acceptable returns measured against other investments and including aggressive solicitation by communities. He indicated that developers get presented many projects each year but they only build one or two a year. He stated that from the developer perspective, "What Makes Financial Sense Gets Built and What Doesn't, Doesn't."

Mr. Goman explained the need to understand the industry and the long timelines. He stated that the industry is highly competitive, highlighted the need to mitigate risk and added that public incentives are a competitive tool. He reviewed the process beginning with the RFQ/RFP. He cited the key issues involved with the interviews, negotiations, legal counsel, development agreement considerations, negotiation of incentives such as sale of land, TIF/CEA, tax abatement, reductions in permitting fees, and sharing of infrastructure costs.

In summary, Mr. Goman stated record activity is expected in 2025-2026 with capital investors looking for opportunities and ideas, redevelopment opportunities, and emerging demand for new products and services. He commented on topics for discussion including the Downtown Master Plan, options for today's apartment residents and ground lease alternative options.

Mr. Goman complimented the City on the downtown master plan. He stated most apartment residents are DINK's (double income no kids), recently divorced (about 25% of renters), working empty nesters, and retired empty nesters. He commented on ground leases which are usually in more urban environments and most developers will not do them. He stated that developers and lenders want to own the land and explained why.

1.3 Downtown Project Discussion, Question and Answer

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked why he indicated the Master Plan is too generic with Mr. Goman responding that there needs to be another level of detail. He added that the current plan was appropriate for the assignment provided to the consultant but a developer would need to develop more detail in order to obtain financing.

Mayor Hawkins thanked Mr. Goman and stated his presentation was a wake up call for the Commission.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft commented that the City's consultant should have also done that with Mr. Goman indicating the City could ask the consultant to do a full market study once they have a specific plan. He stated that the next step would be to have some take on the financial information and develop detailed pro formas. He commented on how a consultant would be tasked with looking at the pro formas to see that the developer's figures are accurate and substantiate any request for abatements or incentives. He explained how his company would look at a developer's information to confirm that it is appropriate for a given site.

Mr. Carrino explained MIG completed the City's master plan and stated they were hired to collect public input and develop a shared vision. They had a subconsultant, Johnson Consulting, who was supposed to look at the financials and the market which showed information such as the recommended number of residential units and commercial square footage. He stated that MIG has laid the groundwork and done some basic analysis for a shared vision. The developer has to take the information and move forward with that. He stated his opinion the City has a good master plan but there is

more work to be done and that is where they are now. Mr. Goman agreed with Mr. Carrino's statement.

Mayor Hawkins echoed the comments of Mr. Carrino and Mr. Goman with Mr. Goman stating his job is to mitigate risk to the community and not to protect the developer.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked if the City should have a land use attorney with Mr. Goman responding not a land use attorney but a development attorney. He explained the agreement should show that the land is not transferred to the developer until certain criteria are met and that the agreement also provides remedies in case something goes wrong. He indicated they work alongside the community's legal counsel to protect the community.

Commissioner Asbate commented that the attorney he previously mentioned was intended more for in-house negotiations for developments. He stated he struggles with how to get the ball rolling the right way and he expressed support for getting the building and architectural standards improved prior to more development.

Mr. Goman responded that would be the ideal way to do it; however, the process can be on a concurrent path. He explained that development is based on timing and capital availability. He commented on the need to work with the developers without delaying due to desire to improve the standards.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked if that could be incorporated into the development agreement with Mr. Goman responding that review of architectural criteria could be included in a development agreement.

Mr. Goman cited the lakefront as a jewel for the City. He commented on the City's growth potential. He indicated Eustis should not be Mount Dora but should be a good alternative. He said the comprehensive nature of the master plan is a good thing but the City needs to pursue development opportunities when the opportunity presents itself.

Commissioner Asbate asked Mr. Goman's opinion about the recommendations included in the master plan.

Mr. Goman responded that he did not see anything in the master plan that caused concern. He stated he thought it is an excellent master plan but it is only a piece of the puzzle.

Mayor Hawkins asked how many master plans he has reviewed with Mr. Goman indicating he reviews 30 to 40 per year; however, his company also prepares master plans. He explained the purpose of a master plan is to attract investment capital. He stated that his company focuses on a data driven plan. He provided a number of examples. He added that the City has some momentum and a workable document and they need to keep moving forward with it. He explained that they do not put out an RFP/RFQ but instead personally contact principals of a development company and present their ideas.

Commissioner Lee asked what he would suggest they need to do to get to the next level from the master plan.

Mr. Goman responded he would talk with staff about where they are with any updates. You need to see what you have in place regarding architectural standards and design standards and then look for ways to modernize that.

Mr. Carrino asked if it would be reasonable to secure the services of a consultant and specialized legal assistance to move forward to the next stages with Mr. Goman indicating that would be a good next step. He commented on communities who had projects that stalled and how his company had helped them.

Mayor Hawkins expressed support for moving forward and hiring a consultant.

Commissioner Lee commented on the upcoming approval of the master plan at the next CRA meeting.

Mr. Carrino noted that they will also have to incorporate the master plan into the CRA redevelopment plan. He indicated the City Commission actually has to approve the CRA redevelopment plan. The CRA will consider a recommendation to approve and incorporate the master plan into the CRA redevelopment plan at their January 16th meeting and then it will go to the City Commission on February 6, 2025, to be incorporated into the CRA redevelopment plan.

