



MINUTES

City Commission Meeting

6:00 PM – Thursday, January 16, 2025 – City Hall

Invocation: Moment of Silence

Pledge of Allegiance: Commissioner Emily Lee

Call to Order: 6:02 p.m.

Acknowledge of Quorum and Proper Notice

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Michael Holland

1. **Agenda Update**

Miranda Burrowes, Assistant City Manager, stated that there is an updated version of the downtown incentive program on the dais.

2. **Approval of Minutes**

January 2, 2025 City Commission Meeting

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Lee, to approve the Minutes. The motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Commissioner Lee, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Hawkins

3. **Presentations**

3.1 Incoming Mayor's Message from Mayor Willie Hawkins

Mayor Willie Hawkins delivered his Incoming Mayor's message to the City Commission and members of the public.

3.2 Library Award Presentation

Ann Ivey, Library Director, explained the new award program for Library staff members they established to recognize each other for kindness and excellence in the day-to-day operations of the library. She stated the program is called the LIBRARY EXCELLENCE AWARD PROGRAM (LEAP) where staff nominate each other every month and Certificates of Achievement are given out at morning meetings to each person who was nominated. She indicated the program was started in May of 2024 and had 81 total nominations. She explained that the staff member with the most certificates would be recognized with a dinner/gift card and acknowledgement by the City Commission. Ms. Ivey presented the first annual award to Carrie Cottrell, Library Assistant II, and noted that Ms. Cottrell was nominated 11 times during the year by her teammates.

3.3 G3C2 Monthly Update

Jerry Gunther and Derek Wallace from G3C2 presented their monthly update. He explained they decided to focus on lot three first. He indicated they are basing what they are presenting on the master plan. He stated that they are proposing a mixed use/residential use on half of the lot with parking on the other half. He explained they feel that parking needs to go in first to support what goes on the rest of the three lots. He presented four different elevations showing what has been done in other communities. He stated three were built in downtown areas and have a downtown look to them. He indicated the one different one was for AdventHealth which is a very inexpensive garage which used banners to decorate it that could be changed periodically. He commented that the master plan shows 220 spaces on the three lots which they feel is significantly under what will be needed. He cited what the master plan proposed and the amount of parking that would be needed for those uses which would result in 594 spaces being needed. He added they could reduce that by approximately 15% due to how the parking would be timed based on the uses which would result in a total of 500 spaces.

Mr. Gunther stated the most economical design for the garage would consist of two bays with two parking rows which would be located on the north side of Block 3 and would have 520 spaces if built as planned. He stated this is their biggest deviation from the master plan as they do not feel 220 spaces would be adequate.

The Commission asked about the number of parking levels with Mr. Gunther responding there would be ground level plus four levels. He added the height would be about 45 feet; however, that side of the block is much lower so a lot of it will be built in the ground. He indicated that a three story mixed use building would be on the other side and would hide the garage.

Mr. Gunther explained that the mixed use project and the parking would be done at the same time. He added that residential would be next on block 2 and explained that they needed to get some energy downtown in order to attract a hotel to the downtown area. He stated that within the next few months they will have plans for all three blocks.

The Commission asked about how they determined the amount of parking required with Mr. Gunther responding that it is based on the square footage of the lots.

Derek Wallace reviewed the mixed-use options with apartments and parking garage next to it. He presented renderings and explained that retail would be on the first floor, office space on the second floor and residential on the third floor. He added that it would sit back from the road and there would be some parking in front of the retail space. He noted the possibility of outdoor seating as well. He stated the purpose of the renderings is just to show their concepts to see if they are going in the right direction. He added they are separate buildings with residential on the inside.

The Commission asked if it is possible to surround the parking garage with retail to be more aesthetically pleasing.

Mr. Wallace responded that the parking and residential portions of the design would include first floor as retail use. He added that, at this point, they can probably do just about anything they want. He stated that there is only so much retail they can put in that area due to the amount of time that would be required to find quality retail tenants. He explained how their financing approvals are based on the tenants they have already arranged.

The Commission asked about the number of residential units with Mr. Wallace indicating it currently reflects 80 units.

The Commission then asked about the amount of retail space with Mr. Wallace responding the number of tenants would be based on the amount of space each type of tenant requires.

