



MINUTES

Commission Workshop: Master Plan

5:30 PM – Thursday, May 08, 2025 – City Hall

Call to Order: 5:33 p.m.

Acknowledgement of Quorum and Proper Notice

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

1. Workshop Item with Discussion, Public Input and Direction

Mayor Hawkins explained the plan for the workshop is to review the Master Plan.

Tom Carrino, City Manager, noted he had four speaker cards from Daniel DiVenanzo.

Daniel DiVenanzo, owner of four downtown businesses, commented on the Master Plan and how it will affect his businesses. He stated it is a great guideline for which the City paid \$249,999. He commented on the important consideration of property values with new development and questioned whether or not they require historical review for the downtown area.

Mr. Carrino noted that every building is supposed to be reviewed to follow the architectural design guidelines; however, new buildings do not need to be reviewed by the Historic Preservation Board.

Mr. DiVenanzo noted that anyone building downtown would have to go through development review. He stated that the Wells Fargo building was going to be just a box until he and his partner purchased the property and re-designed the building. He asked if the Master Plan says the architectural guidelines will have to be met with Mr. Carrino indicating they are in the code; however, the Master Plan does not speak to that. He then noted other property he owns downtown and buildings he constructed in the downtown. He expressed concern regarding any negative effects on the downtown property values.

Mr. DiVenanzo then commented on his restaurant - Lake Eustis Marina - and stated that to have a viable downtown there needs to be ten successful restaurants.

Brian Butler commented on the proposed location of a parking garage and questioned why they would take up valuable downtown real estate. He recommended considering the old American Legion site.

Marie Aliberti commented on her recent research on the Eustis Chamber of Commerce that shows the Chamber is over 100 years old. She noted that at one time there were four hotels downtown. She stated the City has a lot to offer and emphasized the potential of activating, promoting and supporting the waterfront.

Commissioner Asbate provided comments on the Master Plan beginning on page 50, the market analysis. He stated that Johnson Consulting had recommended the parking garage be located north of Clifford. He reviewed the Master Plan Summary with the following items: 1) hiring a consultant; 2) activating the waterfront; 3) adding a hotel; 4) retail/restaurants, etc. He commented on how the garage could be paid for either through a loan or through issuance of a bond. He stated his research shows the financing costs at 3.8 to 4.0% which would work out to approximately \$84,000 per month. He noted that Rick Gierok had previously obtained a quote for a parking garage and asked if they

should have him get an updated price. He indicated they should discuss whether or not the City wants to own the garage in order to avoid having someone else charge for parking.

Discussion was held regarding the parking garage, cost of construction, possible locations, whether or not to construct two garages, and updating the previous construction estimate.

Mr. Carrino explained the previous cost estimate was obtained as part of the Atrium project. They proposed a garage on one of the three lots, and the City was going to construct a garage north of the surface lot behind the Atlantic Coast Tile/Lake Mechanical building. He stated they could probably get some updated pricing on what the City was going to do. He indicated the issue would be that is not the entire parking solution for downtown. The question would be what other complementary parking is involved which would probably be related to a discussion with a developer for the three lots. He added that the Master Plan calls for some on-street parking on all three blocks.

Commissioner Lee asked if there would be parking affiliated with the hotel with Commissioner Asbate responding that to get the national flag for a hotel they would have to have parking. He cited the need for the main anchor parking to be in Ferran Park along with something on the south side and something on the north side along with fill in parking throughout.

The Commission discussed funding options for the parking garage to be discussed during the budget workshops. Mr. Carrino noted the option of the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) participating in the funding.

Further discussion was held regarding possible locations and how far the downtown area would extend in the future.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus of the Commission for staff to update the estimated cost for construction with financing to be discussed during the budget workshops.

Mr. Carrino commented that Public Works could be a resource for geotechnical information regarding the parking garage and Development Services and Economic Development regarding placement of the parking garage.

Commissioner Asbate referred back to the Master Plan Summary which recommends creation of a hotel event space incorporating 15,000 sq. ft. of event space along with a rooftop venue to take advantage of the views. He indicated that Chief Swanson informed him you can fit approximately 1,200 seated banquet style in 15,000 sq. ft. or close to 1800 in stadium chairs. He commented on how that could benefit the City.

Discussion was held regarding the benefit of an event space and what size the City would need to fit approximately 1100 people. It was agreed that Chief Swanson would prepare the estimate for what would be needed to fit that number of people and provide it to the City Manager for distribution to the Commission. Further discussion was held regarding how large the hotel should be.

Commissioner Holland remarked that the master plan is a road map, and the market will dictate the capacities.

Discussion was held regarding the type of hotel and the possibility of a resort. It was noted that a lot of the details will have to come later based on the individual entities that come to the City.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the recommendations for retail to include a small grocery store. He then cited the focus in the plan on activating the waterfront. He asked about the boat dock.