Discussion was held regarding holding a workshop to review the master plan.

Mr. Carrino asked for consensus to hold a workshop to review the master plan prior to approval by the Commission. It was a consensus to hold the workshop with Mr. Carrino indicating he would discuss the procurement process with purchasing. He indicated the City has used Guenster and Associates for land use issues, not redevelopment.

Mr. Carrino indicated that staff can identify a real estate consultant who can paraphrase the protections the City needs in an agreement and they can then work with the City Attorney on executing that language. He added that they may not identify specialized legal help if a real estate consultant can explain what they want in an agreement.

Commissioner Asbate asked for a prospective timeline with Mr. Goman estimating they are approximately three to four years away from the first occupants for the residential units.

Commissioner Asbate noted the master plan has eight targets and the Waterman site is only one of eight. He asked for a timeline to implement the entire Master plan.

Mr. Goman stated it would probably be 15-20 years for the whole master plan.

Mayor Hawkins stated his desire to see movement on the downtown area to encourage interest with Mr. Goman commenting that when developers see other projects underway it helps to encourage additional development.

Commissioner Asbate cautioned that the City needs to make sure they have all of their staff and consultants in place and their vision for moving forward.

The Commission thanked Mr. Goman for his presentation and Mr. Carrino indicated that staff would distribute Mr. Goman's presentation to all of the Commissioners.

RECESS: 12:11 P.M. RECONVENE: 1:16 P.M.

1.4 Department Updates:

Commissioner Holland announced he would need to leave before 2:00 p.m. He thanked staff for their participation.

City Manager

Mr. Carrino provided an overview of all the divisions included under the City Manager including City Clerk. He noted that Events and Tourism was separated into a new department which also includes Communications.

Mr. Carrino highlighted a number of areas of focus including the following: 1) Revision of the Land Development Regulations specifically improving the quality of single family subdivisions. This would include working on regulations and guidelines to improve that quality. He cited the direction from Kimley-Horn and noted they are working with one major property owner. 2) Implementation of the downtown master plan, redevelopment of the downtown and development of the former Waterman site; and 3) Addressing the outdated strategic plan. He indicated a consultant was engaged; however, due to departure of former Commissioner Nan Cobb and three seats being up for election, staff had opted to postpone work on the strategic plan until the swearing in of any new Commissioners. He stated that now staff would re-engage the consultant and begin work on the strategic plan.

Mr. Carrino explained that he asked each department to provide a five and ten minute presentation regarding the organization of their department and some of their goals and issues.

Mayor Hawkins asked if there is anything the Commission needs to be concern about in developing the Strategic Plan.

Mr. Carrino stated a municipality will always be somewhat reactive due to changing priorities within the community. He indicated they need to continue to be flexible while also working on the Strategic Plan. He explained the existing plan was prepared in 2012 and reviewed the history of updating the plan stating they have been working on that for about three years. He indicated he would need to reengage with the former consultant to determine the cost for the plan.

Mr. Carrino explained the review process in selecting Wildan as their strategic plan consultant.

The Commission asked for an estimated time for completion with Mr. Carrino estimating nine months.

Discussion was held regarding the need to move faster and where they were in the process prior to putting it on hold.

City Clerk

Christine Halloran, City Clerk, provided an overview of the Clerk's Office accomplishments in 2024 and plans for 2025. She provided an update on their scan project and implementation of new Laserfiche software and explained how that would be utilized.

Events, Tourism and Communication

Miranda Muir, Director, reviewed their staff roles and responsibilities. She provided an overview of all the events held in 2024. She commented on the number of new vendors and partnerships with school groups and organizations which helped with volunteers. She commented on the inaugural Miss Georgefest as part of Miss

Florida. She noted that the City's representatives received \$5,000 in scholarships and earned another \$5,000 in scholarships at the Miss Florida pageant. She reported on the opening of the Clifford House and how well the tours are going on.

Discussion was held regarding what could be done to improve security for the Clifford House.

Ms. Muir commented on the hiring of the new Public Relations Manager - Jaime Lanford and how well Marissa Cella filled in during the lapse. She noted that Marissa had initiated a weekly email to residents and downtown businesses. She stated that for 2025 they want to focus on expanding events such as Georgefest and the boat races into regional events. She indicated they would expand advertising and offerings to do that. She noted the department has taken over the Amazing Race event. She commented on how she intends to work on the growth and development of her team. She noted that they have rebranded the Georgefest logo to increase recognition of the event and provide consistent messaging.

Ms. Muir commented on getting the Communications team in place with the hiring of Ms. Lanford. She stated that the City needs to get more messages out to the public about the City, its staff and events. They also need to develop media relationships with TV, radio and newspapers. She noted that they invited some social media influencers to the snow event and the benefit to getting them to post about the City. She stated she will be evaluating what the City is currently doing and reviewing its methods of communication. She indicated they need to determine the best methods to communicate so they get the best bang for the buck. She emphasized encouraging her staff to think outside of the box and to try new things.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about the weekly updates with Ms. Muir indicating they come from Nichole Jenkins in Water Customer Service. She indicated residents can also sign up on the City's website to subscribe to the updates.

