

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES
EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 7

Patrick C. Comiskey

*Juno Beach Town Manager
Candidate Report*

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Cover Letter and Resume

Patrick C. Comiskey

**1501 Edgewater Avenue
Mount Dora, FL 32757**

**Cell: 443-477-0972
Email: pccomiskey@gmail.com**

October 18, 2024

Mr. Scott Krim, Senior Consultant
Colin Baenziger & Associates

RE: Juno Beach Town Manager Position

Dear Mr. Krim:

I am excited to submit this letter of interest for the town manager position having spent 30 years building my knowledge of city government operations. I feel my background encompasses the broad and diverse municipal experience for which you are looking. I have successfully managed cities in different parts of the country giving me a vast assortment of work experiences with different governments: state, county, and regional. I hold a solid record of positive, energetic leadership stressing quality customer service, support for the employees with whom I have worked, and productive partnerships with many intergovernmental and community agencies. I have also enjoyed good working relationships with the vast majority of the elected officials under whom I've served. I strive to be an effective listener and value input from others and have always had an open-door policy with officials, staff, and citizens of the community. I believe citizen accessibility to be vitally important and have always been very visible in the community.

A strong attribute of mine is planning, particularly with infrastructure, and my planning and oversight experience is substantial. I also enjoy finding solutions to budgeting challenges. I have successfully prepared and managed many general and enterprise fund budgets, have overseen millions in capital projects, and have acquired many grants. I also possess an in-depth understanding and experience with an array of electric, maintenance, water, wastewater, marina, and storm water management issues. Additionally, I have extensive experience with successful beautification and park projects. Furthermore, I have undertaken measurable improvements to responsible service delivery through successful negotiations resulting in sensible agreements with county government and other area agencies.

In Mount Dora, I was brought in as a change agent and unfortunately a new mayor and the bureaucracy pushed back; eventually, leading to my position becoming untenable. After my first year, I had a good review from the city officials and they gave me a \$17,000 raise. I have provided a list of many of the city's accomplishments and fiscal savings under my leadership.

My wife is a Florida native and I am a graduate of the university in Gainesville. We are excited about this opportunity and are looking to make a long-term commitment to Juno Beach where we plan to become actively involved. I look forward to discussing this position and special opportunity with you at your convenience.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Patrick Comiskey

Patrick C. Comiskey

**1501 Edgewater Avenue
Mount Dora, FL 32757**

**443-477-0972
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Experience

City Manager, Mount Dora, FL

2021 - 2024

Population approx. 18,000; regular employees approx. 250, total approx. 325; annual budget about \$130 million

- Oversaw city operations
- Responsible for general, sewer, water, storm water, electric, sanitation, fire service, capital, CRA, and other funds
- Managed police, fire, public works, sanitation, sewer, water, electric, storm water, parks, recreation, economic development, HR, planning, zoning, and large tourism operations
- Reported to the mayor and six city council members

Opportunities: Proposed an alternative plan for the construction of two new fire stations and a new public works complex that would eliminate the construction of one building utilizing current structures and saving \$16 - 20 million; Council accepted my plan to eliminate the city police dispatch center in favor of the county 911 center saving over \$400,000 annually; eliminated and consolidated unneeded positions resulting in a net reduction of six positions for a savings of approximately \$400,000; directed key staff to seek piggyback contracts or take informal proposals to avoid automatic use of CMAR resulting in savings of \$330,000 on two different projects from what the CMAR proposed; collaborated with the city engineer and budget director to reserve over a quarter of a million dollars over two years to mill and pave the gateway street into town (project planned for fall of 2024); increased sewer fee to generate an excess of \$1 million in annual revenue for planned ongoing effort to reline or replace aging sewer lines; partnered with Rural Water to bring in consultants to assist the city in identifying an ongoing odor issue and implement action plan to combat it; convinced city council to upgrade sewer plant one in annual stages instead of borrowing \$30 million to perform redesign of downtown plant; guided key staff member to conduct a physical audit of the city's vehicle and equipment fleet and identified 13 vehicles on the city insurance list that the city no longer owned; partnered with state house member to secure \$707,671 in state allocations for city capital projects; tapped personal contacts in Tallahassee to secure \$4-6 million in federal funds for constructing a community building (not yet awarded); united with the Mount Dora Chamber of Commerce to increase welcome center hours of operation to include weekends and many holidays; reserved \$2 million over two years to secure property for expanding needed parking in the downtown; strategized with IT director to secure a software program with devices for tracking downtown available parking spots and for facilitating paid parking.