The Commission asked if they should conduct a market study first prior to designing the buildings with Mr. Wallace stating that, at this time, he has only designed a box. A feasibility study will be needed to determine what the retail/office space is designed for.

Mayor Hawkins asked where the entrance to the garage would be located with Mr. Wallace responding that the entrance would be off MacDonald.

Commissioner Asbate asked about the location of the parking garage and expressed concern regarding walkability for the downtown area. He stated his thought that it would be better placed on the outside of the area, not the interior. He expressed support for a market analysis. He asked that future reports be provided sooner so the Commission has the time to review prior to the meeting. It was suggested that they can review what was provided and further discussed the following month. He further expressed support for the City to hire a consultant as soon as possible and emphasized the need for walkability.

Mr. Wallace commented on their need for the market analysis so they can obtain their financing.

The Commission discussed walkability and the location for the garage.

Commissioner Lee asked them to review the contents of the documents provided and then they can discuss it at the next meeting.

Mr. Gunther stated the recommended location for the garage is the furthest east of downtown and is the furthest south where a garage could be placed. He added that eventually they will need additional parking on the north side. He stated that people will not rent an apartment and then want to walk three blocks. He said it would be difficult to get it financed that way.

Further discussion was held regarding the best location for the parking.

Mayor Hawkins asked if the garage would also provide parking for the convention center.

Discussion was held regarding the convention center/community center and the need to make sure they don't compete with each other.

Commissioner Lee asked about the additional sections of the booklet provided.

Mr. Wallace reviewed the various sections of the booklet provided. He indicated they have had discussions with a hotel developer. He stated that the developer should have a feel by April as to whether or not there is an interest to move forward. He added that it would not be easy to get a hotel. He further stated it would be 18 months before they could even start.

Mr. Wallace stated that Tab 4 provides information regarding a firm that sources vendors for the mixed use. He indicated they are a very well respected company and they have expressed interest in bringing vendors to Eustis. He stated the final tab is regarding design guidelines so they have something to start from. He commented that they are unable to proceed until the City gets its consultant so they receive direction from the Commission.

Mayor Hawkins stated that based on previous discussions the hotel and/or convention center was always going to be on Block 1. He further stated they know they will need parking so where else could they put it. He commented on walkability versus the ease people want for parking.

Discussion was held regarding parking versus valet parking, the best location for the garage and the need for parking for the downtown residents. Comments were made about asking the downtown businesses and their employees to not park in the downtown parking spaces. Discussion was held regarding not slowing up the process and the need for a consultant to help them start making some decisions. It was stated that they need to allow G3C2 to continue developing their ideas rather than squashing their ideas.

Discussion was held regarding allowing G3C2 to proceed with their plan so they have a base for the next month. Commissioner Ashcraft noted they would not be meeting with the consultant until the 13th.

Mr. Wallace stated they cannot order the feasibility studies under the current agreement. He said without a pre-development agreement, they can't spend additional funds. He commented on the funds already expended by the company and emphasized the amount of work that goes into the design.

Mr. Gunther asked how soon the City will have a consultant in place with Ms. Burrowes stating that the goal is to have a consultant on board prior to the workshop so they can attend. She added that currently the City Manager is requesting information from potential providers.

Commissioner Ashcraft recommended that G3C2 not do another thing until the City decides what they want to do with the consultant.

Mr. Gunther stated that the parking garage can be relocated anywhere. It was noted that the Mount Dora parking garage is rarely used because it is on the outskirts of downtown.

Commissioner Ashcraft questioned why they would want G3C2 to do anything further until they get the consultant onboard.

Further discussion was held regarding whether or not G3C2 should move forward before the consultant is brought onboard. Concern was expressed regarding the development of the master plan and how it was developed using feasibility studies and public opinion.

Mr. Wallace explained they will have to do a feasibility study and have a concept plan in place in order to get their financing.

Mr. Gunther commented on the high cost of the residential and the expectations of those residents. He emphasized that the parking will have to be in the downtown area.

The Commission further discussed whether or not to allow G3C2 to move forward or to wait until the consultant is chosen and the possibility that the different consultants will have differing opinions.

Commissioner Ashcraft commented that the Commission knows what they want and where and questioned why a consultant is needed.

Mr. Wallace stated that each block has a different feel and emphasized they can't be all done at the same time. He indicated they would be bringing back Block 2 at the next presentation.