Mayor Hawkins noted he has friends in Orlando who knew about Georgefest. He asked how they plan to make them better.

Ms. Muir responded she was asked to make Georgefest bigger and longer and explained how she has worked to do that. She commented on the better entertainment she has been able to attract to the City. She explained why she encourages everyone to follow all the safety measures surrounding the entertainment. She added that building the relationships with groups such as the high school drama club and the American Girls group from Lifepointe Church has provided a group of volunteers they can utilize.

Mayor Hawkins asked about their relationship with the downtown businesses with Ms. Muir responding that some are very supportive and others not as much. She cited things the businesses could do to help improve their foot traffic during events.

Commissioner Asbate asked about doing some video for commercials to attract out of town people with Ms. Muir responding that commercials are expensive. However, they are having someone shoot some quality video that could be used for either commercials or social media.

Commissioner Asbate asked what she thinks about putting a small band in pocket park to try and give a little push to the downtown and how long it would take to get a return.

Ms. Muir responded that for larger events they say to usually give it three years. She said that adding entertainment will add some liveliness to the downtown. She indicated

that encouraging people to wander about the downtown would be a good thing whether or not people are sitting in front of the band.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the need for the downtown businesses to help promote those events.

Mayor Hawkins asked what Georgefest will look like when work begins on the downtown project with Ms. Muir responding that parking will probably be the biggest issue. She suggested it might be possible to reserve the fairgrounds to use for parking and offer shuttle service.

Commissioner Lee suggested that a porch band be placed at the Clifford House with Ms. Muir noting that the world's largest rubber duck will be located in Ferran Park during this year's Georgefest. She announced that Duke Energy donated \$10,000 towards Georgefest. She commented on plans to place other events at the Clifford House but it would be difficult to move the Georgefest activities there due to the presence of the giant rubber duck.

Mayor Hawkins asked about possibly expanding the Light Up event with Ms. Muir noting there was some expansion in 2024 into Fountain Green. She stated they had some photo ops and bounce houses for the kids. She added they also had an antique car that drove around playing Christmas carols during the event. She cited other kid-oriented vendors there as well. She stated they are almost outgrowing the park.

Economic Development

Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, announced Grant writer Nadine Mann would be leaving the City to work for Lake County. He indicated they would be looking for a new grant writer in the near future. He added that the president of the Ocala Chamber of Commerce, who houses LEAD (Lake Area Economic Development Marketing and Facilitation Organization) is leaving to go to Charleston, South Carolina. He stated they would continue to work with them as normal.

Mr. Latimer reviewed the Economic Development activities and benefits of each and commented on the need to diversify businesses within the City. He cited the downtown revitalization and commented on how the Coolidge project helped the City to take on more waste from Florida Foods which enabled them to expand. He cited the City's demographics and changes.

Mayor Hawkins questioned the accuracy of the median household income with Mr. Latimer assuring him it was accurate. He then stated that 70% of the City's homes are owner occupied. He cited the Golden Triangle GDP is \$2.5 billion. He stated the leading industries are manufacturing, construction, retail, health care, education, tourism and agriculture. He commented that there are strong companies within the community that have the strength to grow. He commented on Economic Development's efforts to assist those companies. He cited the following economic development activities performed on a regular basis: 1) Research and due diligence; 2) Business development; 3) Business assistance to identify resources to assist with specific issues; 4) Redevelopment; 5) Small business and entrepreneurial hub; 6) Engaging with partners such as Lake Sumter State College and Lake Tech; and 7) Grants development.

Mr. Latimer cited the economic development marketing study which should conclude within the next two months and is being funded by a \$30,000 grant from Duke Energy. He noted that G3 C2 also provided \$10,000 towards that study. He then noted

the targeted industry study which will help identify businesses and assist with diversification of businesses. He then reviewed the land analysis which will consist of reviewing the City-owned properties and providing some recommendations regarding what those properties may be utilized for. He indicated that would be brought to the Commission later in the year.

Mr. Latimer then cited Trident Boats who will begin tour boat operations toward the end of 2025 if all of the infrastructure is in place. He commented on how that will further distinguish the City. He commented on how the City provided assistance to various businesses including RCM Utilities, Florida Food Products, and Quest Fuel.

Mr. Latimer then discussed their redevelopment activities including the former Waterman site, gateway grants, and development of a business growth and sustainability incentive program. He reviewed the benefits being derived from the UCF Business Incubator program. He commented on the City's partnerships with Lake Sumter State College and Lake Tech. He reported on the City's grant development stating that in 2024 the City applied for 16 grants and were awarded half of those for a total of \$563,449. He stated that, additionally, the grants staff also assists with the preparation of the City's legislative appropriation requests which resulted in \$1.5 million awarded for the Coolidge infrastructure project.

Commissioner Asbate requested a breakdown of the grant funds received with Mr. Latimer indicating he could provide that.

Commissioner Lee confirmed the total includes the JAG grants received for the Police Department with Mr. Latimer stating those are applied for every year and then there are cycle grants such as Firehouse Subs that are quarterly. He indicated the City would submit at least for two quarters. He noted they had submitted for a T-Mobile grant last year which they did not receive but they came close so they would be applying again.