City Manager, City of Cambridge, MD

2018 - 2021

Population approx. 12,326; regular employees approx. 112; annual budget about \$20 million

- Oversaw city operations and served as the city spokesperson
- Responsible for general, sewer, marina, and sanitation functions
- Prepared and responsible for city budgets
- City has an engineer, an architect, a planner, a contracted accounting firm, and an economic developer in addition to a police chief, fire chief and other department leadership positions
- Reported to the mayor and five city commissioners
- Served as supervisor of city elections

Opportunities: Everyday responsibilities involve working to meet the goals of a diverse council and needs of a very diverse community; worked with department heads and city staff to compile a detailed line-item budget booklet of the city's operations and prepared budget reduction recommendations; in partnership with state representatives, FOP leaders, and firefighter leaders, we proposed at the state house a police service fee in an effort to keep up with neighboring police salaries and benefits and a separate fire apparatus replacement fee to address the need to replace fire trucks (not just increasing property taxes); worked with Oasis marina management company establishing them in their first two years of managing the city's marina and worked with the company on restructuring their agreement in the face of COVID-19 revenue reductions; served as the city representative board member of a new volunteer committee, Cambridge Waterfront Development, Inc. (CWDI), on a large waterfront development effort involving the county and the state; teamed up with planning staff, county staff, Habitat for Humanity, and consultants on a neighborhood rehabilitation effort involving federal funds and initiated state and federal grant applications for a neighborhood park; collaborated with the Chamber of Commerce, Main Street, the county tourism office, and the county economic development office to promote the city and encourage various downtown revitalization projects; initiated a plan to apply for federal funds to eliminate environmental issues in the vacant, historic city hall that will ultimately lead to renovating and reusing the two-story building with its iconic clocktower; left millions in budget surplus upon my departure.

Educational Sabbatical

2016 – 2018

Furthered my education by completing a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration (concentration in accounting) to compliment my BA and MPA; towards the end of this period, met with several cities to find a new employment opportunity.

City Manager, City of Thomaston, GA

2002 – 2016

Population approx. 9,500; commercial hub for several counties, regular employees approx. 80, originally approx. 135; annual budget about \$25 million

- Oversaw all city operations and served as the city spokesperson
- Responsible for general, police, fire, public works, water, sewer, electric, and sanitation functions
- Prepared and responsible for all city budgets
- Performed all hiring and firing
- Coordinated most major purchases
- Collaborated with multiple engineering firms and multiple attorneys over the years

Opportunities: Under the leadership of the mayor and city council, our team replaced out more than \$30 million of capital assets and infrastructure including the replacement of approximately one third of the city's estimated 79 miles of water lines, approximately 12% of the city's estimated 68 miles of sanitary sewer lines, approximately 37% of the city's estimated 57 miles of streets, and many miles of sidewalk replacement; doubled the size of Thomaston's largest reservoir adding 1/4 billion gallons of water storage; developed a popular 40-acre passive park with walking trails, water features, picnic and playground areas; reacquired two parks from the county (through service delivery agreement) rebuilding playgrounds, basketball and tennis courts; developed Lake Thomaston, the city's 70-acre reservoir with its 1.6-mile lakeside trail, for use as a new city park and as a tourism draw, with new restroom/pavilion and boathouse/amphitheater facilities; prepared and managed 14 balanced budgets, leaving approximately \$16 million in surplus upon my departure.

City Manager, City of Wellsburg, WV

1998 – 2002

Population approx. 3,300; regular employees approx. 35; annual budget about \$2.4 million

- Served as chief administrator and chief financial officer
- Responsible for general, water, and sewer functions
- Reported to city council (8 members) and mayor
- Reported to water/sewer board (6 members) and mayor
- Assisted all city boards and committees in bringing ideas to fruition

Opportunities: Under the leadership of the mayor and city council undertook factory tax audits (hired out of town CPA) and brought in \$92,000 in back taxes; initiated commercial garbage bill audits brought in \$17,000 in additional annual revenue; strategized with elected officials, city staff, and citizens on resolving dilapidated housing issues; prepared ADA plan for city hall; managed storm water separation projects; and oversaw approximately \$475,000 in capital improvement projects.

