



MINUTES

City Commission Workshop: Downtown Development and the Eustis Community Center Site

9:00 AM – Friday, July 18, 2025 – City Hall

Call to Order: 9:00 a.m.

Acknowledgement of Quorum and Proper Notice

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

ABSENT: Commissioner Michael Holland

1. Workshop Item with Discussion and Direction

1.1 Downtown Development

Tom Carrino, City Manager, provided a history of the former Waterman site and Downtown Redevelopment project including a previous proposal from Atrium. He discussed the issues with the Atrium proposal. He explained the next RFQ issued by the City which resulted in two proposals - one from G3C2 and one from Kagan Management. He commented on the process used with development of the downtown master plan and the ultimate decision by the Commission to not proceed with the proposal from G3C2. He explained the purpose of the workshop is to determine the next steps as well as the legalities and any disposition of City/CRA property. He introduced Mike Goman to provide a presentation regarding the master plan implementation.

Mike Goman, Goman+York advisory consultant to Eustis for matters regarding the Master Plan and economic development, presented recommendations for the next steps in the Master Plan implementation. He commented on the need for decisions to be data driven and based on market analysis and financial feasibility. He discussed how to develop the overview of the market with the goal to raise awareness of overall growth and market potential with a focus on market drivers, population, permits, traffic counts and growth rates highlighting activity in the northwest sector of Orlando and Eustis. He explained how they would analyze the Eustis market by sector and provide detailed socioeconomic data using drive-time data. He commented on the Eustis areas of opportunity including the existing core, expanded core and aspirational core.

Mr. Goman reviewed the Phase I - Marketing Period to include direct contact with developers to attempt to attract those with the experience and financial capability for such a project. He commented on how that is done including attendance at conferences and phone calls. He stated they then follow up with data regarding the City and the project. At that point, they will provide the developers with copies of their financial analyses of the various sectors. He commented on his experience reviewing proposals which helps streamline the analysis for developers.

Mr. Goman then reviewed the Phase II - Marketing Period which would include market and site tours, engaging on sites and issuance of the updated RFP or RFQ for the Waterman site

parcels. He commented that there are more opportunities within the City in addition to the Waterman site. He cited a number of opportunities within the City and emphasized their intent to market the entire City, not just the single project.

Mr. Goman provided an overview of the market trends, employment centers and residential development opportunities within the greater Orlando, Lake County, and local/neighboring areas. He explained the need to identify where the workers are located and where the employment centers are. He reviewed recent traffic counts in the surrounding areas and provided an analysis of tourism, regional market traffic counts, and permit data. He cited the master plan boundaries and the location of the existing core, expanded core and aspirational core. He noted other redevelopment area opportunities within the City.

Mr. Carrino summarized Mr. Goman's presentation and commented on the various opportunities both downtown and in the City as a whole. He stated staff's desire that Mr. Goman market the opportunities in Eustis including the Waterman site as well as other development opportunities. He explained the solicitation process for the RFP or RFQ for the Waterman site in order to move forward. He stated they will need direction in order to wrap-up the previous process which included a proposal from Kagan Management as well as G3C2. He explained that once the RFP and RFQ process is issued the City can no longer have one-on-one communication with developers. He recommended they hold a brief marketing period of 60-90 days, followed by issuance of the RFP or RFQ to allow a certain amount of time for developers to prepare their proposals. The proposals would then be evaluated by staff and then the CRA Board/Commission.

Mayor Hawkins commented on the amount of time since the Atrium proposal was submitted. He expressed support for allowing Mr. Goman to market the City for a period of time prior to issuing the RFP/RFQ.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft confirmed Mr. Goman's recommendation is to proceed with marketing the City at that point with Mr. Goman agreeing and stating they would spend the 60 to 90 days telling the Eustis story and reviewing other development opportunities, not just the Waterman site. He noted a number of developers don't know anything about Eustis and stated his belief that it's worth spending the next two or three months marketing.

Discussion was held regarding the purpose of the workshop and how much more money the City would need to spend on the process.

Commissioner Asbate asked how much the marketing campaign would cost with Mr. Goman responding that a 60 to 90 day campaign would cost approximately \$30,000.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked if Mr. Goman's company also does urban redevelopment planning including historic downtowns with Mr. Goman responding affirmatively.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft then asked if they have a department for parking with Mr. Goman responding they are not traffic engineers, but they are aware of the need to conform with local parking regulations.