Commissioner Ashcraft confirmed their opinion that the hotel cannot be the first thing that's built.

Mr. Gunther commented on the possibility of doing a pre-development agreement for each block individually. He stated that the other blocks will be very similar to the master plan with a hotel and restaurant and convention center on block 1 and most of the residential on block 2.

Mayor Hawkins stated it was a consensus for them to move forward with Mr. Gunther indicating they would continue to work on the project.

RECESS: 7:08 p.m. RECONVENE: 7:15 P.M.

4. Audience to be Heard

Marie Alberti, President and CEO of Lake Eustis Area Chamber of Commerce, announced the monthly Sip and Stroll Sunset event on January 30th with entertainer Mark Houghton in Pocket Park at 6:30 p.m. with Hickory Hill Realty and Property Management sponsoring. She noted the Chamber will be accepting registration from businesses to participate and support each other. She indicated the event will start at the Chamber of Commerce building with a stroll through the downtown. She added the Georgefest Breakfast would be held on February 5th at Lifepoint Church. She highlighted other Georgefest activities and events.

Shekita Hill and Pastor Kelly thanked City Commission for its support with the Martin Luther King Jr. event to be held January 19th at Trinity Church at 4 p.m. with a gospel concert, and the Unity Walk and breakfast on January 20th. She commented on the speeches from young people to be judged and opportunity to recite their speeches on Monday at Ferran Park. She explained the speech program and encouraged participation from the young people.

5. Consent Agenda

5.1 Resolution Number 25-10: Approval of Annual Purchase in Excess of \$100,000

5.2 Resolution Number 25-12: Seventh Addendum to the Amended and Restated Solid Waste And Recycling Collection and Disposal Contract

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Lee, to approve the Consent Agenda. Motion passed on the following vote:

Voting Yea: Commissioner Lee, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Hawkins

6. Ordinances, Public Hearings, & Quasi Judicial Hearings

6.1 Resolution Number 25-11: Fine Reduction/Release of Lien - 1601 Orange Drive

Sasha Garcia, City Attorney, announced Resolution Number 25-11: A Resolution of the City Commission of the City of Eustis, Florida; providing for a reduction of outstanding code enforcement fines and release of a code enforcement lien recorded against 1601 Orange Drive, upon full payment of the reduced fine.

Eric Martin, Code Enforcement Supervisor, presented the terms of the resolution and explained the proposed reduction is from \$28,750 to \$13,230 with the release of lien once the fine is paid. He stated staff's recommendation for approval.

Commissioner Lee asked why they are recommending a substantial reduction.

Mr. Martin explained the property was the subject of a tax deed sale in December 2023 and at the time the fines were \$95,000. The City received \$66,000 from the tax deed surplus. The \$28,750 was what was not paid from the proceeds. The applicant requested a reduction to zero and the Code Board denied that and recommended the reduction to \$13,230. He confirmed that the new owner has brought the property into compliance and renovated it.

Mayor Hawkins confirmed that the fine was on the old owner and that all the fines accrued under the old owner.

Mr. Martin stated the old owner was Godly Trust. He explained that the lien against the property carried over. He said any liens that are not paid through a tax deed sale are incumbent upon the new owner. He explained that the amount from the tax deed usually is sufficient to pay off the lien so the Commission never sees those.

Craig Capri, Police Chief, expressed concern about trying to get money from an innocent person and Mayor Hawkins agreed.

Attorney Garcia explained this was a non-traditional purchase. It was purchased through a tax deed sale. She indicated that in a traditional sale, they would have done their research and would have satisfied the lien prior to the sale. She explained that it is a buyer beware situation. In this case, the lien was not extinguished through the tax deed sale leaving the new owner responsible for the balance.

Mr. Martin stated that the new owner did request a full waiver which the Board denied. He explained that, in the past, the cases would come before the Commission as a release of lien and would ask to waive any remainder. He stated that the Board felt that the new owner should have done their due diligence. He indicated that the Commission has the ability to waive the remaining fines. He reviewed the history of the violation and how the fines accumulated. He commented on the improvements made to the property by the new owner. He indicated that the City costs totaled approximately \$2500.

Chief Capri expressed concern about the Code Board and support to change to a magistrate process.

Attorney Garcia stated that the Commission has the discretion to accept the recommendation of the Code Board or to vary it however they choose.