**Director of Purchasing and Personnel,
Director of Personnel**

**City of Clarksburg, WV 1993–97
1997-98**

Population approx. 18,000; regular employees approx. 220; budget about \$11 million

Purchasing: Organized, created, and reviewed contracts and agreements with vendors

Some Successes: Reduced a number of invoices through consolidated orders and payments; increased use of formal purchase orders; achieved expenditure savings in excess of \$50,000 in last fiscal year; created service contracts and implemented bidding on several items where it had not been done previously; created a draft for a purchasing policies and procedures manual.

Personnel: Created an employee handbook and many personnel forms and policies; designed employee appraisal forms and process; wrote numerous job descriptions; drafted organization charts for all city departments; served as secretary to management team during union contract negotiations; established an employee newsletter; coordinated department safety committees; organized a wellness program.

Some Successes: Developed and implemented policies for reducing sick leave usage; policies helped reduce sick leave usage by more than 35%.

District Executive, Boy Scouts of America, Clarksburg/Parkersburg, WV

1989–91

- Organized and guided the Boy Scout program in a four-county area of West Virginia; coordinated approximately 36 volunteers.

Education

Master's Degree in Public Administration, West Virginia University, Department of Public Administration, 1993

- Graduate work performed for the Small Community Rural Wastewater Demonstration Project
- Employed as a part-time worker/intern for the City of Clarksburg
- Pi Alpha Alpha National Honor Society for MPA students

Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, University of Florida, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1988

- Florida Blue Key (one of approximately 120 students tapped annually)
- President Pro Tempore of the Student Senate (elected by 80-member body)

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (concentration in accounting), Middle Georgia State University, College of Business, 2017

- President's List Scholar

Certified Purchasing Manager (CPM), Institute for Supply Management (ISM), 1997

- Completed the requirements for the Certified Purchasing Manager Certificate (CPM)
- Passed all four comprehensive examinations

Associations

- International City Managers Association (ICMA)
- Institute of Supply Management (ISM)
- Former Harrison County United Way Allocations Committee Chair
- Former Flint River Council Commissioner
- Former Pine Mountain District Membership Chair and Finance Chair
- Former Wellsburg and Thomaston Kiwanis
- Former Knights of Columbus Financial Secretary, Council in Wellsburg
- Ancient Order of Hibernians
- Eagle Scout

**Mount Dora City Manager Patrick Comiskey
Savings, Grants, and Cost Avoidance
Summary 2021 - 2024**

✓ Advised City to limit construction to just one, new fire station -\$16 minimum but as much as \$20 million total avoidance	\$16 million
✓ Worked with personal contacts in Tallahassee to secure support for a community center in NE community (if/when a grant is awarded)	\$4-6 million
✓ Eliminated police dispatching services in favor of using 911 (annual savings of \$400,000)	\$400,000
✓ Elimination of administration police captain post (annual savings of \$85,000)	\$85,000
✓ State Allocation for Donnelly Street Milling/Paving	\$500,000
✓ Savings by not using CMAR for Liberty Ave. Storm Water project (one-time savings of \$300,000 or up)	\$300,000
✓ Directing staff to file Pine Street sewer line invoices to FEMA	\$877,666
✓ State Allocation for Hilltop Storm water project	\$207,671
✓ Eliminated Leisure Services Director position & Assistant (annual savings of \$175,000 in salary alone)	\$175,000
✓ Elimination HR manager, asst city clerk post, crime analyst (annual savings of \$180,000 in salary alone)	\$180,000
✓ Consolidated PIO & Economic Development Director positions (annual savings of \$60,000 in salary alone)	\$60,000
✓ Reduction in legal fees FY 21-22	\$25-35,000