The Commission asked if the total included the public safety grant with Mr. Latimer responding affirmatively. He explained that Nadine Mann collaborated with the police and fire personnel to complete the grants. The Commission questioned the next step after Ms. Mann leaves with Mr. Latimer stating they will be rehiring for the position. He explained that Ms. Mann has also been assisting with compliance as well as the submittals.

Mr. Carrino explained there is a difference between grant writing and grant administration. He stated they need to determine what is most appropriate to be done inhouse and what could be outsourced. He noted a company that proposed a retainer relationship. He commented on the state appropriations and stated those have a lot of reporting requirements.

Commissioner Ashcraft noted that the Florida League of Cities has an arm that can assist with grant administration. He commented that the City needs to make sure they have the tools on hand to take advantage of grant opportunities.

Mr. Carrino stated that the City has not been including in their grant submittals any funding for grant administration. He indicated that may help the City get grants but then the City has to absorb that cost.

Commissioner Lee asked if the grant writer also receives a portion of any grant that is awarded or do they only received a salary. It was confirmed that they have a set salary.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not it would be cost effective to outsource the grant writing with Mr. Latimer indicating the cost to outsource is more than what would be cost effective. He indicated the salary is currently in the mid-\$40,000 range.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not \$40,000 is sufficient for the position in order to get someone with experience. Discussion was also held regarding hiring a grant administrator or outsourcing the grant writing and the possibility of utilizing more than one company to do the grant writing.

Mr. Carrino explained the City periodically advertises for professional companies for various services. He stated they previously included grant writing in those ads but did not receive any responses. He indicated staff will be reissuing that advertisement specifically for grant services. He noted that most companies specialize in certain types of grants so they may need to obtain multiple companies. He stated that grants administration is different and they could possibly only use one company for that. He indicated staff will need to do some research to identify how to secure the grants and then how to administer them.

Commissioner Ashcraft suggested reaching out to the City's lobbyist with Mr. Carrino noting that they have utilized Fred Fox in the past who helped the City obtain FRDAP and CDBG grants. He explained that he does it at risk with the hope the City would hire him to administer the grants. He added that Sam Brinson has a relationship with the South Florida company.

Further discussion was held regarding how fast they need to move and the benefit to having someone inhouse.

Mr. Latimer reviewed the Downtown and East Town CRA activities including redevelopment agreements and updating the redevelopment plan. He added they continue to work on infrastructure improvements including the seawall, street improvements and wayfinding.

The Commission asked what he needs that he doesn't have, besides a grant writer, with Mr. Latimer responding that he could use some temporary administrative support as he will have to take over the grant writer function until that position is filled. He cited specific activities that would include such as the gateway grants and the downtown incentive program.

Mayor Hawkins asked how long does it take to go through the hiring process once someone is identified with Karen Crouch responding, once identified, about two weeks. The problem is finding the right person.

Mayor Hawkins asked about the salary matrix with Ms. Crouch responding that they have a company that does the salary comparison and indicated they now may have a better idea of what is needed for the grant writer position.

Commissioner Asbate expressed support for outsourcing but noted that companies often want their payment upfront instead of waiting for payment from the grant proceeds.

Development Services

Mike Lane, Development Services Director, explained what the department oversees and provided statistics for the current fiscal year versus previous years. He noted that Eustis is the third largest city in Lake County. He cited the Eustis Village visitors per

year as compared to other areas. He reviewed the City of Eustis retail rankings identified through Placer. He indicated that the area around Eustis Village is underutilized. He commented on the need to get the word out about the City's retail statistics.

Mr. Lane reviewed some of the department's activities and plans for improvement including the implementation of a software program such as GovWell which will streamline the department and make it more efficient. He cited the department's work with Kimley-Horn for revision of the land development regulations and architectural design guidelines. He commented on recommended changes to the landscape requirements including caliper vs. canopy, addition of shrub requirements, tree bank and tree mitigation fund. He cited the need for buffer requirements between buildings and how that could supplement the America in Bloom activities.

Mr. Lane reported on the need for the City to complete the Evaluation and Appraisal Report for the Comprehensive Plan pursuant to state statute. He then reviewed the recommended changes to the "table of uses" and cited recommended changes pertaining to hookah/vapor bar taverns and self-service storage facilities.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about code requirements for maintenance of landscaping with Mr. Lane confirming there are requirements for irrigation and explained why the retailers don't always use or maintain the irrigation.

Commissioner Asbate commented on several code enforcement issues regarding failure to maintain their landscaping. He cited the need to make sure building plans are archived digitally. He then asked Mr. Lane's feelings about the presentation by Mike Goman

Mr. Lane responded that Mr. Goman was on point and agreed there are companies that could be hired to assist City staff. He indicated they would probably have to go through a procurement process which would help get it right.

RECESS: 2:57 P.M. RECONVENE: 3:06 P.M.

Library

Ann Ivey, Library Director, commented on the improvements to the library since joining the Lake County Library System. She announced the library's implementation of an e-book app. She cited the various notices they send out and their new website. She commented on their newest data base of Peterson which provides online practice testing and the positive feedback they have received. She noted there is also an online resume builder as part of it. She indicated they are going to be setting up an AI dedicated computer as well. She commented on how all the new activities are increasing the library's membership.