Mr. Martin confirmed that staff's recommendation was to waive the fines and not hold the new owner accountable.

Commissioner Asbate asked if he could discuss the case (since he previously served on the Code Enforcement Board) and Attorney Garcia responded he could discuss the case and vote on the issue even though he was on the Board. Commissioner Asbate commented on the Board's feelings on the case.

Chief Capri emphasized his desire for compliance, not getting money.

Commissioner Asbate emphasized the importance for consistency and treating all cases the same.

Mr. Martin explained the new owner cleared the violation and improved the property immediately in order to sell the property. The remaining lien was discovered when the new owner tried to sell the property.

Attorney Garcia explained the tax deed sale occurred because the property taxes were not paid. She stated that the Tax Collector receives the funds from the auction and anything over the amount of the unpaid taxes is paid to anyone who has a valid lien against the property. The City would have been notified of the tax deed sale and would have submitted a request for payment.

Mr. Martin explained the tax deed sale process. He stated, in this case, the City received \$66,578.11 from the auction. He asked if it was possible to change the resolution to drop the fine to zero and authorize the City Clerk to execute a release of lien.

Attorney Garcia indicated that, if the Commission wants to reduce the fine to zero, then they will have to bring it back to a future agenda. She indicated they could table the resolution and bring it back with a full waiver.

Discussion was held regarding changing the City's policy so that future cases are consistent and allowing a full waiver of liens.

Attorney Garcia opened the public hearing at 7:46 p.m.

Alan Paczkowski, chairman of the Code Enforcement Board, stated the new owner did not show up at the meeting where they discussed the application for a waiver. He discussed how the Code Enforcement Board reviews each case to make a determination. He emphasized that the Board members are not there to make money for the City and reviewed the specifics of the case.

Attorney Garcia conducted a straw poll on disposition of the resolution due to the absence of Commissioner Holland. The straw poll results were as follows: Commissioner Lee - in favor of reduction as presented; Commissioner Asbate - in favor of reduction as presented; Commissioner Ashcraft - not in favor as presented, support full waiver; and Mayor Hawkins - not in favor as presented, support full waiver.

Attorney Garcia indicated the Commission could reduce the fine but to completely waive the fine would require rewording the title of the resolution to provide for an elimination of the fine and would require postponement of consideration.

Commissioner Ashcraft suggested reducing the fine to \$100.

Further discussion was held regarding the reduction with Commissioner Lee emphasizing the need to consider each case on a case-by-case basis and Commissioner Asbate emphasizing the need for consistency.

Attorney Garcia recommended postponing the resolution to allow for a full Commission and changing the resolution to either a reduction of the outstanding lien to an amount to be determined by the Commission or for elimination of the lien.

Mayor Hawkins asked that the resolution be postponed to February 20th as he would be absent at the February 6th meeting.

Motion made by Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Seconded by Commissioner Asbate, to postpone Resolution Number 25-11 to the February 20, 2025 agenda.

Voting Yea: Commissioner Lee, Commissioner Asbate, Vice Mayor Ashcraft, Mayor Hawkins

Attorney Garcia suggested that the Commission considered a joint meeting with the Code Enforcement Board to discuss the issues.

Mayor Hawkins noted it was 8:05 p.m. and asked if the rest of the Commission wanted to continue with the agenda. It was a consensus to continue and finish the agenda.

7. Other Business

7.1 New Downtown Business Growth and Economic Sustainability Grant Program

Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, noted that October 3rd staff was asked to develop some ideas to help stimulate business traffic and growth downtown. They were also asked to work with the Chamber of Commerce and they subsequently talked with the downtown businesses. The result was a draft incentive program which was brought back for review by the Commission. Six ideas were presented to the Commission. He presented the

revised Downtown Business Growth and Economic Sustainability Incentive Program with guidelines and application so they could see the total program. He stated there are four grant opportunities proposed as follows: 1) Entertainment Grant; 2) Sidewalk Dining Establishment Assistance Grant, 3) Patrons Tour Grant; and 4) Customized Business Training Grant.

Mr. Latimer reviewed each of the grants, its specifications, maximum award, number of awards per year and total budget.

The Commission asked if one business could receive all of one grant with Mr. Latimer explaining it is limited to one award per business per year.

The Commission asked if the City would approve the entertainment with Mr. Latimer responding that they are recommending that a committee be formed of staff members to review each application. A number of things would be considered including the taste, style of the entertainment, and the timing of the event so it does not conflict with a regular City event.