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✓ Library Simpson House Renovation work without CMAR	\$30,000
✓ Negotiation with CMAR on pay beyond PO on WWTP 1 (below what the mayor agreed to pay the vendor)	\$26,400
✓ Directed staff to perform a physical audit on all vehicles/equipment (discovered 13 vehicles on the insurance we no longer had)	\$26,000
✓ Police supplies proposed for purchase, directed chief to Lowes	\$15,000
✓ Additional interest to be received on one year CD	\$12,000
✓ Directive to request 5% reduction in Street sweeper price	\$9,000
	<hr/>
Estimate/Summary Minimum with Grant	\$22,928,737
Without Community Center Grant (minimum summary)	\$18,928,737

**Mount Dora City Manager Patrick Comiskey
Projects and Actions
Summary 2021 - 2024**

- ✓ Working with Rural Water and outside contractors to dramatically reduce, contain and monitor the hydrogen sulfide odors at the city sewer plant on Rt 441.
- ✓ Worked with city engineer to set up a \$3 million dollar project to mill and pave Donnelly Street from 5th to Limit. Worked with Rep Keith Truenow to get a \$500,000 allocation from the state.
- ✓ Setting the stage for replacing or relining sewer lines in the city with an annual commitment of \$1.5 to \$2 million annually with \$500,000 in annual assistance from the state. Promote a constant effort to identify ways to consolidate sewer lift station locations.
- ✓ Working with the Chamber of Commerce to get the "Welcome Center" open on the weekends and many holidays.
- ✓ Set aside \$2 million (after two years) for property purchase for parking solution.
- ✓ Working with County government to set up a plan for a three-year pilot project to establish bus shuttle service for weekends with the federal government paying for 50% of the program (starting in the late summer of 2025).
- ✓ Identifying multiple lots for possible purchase for adding parking spaces; had an agent approach the property owners for purchase prices.
- ✓ Worked with DOT officials in DeLand and Tallahassee to get a temporary traffic light installed at the entrance way to the Lakes of Mount Dora.
- ✓ Worked with Apopka officials to develop agreement to transfer city reclaimed water customers in Orange County from Mount Dora to Apopka.
- ✓ Recommended city-pull back from \$30 million dollar loan plan for WWTP 1 and instead prioritize smaller projects at the plant each year.
- ✓ Put together a plan for constructing a community center on Lincoln Street and received buy-in from state community development officials.
- ✓ Establishing a full-time urban forester position, prepared hire letter to finalist to be hired in January 2024.

Section 7

- ✓ Initiated ongoing, annual fire hydrant testing by the fire fighters so they would know how to operate them in an actual fire event and the hydrants would be in working order.
- ✓ Initiated ongoing, annual pre-fire inspections of all commercial building by fire fighters so they would be familiar with the insides of the buildings should a genuine fire break out.
- ✓ Picked up the languishing pickleball court project and carried it to the finish line.
- ✓ Directed staff to install fire alarm systems in one water plant and two sewer plant facilities that did not have them.
- ✓ Directed a staff member to audit city vehicle inventory and discover 13 vehicles on the city vehicle insurance even though we did not have them anymore.
- ✓ Pulled back approximately \$350,000 in proposed purchases in 2022-2023 FY, deactivated many procurement cards limiting number for each department, and required departments to receive approval from the finance director or city manager in order to make purchase over a set number for the last two months of the year in an effort to offset underbudgeting of health insurance costs.
- ✓ Moving staff out of the Simpson house permanently so it could be renovated.
- ✓ Established a social media coordinator position and began a city social media presence and improved posting of information ahead of time.
- ✓ Increased transparency at city hall posting council meeting agendas earlier than in the past.
- ✓ Directed staff to contract with a collection agency to submit written off collectibles to further collection potential

Candidate Introduction

Patrick Comiskey

EDUCATION

Masters in Public Administration (MPA) – West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
Bachelors of Science (B.S.) in Business Administration with a Concentration in Accounting – Middle Georgia State University, Macon, GA
Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) in Sociology – University of Florida, Gainesville, FL
Certified Purchasing Manager (CPM) – Institute for Supply Management, Tempe, AZ

EXPERIENCE

City Manager, Mount Dora, FL	2021 – 2024
City Manager, Cambridge, MD	2018 – 2021
City Manager, Thomaston, GA	2002 – 2016
City Manager, Wellsburg, WV	1998 – 2002
Personnel Director, Clarksburg, WV	1993 – 1998
Purchasing Director, Clarksburg, WV	1993 – 1997
District Executive, Boy Scouts of America	1989 – 1991