Mayor Hawkins commented on the need for the City to determine the parking needs and where it should be located with Mr. Goman responding that parking has to go hand in hand with any development.

Commissioner Lee expressed the hope that they would be making more detailed decisions at the workshop with more concrete direction.

Commissioner Ashcraft commented on why marketing was not begun 90 days ago with Mr. Goman noting that the City had an agreement in place that precluded that.

Further discussion was held regarding the need to wait until a decision is made regarding the community building site with Mayor Hawkins citing the need for the Commission to determine what they want on each parcel.

Discussion was held regarding the possibility of getting a second opinion about what should be done with the downtown and whether or not the community building needs to be considered before any further decisions are made.

Mr. Goman responded that the community building is only one of a number of possible development sites. He stated that they should be working on all of them at the same time. He explained that a developer will come in and decide which sites are of interest to them. He emphasized that development takes a lot of money and a lot of time. If a developer comes forward and is interested in the community building site, then they can focus on that. He stated that his recommendation would not be to just focus on development of the Waterman site.

Mr. Carrino stated his purpose for the meeting is to get directions on the Waterman site if they do not proceed with G3C2. He noted staff has made a recommendation but that it is about more than just the Waterman site.

The Commission discussed the areas of interest for development and possible plans for the community building.

Sasha Garcia, City Attorney, emphasized that they will have to use a public process for both the RFP/RFQ and for any disposal of the community building property. She explained they are waiting on the title component regarding the community building and then they will have to utilize a public process and a resolution for that. She stated her hope for the workshop to provide direction regarding what to include in any RFP or RFQ as well as the community building. She commented on all of the public notice that will be required.

Further discussion was held regarding how to proceed with Mr. Goman emphasizing that the goal is to encourage interest in the downtown. He suggested that they can do a number of things simultaneously.

Mr. Carrino recommended they conduct a marketing campaign, make all three Waterman parcels available and tell developers they can submit proposals for any or all of the lots. The Commission would then evaluate the proposals.

Commissioner Lee expressed support for issuing an RFP rather than an RFQ so that the developers submit their vision for a particular lot.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the master plan. He recommended closing the process on the previous RFP, but not necessarily on a particular developer. He further commented on all of the economic development discussions that have occurred including with Lake County. He expressed concern about the people that weren't at those meetings and commented on the current economic climate and the lack of leadership by the consultants. He expressed agreement to get a second opinion from another consultant. He commented on the effect on the downtown businesses once construction begins.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft expressed concern regarding the lack of marketing in recent years.

Mr. Carrino suggested asking Mr. Goman to market Eustis based on the data he has and at the same time hire a third-party facilitator to host a design charrette for what the Commission would like to see and where.

Mayor Hawkins stated the purpose of the meeting was for the Commission to talk about what they want to see downtown.

Further discussion was held regarding lack of leadership, the need for the Commission to decide what they want and then have someone tell them where they can put those things and the lack of progress.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft stated, assuming the community building stays where it is, he would like to see a hotel on the block next to Wells Fargo, the Magnolia block would be commercial mixed use and the block across from the post office would stay vacant for the time being or could be used for surface parking. He noted they may not actually need a parking garage.

Mayor Hawkins stated he would like to see south of the parking garage expanded and suggested expanding the existing parking garage. He also suggested having surface parking to the north.

Commissioner Asbate commented that if they do something on the community building site, then they will want extra parking on the north side. He suggested, if the community building site is developed, they could construct a joint parking garage with a portion dedicated to the development.

Mayor Hawkins objected to having a conversation as if the community building proposal is a done deal.

Commissioner Lee stated that, if they do develop the community building site, they need to think about what will they provide for people until that is done as well as how they will accommodate parking for the rest of downtown.

Mayor Hawkins opened the floor for the individual Commissioners to say what they would like to see.

Commissioner Lee stated she would like to work on the community center with possibly a hotel, a parking garage behind George's property, and retail or townhouses with retail underneath next to Wells Fargo. For the lot on Magnolia Avenue, she indicated she would rather have people present designs with their ideas of what to put there.