Mr. Latimer explained that the Pocket Park concerts are envisioned as consisting of middle school, high school and college bands to play in Pocket Park. He added that the Chamber of Commerce could hire a performing arts band to play there as well. He suggested that could become a regular occurrence and confirmed that the entertainment would be scheduled by the business applicant, not the City. He noted the intent is also to help with the development of the various school bands.

The Commission asked about the Patron Tours Grant with Mr. Latimer explaining the tours must originate from outside of the City. He noted that the Chamber of Commerce could also apply for that category.

The Commission recommended that the Sidewalk Dining Assistance Grant be clarified as to what it does and does not cover.

The Commission asked if the downtown merchants are currently taking advantage of the business incubator and what it offers with Mr. Latimer responding that the program is more for a customized training program to assist a specific business with marketing, pricing information, inventory control, etc. He added it could help build their relationship with the incubator.

Commissioner Asbate reported there are about 370 entrepreneurs per month that take advantage of the business incubator. He stated they work with SBCC and can meet with a certified public accountant who will evaluate their issues. He added they also can go to One Million Cups who will provide assistance with a specific problem. He noted that is all for free. He suggested giving Mr. Latimer the flexibility to adjust the funds between the various programs.

Mr. Latimer confirmed that the total budget is \$50,000 but they decided to initially only utilize \$29,000.

The Commission asked if one business could apply for all of the grants with Mr. Latimer responding negatively. The Commission indicated that the restrictions regarding how frequently a business can apply should be included in the program details.

The Commission requested that staff keep statistics on the program and provide updates to the Commission on how well it is working.

Discussion was held regarding whether or not the program would apply throughout the CRA district not just within the Central Business District.

Ms. Burrowes clarified that the funds budgeted are not CRA funds but come from the economic development fund.

Discussion was held regarding budgeting some CRA funds for the program for businesses within the CRA and use the economic development funds within the Central Business District.

8. Future Agenda Items and Comments

8.1 City Commission

Commissioner Ashcraft commented on the Habitat for Humanity presentation at the recent Lake County League of Cities luncheon. He suggested that the City might want to have Habitat for Humanity run the City's housing rehab program. He expressed concern regarding how the current program has been run and stated he just wants to get the most out of the City's funds.

Mayor Hawkins expressed support for having a discussion on that issue.

Commissioner Ashcraft expressed support for having another housing rehab program funded out of the General Fund for people under certain incomes that aren't located within the CRA district.

Commissioner Asbate clarified that Mega Workplace will not charge the City for any events or classes that it holds at Mega Workplace that are for fostering economic growth and collaboration. He suggested that the Commission provide direction to code enforcement that if a property goes to tax deed sale and the City receives a portion of the proceeds due to a code enforcement lien that would be the end of it and would not need to come before the Commission. He asked about consistency in dealing with cases.

Attorney Garcia stated that the Code Enforcement Board is an independent body and cases are considered separately. She stated that their recommendations come to the Commission as an appellate.

Discussion was held regarding the decision being made on a case by case basis and the Code Enforcement Board being an independent body.

8.2 City Manager: None

8.3 City Attorney: None

8.4 Mayor

Mayor Hawkins expressed appreciation for the constructive dialogue during the meeting and stated they are moving in the right direction. He commented on how the meetings probably will be longer due to that. He announced that the Eustis African American Committee would be holding their Sassy Senior Fashion Show on Jan 24th. He added that Parks and Recreation would hold the daddy daughter dance on January 18th. He cited the oath the Commissioners take to assume their positions. He stated that oath means they are to put the City first. He commented on how the Commissioners represent the City and the importance for sworn and unsworn personnel to remember that whatever they do while in a City vehicle reflects on the City. He then announced a comedy show would be held on January 25th at the Hideaway Plaza.

Commissioner Lee asked that the City purchase a new chair for Commissioner Asbate.

Fire Chief Mike Swanson announced the Tri-City Food Drive would be held Saturday, January 25th with drop off at Station 22.

The Commission asked how many fires the department has responded to since the new year with Chief Swanson responded there have been at least 15 since January 1st with an average of 1-2 per day.

9. Adjournment: 8:42 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

GARY ASHCRAFT
Vice Mayor/Commissioner