BACKGROUND

The City of Mount Dora, located north of Orlando, is a tourist town. The community currently has a population of about 18,000 and was built in the orange grove belt of central Florida. With the growth of metropolitan Orlando and Florida, in general, housing and commercial development have replaced the orange groves and tourism and retirement incomes are the economic drivers. The city has an iconic downtown that many describe as a New England style town. The city downtown is located along a slope off the shore of Lake Dora providing a unique geographic feature for Florida.

The City of Mount Dora has a general fund budget of \$25 million and a total fund operating budget in excess of \$130 million and 250 full-time employees. Eleven department and division heads, the executive assistant, and the city clerk report to the city manager. The city has traditional enterprise fund operations including water, sewer, and garbage along with storm water and electric. The city also owns a city marina and lighthouse.

The three (3) most pressing issues facing the city include infrastructure replacement, downtown parking, and rapid growth.

1. The city has aged sewer lines that need to be replaced - having water infiltrating the collection system during rain events and periodic line breakages. Parts of the city collection

system become overwhelmed resulting in sewage overflowing manholes during rain events. The city also has sixty lift stations to maintain.

2. Downtown parking is the number one issue of the downtown business community. The city has secured a real estate agent to secure property purchase proposals from property owners on 5th for the long-range purpose of building a parking garage. The agent has also discussed the purchase price of multiple property parcels off of Highland Avenue. The Highland Avenue parcels are being considered for the development of satellite parking lots. The city is working on a plan with the county government to establish a shuttle bus system on the weekends and city holidays to alleviate parking limitations in the downtown areas.

3. Rapid growth is a universal concern throughout the city and county. Lake County is one of the fastest growing counties in one of the fastest growing states. Many residents are in favor of the city government taking steps to curtail and limit the growth. The state has struggled to keep up with the increased amounts of traffic on local state roads. The city has capacity issues requiring a major expansion of a sewer plant and the probable construction of a new plant east of the city if elected officials continue to approve development projects. Also, the county recognizes the limitations on water supply but ignores the issue when considering development.

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

My wife is a Florida native and was raised on the Florida and Georgia coasts. I attended school at the University of Florida and have many friends spread out across the state so we both have strong Florida connections. One of my favorite classes was Florida history and I have a deep appreciation for Florida. We are at a point in my career where quality of life ranks higher than other career objectives. I have accomplished more than most could hope to achieve in a career in local government, so I no longer need to climb the ladder.

I think Juno Beach leaders are looking for a seasoned manager who is interested in taking what he has learned and experienced and help the city leaders formulate consensus and govern effectively. One of the things I like about Juno Beach is its size. Working in a small city government gives me, as the manager, an opportunity to work with more people directly. I think people are going to want a manager who is visible and assessable, and I have always been both of those things. Additionally, my dog and I walk more than two miles a day, every day. We meet a lot of people, and we typically walk the business district multiple times during the week. We visit city parks every weekend, so we meet a number of people and see, first hand, any maintenance or infrastructure issues. I have worked in multiple environments and understand the high expectations of citizens and have successfully worked under those expectations.

Patrick Comiskey

I enjoy bringing people together to work on a problem then stepping back and allowing the group to work out solutions. I also enjoy doing the same with staff members and allowing the staff leader to implement the plan. Management by objectives is my preferred framework. I will ask department and division leaders to put together goals for the year and the two of us will finalize a list, incorporate those into the budget request, then meet monthly to review the progress. I also believe in management by walking around, visiting job sites and workstations is commonplace for me. I enjoy seeing forward progress.

Staff members would advise that I allow them to run their department or division but will give them projects and assignments to complete. I think they would say I am fair, knowledgeable, and open to suggestions and I am someone who would not ask them to do anything I would not be willing to do myself. They will also tell you I expect results and will hold people accountable. With a small staff, like Juno Beach, team projects are a natural. I want staff to enjoy their jobs and be successful.