Commissioner Asbate stated he would like for the City to obtain more help. He stated he is not getting what he needs to represent the community. He expressed support for a second opinion and then the Commission can tell that person each of their visions. He commented positively on the presentation they were given for use of the community building site. He noted that the City has previously discussed redoing the community building. He cited projects proposed by Daniel DiVenanzo and agreed with the concept of dividing up the lots. He stated they need to close the previous RFP and then they need to evaluate the proposals as they come in. He expressed support for addressing the existing parking issue first. He commented on the need to get an actual report regarding the issues on the lot across from the post office.

Commissioner Asbate commented on a plan he saw for a brewery facing the water and for getting proposals for the other lots including from Daniel DiVenanzo or from Kagan. He agreed with expanding the existing parking garage or placing parking on the American Legion lot. He emphasized that there are already parking issues without any new development.

Commissioner Lee commented on the need to make the downtown a walkable experience and cited the plans for the trail.

Commissioner Ashcraft asked about the parking study budgeted in the CRA and when it would be implemented with Mr. Carrino responding it is in the FY25-26 budget which doesn't go into effect until October 1st. He noted they could begin the selection process and then issue the contract after October 1st. He added that, if they wanted to proceed sooner, they could take money out of CRA Fund Balance for that purpose.

Commissioner Lee asked if they have the funds available to get a second consultant with Mr. Carrino responding affirmatively. He noted funds have been set aside for implementation of the master plan.

Mayor Hawkins questioned if that is a good use of CRA funds. He explained that the City has hired someone to do this, and the Commission needs to let them do their job.

The Commission asked what Mr. Carrino needs from the Commission at that meeting with Mr. Carrino explaining they need to wrap up the current RFQ and get direction on next steps.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus of the Commission to close the previous RFQ and end the contract with G3C2.

The Commission asked if staff had reached out to Kagan with Mr. Carrino responding that he has spoken with Mr. Kagan; however, he is working on the Tavares downtown and indicated he wanted to wait to see what the Commission decides today. He stated he would tell Mr. Kagan that he is welcome to participate in what process they use.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft summarized that they are going to proceed with letting Mr. Goman do the 60 to 90 day marketing. He suggested they set up a meeting to talk with Richard Levy or talk to him one on one.

Discussion was held regarding what the purpose would be to talk with Richard Levy with Vice Mayor Ashcraft indicating they would ask him to help ascertain how to move forward. Further discussion was held regarding Dr. Levy, whether to do an RFP on all three lots and whether they could be done simultaneously.

Mr. Carrino explained that Mr. Goman could not legally talk with developers once the RFP/RFQ is issued.

Mr. Goman stated he recommended 60 to 90 days for the marketing period. He explained that it would not involve just advertising but would involve direct contact with developers that are capable of doing this type of project. He added he would provide updates on a monthly basis.

Commissioner Lee asked for Mr. Goman's vision for the downtown with Mr. Goman responding that they have a master plan that sets the vision. He cautioned against going lot by lot and saying what each one should be. He said the market will tell them what makes financial sense.

Daniel DiVenanzo announced he was leaving the meeting and that the Hoffers had also left.

Commissioner Asbate indicated his intent to also leave the meeting but changed his mind after the City Clerk confirmed they would still have a quorum.

Mr. Goman stated they should not specify what should be on each site. Let the investors make that determination other than possibly the parking garage if the City is going to fund that. He also cited the possibility of the City building a hotel and conference center and then contracting with someone to operate it. He stated they should get feedback from the market

before making that type of commitment. He emphasized that he would not be brokering anything, they will just be trying to attract investment capital. He further emphasized the City is his client. He stated the key point is to find out what the market is interested in putting money into. He added they need to make sure whatever is proposed has the data behind it.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked if the master plan consultant had all the data with Mr. Goman responding that it is more an urban planning document although there is some market data in the study.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft expressed support with Mr. Goman proceeding with the marketing, but he would like to talk with Dr. Levy.

Commissioner Asbate expressed concern that Mr. Goman is not a marketing company, but he could subcontract for that. He stated the City needs a marketing plan but expressed opposition to spending the money and added that he did not believe Mr. Goman is the person to do it. He commented that the City already has marketing funding in the budget and expressed support for it either moving back under Economic Development or hiring a person for that purpose.