Mr. Carrino responded they are planning a meeting with Ryan Benaglio to determine the necessary infrastructure and review the FAA process. He noted that the fuel option could be discussed at a later time to include a fixed location or a barge option which requires different permitting.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not fuel should be included especially for the boats.

Commissioner Asbate cited the education recommendation from the plan. He commented on what is already occurring within the community including the UCF business incubator and Lake Tech. He noted the recommendation for market support and cited the existing inventories. He skipped ahead to Page 56 and commented on public participation and community engagement.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about the market study funded by Duke, and Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, responded that the study would be ready in two weeks. Discussion was held regarding a video of the Clifford House that was posted to Facebook with Vice Mayor Ashcraft commenting on the brightness of all the lighting.

Commissioner Asbate moved ahead to Pages 63 and 64 and expressed concern regarding the development of the recreation trail. Discussion was held regarding getting the railroad to work with the City on the trail and obtaining funding for the trail.

Mr. Carrino reported they would be receiving an update from Mike Stevens in the future about the trail.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed the goals listed on Page 65. He then noted the primary catalytic sites and primary gateway sites on Page 68. He reviewed the downtown definitions on Page 71 with Commissioner Lee citing the "framework for success" that discussed identifying opportunities and priorities for investment downtown and creating an environment for partnership between the private and public interests.

Mr. Carrino announced that on May 15th both LEAD and the UCF Incubator will be doing presentations before the Commission.

The Commission discussed ways to generate activity on the waterfront, including seaplanes, pontoon boat rentals and a party boat. They also discussed methods for extending the waterfront and connecting and expanding the downtown area. Discussion was held regarding the kayak rental with Mr. Carrino explaining it was determined that the kayak vending machine was not legal due to a requirement for training before someone could rent the kayak.

Mayor Hawkins asked how much traffic was generated when they had the pontoon boat rentals with Mr. Carrino indicating he did not know. Discussion was held regarding pontoon rentals to get people downtown until the other boats are there.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed "charting the path forward" and the related points as follows: 1) Extending the waterfront; 2) Connecting downtown; and 3) Expanding the downtown. Discussion was held regarding how those could be accomplished and how to get buy-in from the downtown businesses. They also discussed the need for businesses to stay open during events. Discussion was held regarding utilizing the Lake Eustis Chamber of Commerce to help with the businesses. The Commission asked how many downtown businesses are Chamber members and discussed the City possibly paying for some of the memberships.

Marie Alberti reported on Chamber memberships and scholarship opportunities to aid with the membership fee for first time businesses and new business owners. She explained the Chamber pays for a portion of the membership fee with the business to pay the remainder.

Brian Butler responded to Commissioner Holland and stated that the City of Umatilla did pay for Chamber membership fees for a two-year period; however, none of those that participated renewed their memberships. He stated his opinion that it is better for them to pay a portion of their fees.

Ms. Aliberti cited the Chamber's wine and beer walk and sunset stroll events as helpful to get people familiar with the downtown. She commented on marketing strategies for new business owners. She highlighted the theater for getting more involved with the City.

Discussion was held regarding the value of the theater to the City and how the City might be able to help.

Pam Rivas, Lake Eustis Area Chamber of Commerce, commented on local events and business owners coming together for events and driving momentum. She noted an interest in more City interaction with the grant money and cited legal issues with the City being involved in events promoting alcohol. She commented on the need for the Chamber to have City support. Ms. Rivas commented on great feedback from the downtown events and highlighted the music was a great draw with focus on businesses. She commented on their interest in partnering with the City to help activate the waterfront and promote downtown businesses.

Discussion was held regarding having monthly events in the pocket park with entertainment and the possibility of holding a farmer's market in Ferran Park twice per month and the cost affiliated for that.

Mr. Carrino explained staff had been working with the sponsor on the event and they had gotten the cost down to about \$250. He noted that City staff will have to be present in the park on overtime so they have to pass some of the cost along.

Commissioner Asbate proceeded to Page 90 and the various recommendations. The Commission discussed proposed improvements to the bandshell with Mr. Carrino confirming there is a project in the budget for that.

Mayor Hawkins asked about putting in astroturf in the park with Mr. Carrino indicating nothing has happened with that yet.

Commissioner Lee asked that American In Bloom be included in the planning.

The Commission discussed the FDOT project and low level native and Florida friendly plantings that do not include irrigation. Mr. Carrino explained that FDOT's contractor has responsibility for getting the landscaping established.

Commissioner Ashcraft stated the Master Plan included the extension of Bates Avenue and indicated that would be an excellent idea. Mr. Carrino responded that a pedestrian path could be done but not a vehicle roadway. Discussion was held regarding a possible Bates extension.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed the recommendations beginning on Page 104.