City officials will acknowledge I have good budget and financial skills and that I am a humble person who interacts well with the public. I think they would say I am respectful to people even when they are not and that I work to help elected officials find success and achieve objectives. In each city where I have worked, I have made more documents and information accessible to the city officials and the public and have increased transparency.

My strengths are financial and project management. I have a natural knack for budgeting and solving financial dilemmas as well as fiscal budgeting. Additionally, I interact well with a diversity of people. I am open-minded and I try to always improve myself and adapt to other people. I like people and I try to treat others as I would want others to treat me.

A weakness I have might be that I give people more time or too many chances. I always like to give people the benefit of the doubt, especially if he/she has a positive attitude and I think they are sincerely trying. I also like to give people opportunities from within; however, this burned me in Mount Dora, where those I gave a chance to but chose not to promote or gave counseling to for poor performance are the ones who are identified in the Greene report.

Management by objectives is my measure for how successful the department is and how the organization is performing. We will set goals for the organization and the departments and meet monthly to review how each department leader is performing. If someone is not meeting objectives, I will work with the person to reach objectives. I like for the town council and I to set up a list of five-year goals and then working with staff and citizens break those goals down into tasks and start knocking them out. We accomplished two different five-year goal sets while I was in Thomaston.

Patrick Comiskey

My greatest achievement thus far is probably the development of the Lake Thomaston Reservoir in Georgia. This was a multi-million-dollar project that required the acquisition of land, setting up a public bond issue, working with engineers, biologists, state regulatory agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers, neighboring property owners, the state's electric utility, the railroad, and two different general contractors. This was a multi-year project that resulted in the city having a half a billion-gallon reservoir that insulated the city from late summer droughts.

My greatest failure was in Mount Dora as the city manager. Once the mayor started actively undermining my position as the city manager, I should have started a search for a new position. This would have been best for me and Jane, since my contract had been violated. The lesson is you cannot change the behavior of others so after you have tried to unsuccessfully and the support structure in place to regulate roles and behavior are not working, then accept this and move on.

I have had to terminate many workers over the years. I have never enjoyed it, but it ultimately has to be done from time to time. I generally give workers progressive discipline with as much as a five-strike system. The first a verbal warning, undocumented; then, a documented verbal warning (written and signed received by the worker). Third, a formal written warning and, fourth, a written warning with time off without pay. The next step is termination from employment. If the violation is more severe, then fewer or no steps will occur. In general, the city manager is the final appeal but with termination cases, I have had the city judge serve as a hearing officer and the employee has been allowed to appeal to him to hear the case. I have allowed the employee to be represented by an attorney or other individual and the city judge renders a written finding. Cities have different practices on this and I will adapt to the policies in place.

Sometimes, we have to terminate someone immediately. I tell each newly hired worker how termination works and what will result in immediate termination. These will include stealing and driving DUI (for those who drive a city vehicle). Anyone who is driving a city vehicle as part of their position description will be terminated if he is caught DUI. We had a firefighter caught shoplifting who had to be terminated. I typically sit down with the person and the department head and review the problem and walk with the department head through each part of it.

The person accepting the job in Juno Beach will have to be a good listener. A community with active citizens is going to want access to the manager and elected officials. Development and permit issues are typically hot topics with citizens approaching the city government with different perspectives from multiple sides. It will be important for the city to answer this feedback and be seen as ultra transparent in city operations. This will require regular social media posting, monitoring, and providing responses. Pro-active communication is important and keeping the city council regularly informed is paramount. I think the person taking this job will need to be visible in the community and will need to circulate as much as possible with different

Patrick Comiskey

groups of citizens. I will identify the coffee clubs in town and will try to make an appearance particularly when a hot topic comes up. If we cannot give good answers to tough questions then that tells us we might need to re-evaluate what we are thinking, planning, or doing.

Infrastructure needs will be a major concern for the city government. I will need to evaluate the history of the existing infrastructure and meet with the city engineers and long-time citizens to review the current road, beach, and utility status against the city's capital plans. The services and other infrastructure provided by other players also needs to be evaluated so we know where to advocate on behalf of the town. An example, the county owns and maintains the pier; but it is more likely a priority of the town's that it is kept in top shape. I have decades of experience in working with other utilities, governments, and agencies on service delivery. In fact, I was involved with taking a county government to court over service delivery which resulted in city property owners securing about a 1.8 mil reduction in their county property tax rate.