Ms. Ivey then reviewed plans for upcoming programs including a grant to expand the meeting room space which was awarded to the library. She explained that once the plans are done they will be eligible for two other grants that would award \$1 million for construction. She further explained what those plans would entail.

Ms. Ivey then reported on the revision of the interlocal agreement for the library system and commented on her involvement in that revision. She cited upcoming activities and noted they are publicized through Facebook and Instagram. She stated their circulation was up to 100,000 per year. She emphasized activities they are doing through a variety of partnerships.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked if Eustis has the largest circulation in the County with Ms. Ivey indicating that the City ranks 4th but they do have the most available materials. He asked about additional marketing with Ms. Ivey indicating they are also sending flyers to local churches to get circulated to their parishioners. She noted that is only for the bigger events. She indicated they have started using social media blasts as well and added they are working with the new Communications Manager to see how they can make the library more visible.

Mayor Hawkins asked if the City could put a department spotlight in each month's water bill or online.

Commissioner Lee complimented Ms. Ivey on their America in Bloom activities who noted that is part of their partnership with the Ag program. She noted they are hoping to bring back the Wills and Trusts program. She indicated they won't be having tax preparation in 2025 due to the lack of space.

Finance

Lori Carr, Finance Director, explained that Finance is over four divisions: Finance and Accounting, Purchasing, Water Customer Service and Information Technology (IT). She invited Bryce Hale to come up first to discuss IT.

Mr. Hale, IT Director, noted they have doubled the City Hall internet speed and they are moving to eustis.gov at no cost. He announced that IT has moved to the second floor at the Annex. He commented on the installation of three interactive white boards that will be installed at the Police Department, Fire Department and City Hall. He stated they have purchased 55 Toughbooks for PD and EFD. He noted are selling outdated computers to employees for \$10. He announced they have fifty new security cameras being ordered. He stated the purchase order is in process. He indicated they will be installed at Ferran Park, Sunset Park, Eustis PD, Evidence Barn, Community Center, Rec Center, Water Plant, Women's Club and Clifford House.

Mayor Hawkins asked how soon the cameras will be installed with Mr. Hale responding the vendor will begin installation as soon as the check is in their hand. He expressed support for getting the cameras in the park installed prior to Georgefest. He then commented on his five-year dream list. He indicated the City has 30 switches with a third of them needing to be replaced in the next five years. He commented on the possibility of obtaining grants to assist with that. He stated that his five year plan is to get cameras installed at Wastewater, Police Department and the exterior of all City buildings. He then commented on the need for more wireless access points and the need to improve the sound in the Commission Room, Community Building and Women's Club.

Mr. Hale then cited the following needs: 1) upgrading the phone handsets; 2) new servers for City Hall, EPD and the Water Department; 3) upgrade PC's and laptops; 4) upgrade all monitors so all have a minimum of 27" monitors; 5) cleanup wiring closets; and 6) hiring a network administrator. He confirmed they would be addressing the Commission Room sound and would be doing additional training for running the sound system and livestreaming.

Ms. Carr reviewed the Purchasing Division responsibilities and noted that they are working on a succession plan for the division due to the eventual retirement of the current Purchasing Director. She then commented on Water Customer Service and cited their responsibilities including the implementation of the new incentive for utilizing

the electronic billing and online payment. She noted they would have a table at Georgefest to try and publicize that program. She stated they would be implementing new credit card scanners which would allow them to accept payments from ApplePay, GooglePay and the chip reader. She stated they are working with Edmunds to allow online applications.

Mr. Hale explained the new credit card readers would have to be installed wherever they process payments.

Ms. Carr explained they are planning to revise the utility routes to make them more efficient. She stated they are going to discuss with Waste Management them using the same revised utility routes to make the garbage pickup more efficient as well. She indicated they also want to update the utility rates so that they encompass all of the peripheral services as well.

Commissioner Lee asked about credit card surcharges with Ms. Carr indicating there will be a discussion at the first Commission meeting in February. She stated they currently pay a 3% credit card fee which is absorbed for any payments made at Customer Service but it is added at any of the remote locations.

Ms. Carr stated that the City is very fiscally sound with very little debt. She indicated Finance is currently fully staffed. She stated they are looking to revamp the entire budget and streamlining several processes. She noted that the new Asst. Finance Director has found a number of discrepancies in the City's accounting software system; however, they are being resolved. She indicated that the problem seemed to occur when Edmunds reports were dumped into their other accounting system.

Mayor Hawkins asked how long the City has been relying on inaccurate figures with Ms. Carr indicating probably since the program was implemented ten years ago. She explained where the issues were occurring.

Mari Leisen, Assistant Finance Director, explained mostly it was some of the expenditures not tying to the proper department.

Mr. Carrino explained that Edmunds and Gravity do not communicate well. The City has had Edmunds for ten years but Gravity only a few years. He stated they are not continuing with Gravity.

Ms. Carr explained there were no material errors. She commented on how they are trying resolve a number of issues and become more efficient. She then reviewed the other responsibilities within the department including Accounts Payable, Payroll, Budgeting, Risk Management (excluding Workers Comp.). She cited their plans for the next five years including replacing the ERP system or revamp the existing one. She provided a rough estimate of \$1 million for that. She noted there are a number of systems in use throughout the City and stated she would like to bring everything into one system.

Commissioner Asbate asked if there are grants for that with Mr. Hale indicating there is.