Mr. Goman stated that what he is proposing is not a glitzy marketing brochure, but it is a data driven program to discuss why to invest in the City. He indicated they would be discussing with developers why it would make financial sense to invest in the City. He commented on how they would address proposals they did not think were appropriate for the City.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked about the Duke Energy marketing study with Al Latimer, Economic Development Director, responding it has been completed and they will be scheduling a presentation to the Commission.

The Commission asked what is the difference between what Mr. Goman is proposing and the marketing study with Mr. Latimer explaining the marketing study focuses on specific audiences and businesses. He stated that Mr. Goman will be talking to investors only about specific parcels of property.

Commissioner Lee stated that the City needs to hire someone that is marketing the City year-round.

Further discussion was held regarding the various types of marketing with Mr. Carrino explaining that the communications position is about fostering positive relationships with local media and getting the word out about what the City is doing. He added that the people Mr. Latimer is marketing to may not be interested in the absorption rate of residential units, but Mr. Gorman's people will be.

Commissioner Asbate commented on the various marketing programs the City already has available to use without costing more money.

Discussion was held regarding the benefit of utilizing Gorman & York to do the personal contact with Mr. Carrino indicating that Mr. Gorman is currently paid based on specific contracted items. The \$30,000 is a ballpark estimate for his time.

The Commission asked how much had been spent at that time with Gorman & York with Mr. Carrino responding approximately \$25,000. He commented that they could contract with him for a specific task at a specific cost.

Mr. Goman explained how his marketing is done with personal contacts both locally, regionally and nationally and cited a number of other cities they have been working with.

The Commission asked how often they have been successful with their marketing with Mr. Goman indicating eight out of ten with most of them in small towns. He stated they work mostly with cities in the 20,000 to 60,000 population range. He cited other areas they are working in.

Commissioner Lee asked Mr. Goman how he feels about the City getting a second opinion with Mr. Goman responding positively and noting he is familiar with Dr. Levy.

Commissioner Asbate asked to move on to the next agenda item.

Mr. Carrino summarized that they will close out the previous RFQ and they will have Mr. Goman work with the development community. He explained that prior to the previous RFQ, as Economic Development Director, he went out and met with members of the development community in order to get them to respond to the RFQ. He recommended that they allow Mike Goman to assist the City with that.

The Commission asked why Al Latimer couldn't do the development marketing with Mr. Carrino indicating Mr. Goman probably has more development community contacts.

The Commission further discussed a marketing program, what it should entail and if they should use Goman and York for that purpose.

Discussion was held regarding the RFP/RFQ process with Mr. Carrino explaining that the City cannot talk individually to anyone who might respond to that. They have to come to a pre-bid conference and submit any questions in writing. Answers to those questions have to be presented in writing to all of the potential applicants.

Mr. Goman explained his recommendation to contact potential developers first prior to issuance of the RFQ/RFP so they get a better response to the issuance. He further explained how he would market both the downtown lots and other development opportunities.

Ms. Garcia stated that, when it is issued, the RFP needs to be much more detailed and can include all of the information and data that Mr. Goman would be distributing.

Discussion was held regarding who to use for the development marketing program, the lack of response to the previous RFP, and when to implement the development marketing.

Ms. Garcia recommended that the Commissioners should not hold individual meetings with any potential consultants and that any discussions be held in a public forum. She indicated they could speak individually with Mr. Goman as he was already hired as a consultant.

Further discussion was held regarding talking to another consultant, talking to Dr. Levy and how Goman & York was selected. It was suggested that they let Mr. Goman proceed with contacting developers and schedule a workshop with Dr. Levy.

Discussion was held regarding when the development campaign should be initiated with Mr. Goman indicating that the prime period is September to November.

Mr. Carrino stated he would contact Dr. Levy and arrange to schedule a meeting and put him in contact with Mr. Goman.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus of the Commission to have Mr. Goman proceed with the development marketing while simultaneously having discussions with Dr. Levy and obtaining his opinion about their plans.

Commissioner Asbate stated he is only agreeing in order to help them work together. He stated he feels that is in the wrong order. He expressed support for having Mr. Latimer produce a marketing plan. He questioned what would be the end result from Mr. Goman.