In my first six months, I would first sit down with each city elected official and hear about what projects and programs each is passionate about. What each official wants to see from the city government. And what they would like to see accomplished. I would also meet with each department head and visit each building, parcel of property, and piece of equipment the department is responsible to maintain as well as review the personnel files of each city worker. I will want to meet as many stakeholders as possible and also stop by a couple businesses each week and introduce myself and hear what each thinks we should do and find out what we are doing right. Additionally, it will be helpful to review how we communicate with the public and gather ideas on how we can do more. And I will want to evaluate the budget booklet and begin gathering information for the next budget cycle.

Naturally, transparency and meeting members of the media will be a priority. I would plan to meet with members to hear what they think the city is doing right and where we can improve and make certain they have my cell number and know they are able to call me whenever they need to do so unless the city has a different public spokesperson from me. In most cases, I will send out information briefs and provide them with a copy of our council meeting notices, agendas, and packets. In general, I have city officials respond when it is good news to report, and I will respond when it is bad news.

Council members will be concerned by the content of the news broadcasts regarding my tenure in Mount Dora. I will do whatever I can to alleviate any concerns, I received a good evaluation after my first year of service and city council awarded me a \$17 thousand increase in my annual pay. In summary, we had a new mayor come on board after I was hired and she wanted to be the city manager. She withdrew from the November mayor's race shortly after I resigned. I provided a list of all the things that were accomplished and millions in operating funds saved during my tenure.

Patrick Comiskey

I will utilize any tool available to communicate with the public. I find it useful to have an active social media presence. In Cambridge, we brought our followers up to over 13,000 people on our main city Facebook page while interacting with the public and sharing information in a transparent, constructive manner.

I would not suspect anyone in Mount Dora will contact anyone in Juno Beach regarding me. In fact, if you watch the films from the meetings, you will see the community activists were in support of me and you will not see any citizens complaining about me.

I walk my dog early in the morning and again at night. On weekends and holidays, we take longer walks all over town. Weaver will likely become a well-known character in Juno Beach. He has also opened the door to introductions for me of various people I may not have met otherwise. Additionally, Jane and I both believe in community involvement and are active volunteers. We also try to attend as many local events as possible. We enjoy the interaction as well as the sense of community. Jane and I also like to hike, bike, kayak/canoe, and travel (currently, we have seen all 48 contiguous states together!). We will likely take trips to area state and national parks. We also enjoy watching college football and try to attend a Florida game each year. We both enjoy reading and learning about history, particularly the local history of the places we visit. In the past, I have helped the Boy Scout Council recruit membership and raise money. I will only do so in Juno Beach if the city council approves it.

ADJECTIVES THAT DESCRIBE ME

- Dedicated/Enthusiastic
- Caring/Kind
- Prepared/Seasoned/Experienced
- Conscientious/Thorough
- Ethical/Honest
- Reliable/Accessible

REASON FOR LEAVING CURRENT POSITION

I enjoyed working for the City of Mount Dora. I received a good evaluation after my first year of service and city council awarded me a \$17 thousand increase in my annual pay. I also had strong support in the neighborhoods and business community. Unfortunately, a new mayor was elected after I was hired and she wanted to be the city manager. Eventually, the mayor's continual undermining of my position with junior staff made my position untenable. I chose to accept the payout, which was the highest amount the state statutes allowed, and tenured my resignation.

Patrick Comiskey

Two city council members voted against accepting my resignation. Both mayor candidates in the November 2024 election will say good things about me.

MOST RECENT SALARY

My most recent salary at City of Mount Dora was \$196,350.