Ms. Carr further commented on their work on succession planning, revising the financial policies and documentation of all processes and procedures. She commented on her efforts to get all of the staff more aware of each other's duties and doing more cross training. She indicated one of her staff members is trying to get CGFO certification. She stated her interest in adding a grants compliance and reporting

position. She commented on the amount of paperwork required for a number of the grants and FEMA funding.

Ms. Carr commented on the availability of cybersecurity grants. She noted the ability to seek grants ahead of time based on the five-year CIP. She added that the amount of allowed administrative cost has been increased to 15% for FEMA awards although they are currently 10%. She cited the amount of paperwork required for state and federal awards.

Discussion was held regarding the need for a more comprehensive grants process and how that is being developed.

Human Resources

Karen Crouch, Human Resources Director, noted she was the Benefits Administrator for the first part of the year and cited other issues during the previous fiscal year including the retirement of the previous HR Director. She noted that Jamie Tusing was promoted to HR Coordinator when she was promoted to HR Director. She cited the hiring of Molly Schmidt and Sally Alford.

Ms. Crouch commented on the complexity of the hiring process and reported that in 2024 the City hired 56 fulltime employees, 32 part-time, 17 volunteers and one Commissioner. She cited the costs of hiring new employees. She stated the City has approximately 244 employees. She commented on the amount of paperwork involved whenever there is turnover. She then explained they also maintain the employee benefits, union negotiations, budgeting, ensure the City meets all federal labor requirements, provide employee training, fulfill public records requests, track family medical leave and stage two employee events each year.

Ms. Crouch commented on their goals for 2025 including revising the City's Personnel Rules and Regulations. She noted the need for some new policies to be written and indicated they are currently in negotiations with both labor unions. She indicated they are working with the City Clerk's office regarding the City's board and committee volunteers. She stated their intent to implement local GovU training program provided by Public Risk Management. She commented on the need for additional training for new supervisors including creating a supervisory manual regarding processes and procedures. She stated they want to encourage staff members to take advantage of the Feeling Fit program. She concluded noting they are working to reduce worker's comp. injuries.

Mayor Hawkins asked about the use of interns with Ms. Crouch noting the use of a high school intern by Public Works to do scanning.

Mayor Hawkins asked if the City could expand on the intern program with Ms. Crouch noting the City does have volunteers including those at Parks and Recreation and the Library as well as board members. She indicated they hired 17 volunteers in 2024. She commented they could possibly expand the intern program through UCF. She cited an intern in Development Services and some at the Police Department.

Ms. Crouch commented on the reason for most of the turnovers due to low salaries. She stated most of the City's salaries are not very competitive.

Discussion was held regarding turnover and how competitive the City's total benefit package is.

Mayor Hawkins asked about whether or not the City has a discussion with new employees about financial planning with Ms. Crouch indicating the City has a company it contracts with that does provide financial planning advice.

Ms. Crouch noted that the City does send out benefit summaries annually. She explained you can't really do it for brand new employees due to the need for them to select different benefits regarding insurance.

Discussion was held regarding salary comparison studies and how salaries are determined.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the anticipated salary for a grant writer with Ms. Crouch commenting that the previously cited \$110,000 is more than many of the City's department directors are paid. She indicated that most people that want to work in the public sector know that the salaries aren't as high as the private sector. She indicated that the salary survey that's mailed out may have that position but expressed concern that the City can't compete with the larger cities in south Florida or north Florida.

Mr. Carrino commented on the City's outsourcing of the Building Official position due to not being able to meet the salary expectations. He commented on the need to balance internal equity versus external comparison. He explained the point system only deals with internal equity.

Discussion was held regarding the grant writer position and salary and upcoming projects that would require some grant funding.

Ms. Crouch commented on the need to rework the grant writer job description for point factoring.

Discussion was held regarding the need for two actual positions - one grant writer and one grants administrator and the possibility of outsourcing.

Parks and Recreation

Sam Brinson, Parks and Recreation Director, reviewed the department responsibilities. He commented on his efforts to improve the customer service and teamwork aspects of the department and how he worked to get more buy-in from his staff. He then cited other changes to the department including increasing the summer camp registration, changed the senior program breakfast to include foods beside doughnuts, and implemented a teen program.

Mr. Brinson noted he hired a new Teen Coordinator to facilitate that program. He then cited a number of new athletic programs implemented and various new events. He commented on improvements being made to the City's parks and various buildings. He stated he would like to expand the department to include maintenance of all the City's parks. He confirmed they utilize a checklist for maintenance of all the parks and facilities. He indicated that they would put in a work order for some repairs on the boardwalk and stated he would like to replace the entire boardwalk.

Mr. Brinson stated they have the master plan done for Carver Park which is being reviewed by the City Manager. He added they are still waiting on the cost estimate. He announced he would like to create a Parks and Rec Board. He noted a resident had informed him how they could get inexpensive pole lights for one of the soccer fields. He expressed support for getting community members involved as part of a board. He stated that part of their problem is lack of space and expressed support for the Service

Center being placed back under Parks and Recreation. He indicated he would like to move the youth program to the Service Center and then operate the teen program out of the current space. He commented on the need to improve the community building.