Mr. Goman responded that the goal is to get developers to come to the City and provide proposals for development projects.

Commissioner Asbate asked the process that Mr. Goman will use with Mr. Goman explaining the process they use. He stated they track which developers are undertaking what types of projects and they will reach out to them and contact them directly.

Mr. Carrino explained he would discuss the cost with Mr. Goman and how it will be structured for the development marketing.

Commissioner Asbate asked if Dr. Levy isn't interested in helping the City, if they could move on to additional consultants.

1.2 Eustis Community Center Site

Attorney Garcia stated there was no information back yet for the community building site.

Commissioner Lee asked them to look for an additional site that would be good for the hotel if the community building site can't be used.

Attorney Garcia noted that, even if there are no deed restrictions on the property, the sale of the property would still need to be handled through a public process.

Commissioner Asbate asked for an explanation about the handling of the Hoffer's proposal with Attorney Garcia explaining that is CRA property which has to be handled differently. She indicated they have to receive competing proposals. She stated they have to follow the requirements under FSS Chapter 163. She added she expects to receive the title search in the next week.

Commissioner Asbate asked about directing staff to proceed with an RFP as soon as the title search is received.

Discussion was held regarding the City's desire to generate as much interest as possible, what to include in the RFP and what to do if the community building goes away.

Mr. Carrino commented on the need to determine how specific they want to be in the RFP. The more specific it is the longer it will take to issue the RFP. He questioned if they want them to also talk about the community building site with potential developers.

Discussion was held regarding how long to have the RFP out and the need to have space available for the public to use.

Attorney Garcia stated that the RFP would be beneficial and good to preserve full transparency and invite competing proposals. She explained it would be required to advertise it in the newspaper. She commented that one complication with the Hoffer proposal is that it also includes a request to use one of the downtown lots.

Commissioner Asbate asked about the process involved considering an unsolicited proposal with Attorney Garcia explaining it is because the property involved is CRA property. She explained the statute requires a notice for competing proposals which involves publishing in the newspaper and inviting competing proposals. She indicated the RFP is an added layer. She explained how the RFP is processed and emphasized that it would not be feasible to get it done in 30 days due to the process which includes financials and appraisals.

Commissioner Asbate asked if they are required to do an RFP with Attorney Garcia further explaining the requirements under FSS 163.

Vice Mayor Ashcraft asked Mr. Carrino if he had asked the Hoffers if use of the downtown lot is a dealbreaker and he responded negatively. He noted that they are not required to respond to an unsolicited proposal.

Commissioner Asbate asked the requirements under the statute with Attorney Garcia responding they are required to publish in the newspaper, post on the website, and post the RFP on a website for that purpose. She explained that whether they issue an RFP or not, they have to allow for competing proposals if they want to consider the unsolicited proposal.

Mr. Carrino stated they are required to post an ad in the newspaper, and they have to accept competing proposals whether they call it an RFP or not.

Discussion was held regarding final outcomes from the workshop as follows: 1) Dr. Levy; 2) Issuance of an RFP; and 3) Marketing.

Discussion was held regarding issuing an RFP for the community building site only with further discussion regarding inclusion of the downtown lot. It was suggested they run the RFP for 60 days.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus to issue an RFP for the community building site only, once the title search is completed, and for the RFP to be separate from the Waterman site.

CONSENSUS: It was a consensus for the RFP to be out within 30 days and for it to be open for 45 days.

Commissioner Asbate summarized the following takeaways: 1) Meeting with Dr. Levy if he will come, if not, move on to #3 or #4 consultants; 2) RFP for community building to be released within 30 days and to run for 45 days; and 3) Engaging for marketing for downtown development.

Mr. Carrino apologized for an apparent lack of leadership as both Economic Development Director and as City Manager based on Commission comments. He asked if Commissioners want to have a public or private conversation regarding making a change in City Manager.

Mayor Hawkins stated he has full confidence in Mr. Carrino's job. He noted that this type of project has not happened in a lot of communities. He emphasized that he is totally satisfied with the job he has done.

Mr. Carrino indicated he would be happy to have a private conversation if any of the Commissioners would like to do that.

2. Adjournment: 11:58 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