Commissioner Holland asked about closing off Magnolia Avenue to Ferran Park as closure for specific events.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the possible construction of "bolsters" for special events and periodic closure of Magnolia on the west side of Bay Street. He commented on the walkable downtown and on beautifying McCullough Alley as an America in Bloom project. He reviewed the recommendations already underway as part of the FDOT project. He reviewed the "expanding downtown Eustis" discussion on Page 125.

Discussion was held regarding activities for youth during First Friday and other events such as "movie night". Discussion was held regarding placement of a restaurant on the water.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed the recommendations on Page 126 and discussion regarding the Waterman site recommendations beginning on Page 128.

Commissioner Lee asked what the plan means by "block faces" with Mr. Carrino explaining each block should have varying setbacks and architectural embellishments so it doesn't look like one solid wall.

Commissioner Asbate continued the page-by-page review. He discussed the various absorption rates. He commented on issues with tree trimming within the City.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft commented on discussions he has had with Nancy Dodd from Duke Energy regarding trees around the large transmission lines. Discussion was held regarding other tree issues.

Commissioner Lee commented on the recommendations on Page 147 and how America in Bloom could be involved with beautification.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed the recommendations on Page 159 pertaining to the downtown revitalization and beautification.

Commissioner Lee expressed support for more art being included in their efforts.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the marketing and branding recommendations.

Mr. Carrino noted the current marketing plan focuses on Economic Development marketing not city branding. He commented that Jaime Lanford, Public Relations Manager, was hired to initially stabilize communications and can now move forward with City branding.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft stated the City needs to do more marketing outside of the City for the City, not just events.

Discussion was held regarding various marketing methods and the possibility of developing a new City logo. Discussion was also held regarding public comments supporting putting the word "lake" back in the City's name.

Commissioner Asbate continued to review page by page and discussed the recommendations for improving connectivity. Discussion was held regarding the benefits to the City once the trail has been constructed. Discussion was also held on the following items: 1) relocating the parking at the Community Building to the street side instead of the lake side; 2) use of alleyways and mid-block connections; 3) transit stop shelter designs and amenities; 4) downtown infill; 5) downtown housing; 6) ground floor activation; 7) creation of inviting buildings; 8) need for additional office/professional space; and 9) vacant storefront/ building activation programs.

The Commission discussed the need for office space in Downtown Eustis with walkability.

Pam Rivas, Mega Companies, stated Eustis is in a HUB Zone (Historically Underutilized Business Zone). She explained that in a HUB Zone companies can get preferential treatment for government contracts. She noted that 35% of your workforce must be in the HUB zone. She added that most HUB Zones are in a depressed area; however, Eustis' zone has a waterfront, downtown area which is very attractive to businesses. She commented on businesses that have moved into their building. She explained when they are talking about office space, they are not discussing large office complexes. She noted a lot of them work remotely or their staff work remotely but they need to have an office space.

Ms. Rivas reported on a meeting they held with a business interested in relocating to the City who is anticipating pulling employees from Lake Tech. She cited the boundaries of the zone. She explained that the federal government determines a HUB zone based on the census and theirs will be up for review in 2028.

Commissioner Asbate reviewed the implementation recommendations beginning on Page 207 and commented on the need to work those into the budget.

Commissioner Lee asked to have Lake Sumter State College and Lake Technical College added to Item #6 under the recommendations on Page 209.

Commissioner Asbate continued the review on Page 213 with the priority projects. He noted the previous parking structure discussion, the Waterman site, and need for grants for financing. He cited the following items: 1) downtown rail trail; 2) community center; 3) historical museum; 4) extension of Ferran Park; and 5) waterfront Lake Walk and promenade.

The Commission discussed where to start with the projects. It was agreed that City staff would bring back figures regarding the parking garage and they would wait to see what the G3C2 brings back.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft announced that he had two presentations he was going to provide; however, due to how late it was he asked Mr. Carrino to have them printed out for the other Commissioners to see. He explained the first one is a history of the hotels in Eustis and the second one was photographs of Knoxville, Tennessee. He noted all of the redevelopment they have gone through while acknowledging they are not the same as Eustis.

Commissioner Lee recommended that the other Commissioners should go and see downtown Winter Garden. She asked when G3C2 will be presenting since the contract ends June 12th.

Mr. Carrino noted that they could present after June 12th even though the contract ends then. He suggested they present on June 19th which is a regular Commission meeting. It was a consensus of the Commission to allow G3C2 to provide their presentation during the regular meeting on June 19th.

2. Adjournment: 7:40 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

WILLIE L. HAWKINS
Mayor/Commissioner