Mr. Brinson indicated he would like to seek accreditation through the National Parks and Recreation Association which will assist them with obtaining additional grants. He explained it does not cost; however, there is a list of things they have to do. He explained representatives from other accredited programs will come to the City and provide advice about what needs to be done before applying for the accreditation. He then commented on the part-time Recreation Aides. He stated he would like to expand the staff to more fulltime positions which would make them more dependable. He commented on the need for more lifeguards. He indicated they can't keep the pool open year round due to the lack of lifeguards. He noted they do have a pool heater which would allow them to keep it open.

Discussion was held regarding pool hours, the lack of sufficient lifeguards and how much the lifeguards are paid.

Mr. Brinson discussed the need for a Parks and Recreation master plan which would be needed for the accreditation. He explained that the only master plan they have is for Carver Park alone.

Discussion was held regarding the cost for a Parks and Recreation master plan with Mr. Brinson indicating that Kimley-Horn quoted \$160,000 for such a plan.

Mr. Brinson commented on the benefits to becoming accredited and the need for regional events.

Discussion was held regarding installing a greenhouse at the community garden and utilization of hydroponics.

Mr. Brinson commented on the possibility of placing a pickleball court where the tennis court is at Carver Park with the addition of lighting. He noted they also are looking at the Service Center for a pickleball court. He indicated that Umatilla is helping with the maintenance of the skate park. He indicated they need to add lights there with him planning to install solar lighting. He added that quotes have already been received and they are going through the purchasing process.

Commissioner Lee asked what he would do with the service center with Mr. Brinson indicating he would put the 5 to 12-year-olds there, which would be closer to the elementary school, and he would build a playground in the open grass area in the back.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not the facility would still be available for rentals. Discussion was held regarding the former American Legion building which was demolished.

Public Works

Rick Gierok, Public Works Director, provided an overview of the responsibilities of the Public Works and Utilities departments. He indicated he has 97 employees and noted that Greg Dobbins is over Utilities. He provided a breakdown of all of his divisions and staff members over each division. He commented on how they have improved the City's fleet of vehicles. He stated they have moved some equipment and people to Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Gierok reported on information received from Rotellus regarding the eastern wastewater plant and how to break out the costs between the plants. He indicated that they will be coming back before the Commission and stated they do not see the losses from the eastern plant as being the same as what was presented during the rate study.

Mr. Gierok reviewed the status of the various capital projects and upcoming projects. He commented on the good models they now have for all of their lines and explained that will facilitate the projects. He reported on the inspections on the various tanks and the infiltration and intrusion testing and repairs. He explained challenges facing Utilities, including PFOS testing, water initiatives, and fluoride treatment. He stated that the City's current water permit requires the fluoridation. He indicated that would remain the same until the Commission directs him to change the permit. He reviewed the status of sidewalks and paving projects, including issues with the concrete-based roads. He commented on the increase in cost for the paving. He explained that they are doing a new PCI study being done that will reprioritize the roads. He cited the Clifford House and America In Bloom projects. He reviewed the planned roadway improvements for 2024-25. He stated the seawall construction would be after Georgefest but before 4th of July.

Mr. Gierok reported on the paving of dirt roads in the City. He explained that the problem with just paving them is they need property for the stormwater ponds to do flood attenuation. He reported on the Corey Rolle Field project. He indicated the stairs would be in the next phase which is in the current fiscal year. He then reviewed some of the future plans including the re-organization of Public Works and succession planning. He explained how he wants to re-organize. He cited the issues with the poured concrete road base streets. He explained what needs to be done on those streets and how it needs to be funded.

Mr. Gierok commented on the aging of his street workforce and cited the number of key employees that will be leaving. He indicated that the City only pays equipment operators \$18.93 per hour and elsewhere they are making over \$30 per hour. He expressed concern regarding how the City will function when they leave and how those positions will be filled.

Commissioner Ashcraft asked about the FDOT maintenance agreement with Mr. Gierok indicating there has been no action on it yet. He indicated he does have funds in the budget for the maintenance; however, FDOT is still doing the maintenance at this time.

Commissioner Lee thanked Mr. Gierok, Greg Dobbins, Michelle Saxman and Sally Mayer for their work on the AIB project.

Commissioner Asbate asked if they are ok with sidewalks and stormwater based on the new master plan with Mr. Gierok responding affirmatively.

Commissioner Asbate asked if the City could construct a parking garage utilizing a subcontractor rather than a developer with Mr. Gierok stating staff obtained some competitive pricing based on a design-build prior to the Atrium proposal. He indicated they have the design package already written and estimated a timeframe of eight months.

The Commission complimented Mr. Gierok and his staff for all of their work and how they save the City money.

Fire Department

Mike Swanson, Fire Chief, commented on the number of structure fires in the current fiscal year. He noted the five-year ISO review would be upcoming. He stated he is in the process of hiring a new Fire Captain and they are a little short on firefighters. He reported on the total calls for 2024 and stated that most of the calls are between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. which results in many times both vehicles responding to calls at the same time. When another call occurs another city or the county has to respond.

Chief Swanson noted that the department no longer has to respond to assisted living/nursing home calls. He indicated that the City's calls pretty much stay the same year round. He explained that the response challenge is the need for a station on the north end. He expressed support for pursuing the public safety facility and emphasized they need a third truck on the road.

The Commission asked about the City taking over a county station to the north with Chief Swanson indicating that would not help the City's ISO. They asked if the City could put a rescue truck on the north side at a County station with Chief Swanson indicating he has not pursued that. He noted they already place the rescue truck somewhere on the north end. He emphasized he needs another full station on the north end. He explained he is indicating the northwest section of the City such as towards Grand Island.

Commissioner Asbate asked the cost for a new fire station with Chief Swanson estimating \$1.2 million. He noted the fire truck has already been ordered. It was noted that the County puts up a mobile home until they can build a station with Chief Swanson stating that would be possible if they could identify a piece of property to put it on. He indicated that the City really needs to identify the property for a fourth station as well before property rates increase further.

Chief Swanson noted that both Tavares and Mount Dora have relocated their stations which has impacted the City's responses as well. He confirmed they would need two or three acres for a fire station only. They would need up to 15 acres for a public safety facility.

Craig Capri, Police Chief, recommended they build the joint public safety facility in the north area where the Fire Department needs it to be.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the City-owned properties and the possibility of either selling those and using the funds to purchase property for the fire station or possibly doing a land swap.

Discussion was held regarding the old Eustis Commerce Park property and the need to identify property for the next fire station.

Chief Swanson indicated he could generate heat maps for review by the Commission. He commented on the auto aid mutual aid software being built into FirstWatch. He then commented on the City's fire command staff. He stated the department has met 100% of the training requirements for the 2024 ISO rating. He reviewed all of his personnel's certifications. He noted the department received four grants for his people to attend paramedic school. He cited various other training they are undergoing. He indicated he would be undertaking the fire inspector duties for a while because of his fire inspector resigning. He explained that is so he can get a better feel for the position before hiring a new person.

Chief Swanson reported on the implementation on new software - GovWell - which will allow businesses to pay their fire inspection fees online. He reviewed their inspection statistics. He stated current challenges including staffing and retaining personnel. He commented on union negotiations and succession planning. He cited how personnel don't necessarily want to be promoted. He then commented on the difficulty in obtaining equipment and the possible need to order a new truck before the other one is received due to how long it takes to get a new truck. He announced his firefighters are training on the new truck and once it is completely on the road they will do the wet down, push in, ceremony.

Police Department

Chief Capri commented on the state of the department when he was hired and the number of vacant positions. He explained some changes since then including the addition of school resource officers. He cited the department's technology, addition of radios to the cars, implementation of consolidated dispatch, two new motorcycle units and two new canines.

Chief Capri explained they are full service dogs but they will not be trained for marijuana due to possession of marijuana not being prosecuted by the courts. He stated they will work an 11-hour shift. He expressed the opinion that there will be more grant money provided for police departments. He commented on the security that will be implemented for Georgefest. He noted there are currently two openings for police officers and interviews are scheduled. He commented on the department's community engagement activities and on his efforts to keep the Commission informed about incidents and activities.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about the code enforcement lien collections with Chief Capri stating it's going Ok. He indicated that since EPD took over code enforcement things have improved. Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about the speed zone enforcement tickets with Chief Capri responding that the first hearing on appeals would occur that month.

Mayor Hawkins asked about the narrowing of the lanes and if there are any issues with it.

Chief Capri commented he has seen some issues and stated his opinion that more accidents will occur at the intersection by City Hall.

Chief Swanson responded that has slowed down the fire trucks and will continue to do so. He explained they have to wait to pull into both lanes since the trucks won't fit in one lane.

Discussion was held regarding the affects of the road narrowing and how it will probably reduce the amount of 18-wheeler traffic. Discussion was also held regarding keeping the public informed about the project.

Chief Capri commented on the need for additional positions and the possibility of adding a new position each year for the next five years.

Mayor Hawkins asked if the Police Department has hot spots and what is his biggest problem with Chief Capri stating they do not have hot spots and noted the reduction in crime statistics. He stated his biggest challenge is quality of life issues such as homelessness and dumping. He commented on his expectations for his personnel and how they respond to incidents.

The Commission complimented Chief Capri on his accessibility and expressed appreciation for his work.

Commissioner Lee complimented all of the department heads on their presentations and the information provided.

Mayor Hawkins complimented Assistant City Manager Miranda Burrowes for her work with the Commission.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft commented on the challenges facing the City most of which boil down to money.

Mr. Carrino thanked everyone for pulling the information together on such short notice.

Commissioner Asbate cited the following items to be worked on as follows: 1) Hiring a consultant; 2) Starting a parking garage; 3) Architectural guidelines in the Central Business District; and 4) Scheduling a follow up workshop by end of February. He expressed support for hiring the consultant by the end of February.

Mayor Hawkins expressed agreement with those items. He commented on the need to move forward as quickly as possible.

Commissioner Asbate suggested discussing a date for a follow-up meeting at the January 16th meeting.

2. Adjournment: 6:10 P.M.

**These minutes reflect the actions taken and portions of the discussion during the meeting. To review the entire discussion concerning any agenda item, go to www.eustis.org and click on the video for the meeting in question. A DVD of the entire meeting or CD of the entire audio recording of the meeting can be obtained from the office of the City Clerk for a fee.*

CHRISTINE HALLORAN
City Clerk

MICHAEL L. HOLLAND
Mayor/Commissioner