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
PATRICK C. COMISKEY**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Lake County, FL	No Records Found
Dorchester County, MD	No Records Found
Macon, GA	No Records Found
Talbot County, GA	No Records Found
Upson County, GA	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
Maryland	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Lake County, FL	No Records Found
Dorchester County, MD	No Records Found
Macon, GA	No Records Found
Talbot County, GA	No Records Found
Upson County, GA	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found
Maryland	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found

Motor Vehicle

Florida	No Records Found
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Credit

Excellent

Personal Bankruptcy

No Records Found

Sex Offender Registry

Not Listed

Education

Confirmed

**Background Check Summary for
PATRICK C. COMISKEY**

Employment

Confirmed

Social Media

Nothing of Concern Found

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for
PATRICK C. COMISKEY
Personal Disclosure**

Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: Patrick Comiskey

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
1. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated, driving under the influence, operating a vehicle impaired, or a similar offense?
Yes No
6. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
7. Please list links to all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one.
facebook.com/patrickcomiskey,3
linkedin.com/in/patrick-comiskey-66855448/
8. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
 Yes No Television and news sites in central Florida
Reference: Mount Dora
9. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.
None myself, but the cities I have worked have been

Attested to: Patrick C. Comiskey
Signature of Applicant

*DSK Lindsey Green Contract Issues –
Bob Gordon Oct 28. 2023*

DSK Contract Issues – 28 October 2023

How did the contract come about and what issues brought the City to that point?

It all began during the 20 June Council meeting which included an agenda item “Conclusion of City Manager Discussion”. It was agreed by vote of the Council to pursue a Contract with an unbiased 3rd party consultant for ‘Conflict Resolution’ not solely with the City Manager, but all direct reports, the Mayor, the Executive Assistant, etc. Councilman Cataldo made that very clear in his comments during the discussion which can be watched at ~ minute 1:18:30 during that meeting.

It is important to note that during the discussion where Council asked Councilman Bryant to work with Councilman Dawson to develop a Statement of Work and contract with a firm to conduct conflict resolution services, Sherry Sutphen, at that time the City Attorney cautioned Mr. Bryant to follow all purchasing rules and regulations. His motion was revised to include such language (in accordance with purchasing policy) before the vote.

A motion was made to prepare a Statement of Work and allow Counselman Dawson to contact multiple sources to seek a quote for ‘Conflict Resolution’ to work within the City in order to resolve and reach closure of the “City Manager Discussion”. The intent was to have a consultant firm under contract by 18 July and close the City Manager discussions. That motion passed with a vote of 5-1, with the Mayor voting no.

On July 18 City Council meeting the efforts previously agreed upon for closure of the City Manager discussion becomes convoluted and confusing when another issue was raised regarding the City Manager. The Mayor brings up yet another subject, aka “Whistleblower Letter” but she mentions it by reference, and it was not specifically call it the “Whistleblower Letter”. The term “Whistleblower Letter” came up later during various discussions. This “Whistle Blower Letter” was written by the interim HR Director making accusations against the City Manager. The letter is not dated but was addressed to the Mayor and Council Members. It is not clear when or how it was submitted, nor is it clear how it was handled at the time, and how it was handled should be a topic of different discussions.

As the Council meeting continued, Councilman Crail was tasked to contact Atty Jeff Mandel (Labor Atty with Fisher & Phillips Law Firm in Orlando) for 2-3 recommendations on how to proceed with the issue, i.e. the “Whistleblower Letter”. No specific instructions were given, he was merely asked to contact the attorney for recommendations on a path forward because Council was unsure on how to proceed without any appearance of a conflict of interest from any Council member or City function.

During the 24 July City Budget Workshop Councilman Crail gave an update on his action. He had reached out to Jeff Mandel stating the City was looking for 2 or 3 recommendations, and had received only 1; contact Attorney Lindsay Greene. Ms. Greene had conducted the ‘John O’Grady’ investigation for the City, and is familiar with Mt. Dora. Councilman Crail stated he had also reached out to Ms. Greene but had not had a return call. He hopes to be in the position to provide more complete details and information at the next Council Meeting on 1 August.

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Note: It is important for the reader to review the video of this meeting and hear exactly what Councilman Crail says with regard to this investigation and how it is intended to address only 1 issue in a fair and unbiased investigation.

During the 1 August City Council Meeting the discussions continued. This issue was Action Item No. 1 on the agenda. Mr. Crail provided an update to his discussions with Mr. Mandel and the only recommendation Mr. Mandel made was to use Ms. Lindsey Greene, an employee of DSK Law. Councilman Crail stated that Ms. Greene had contacted him on 25 July, and also provided an engagement letter. That letter is dated July 27, 2023 and required an acceptance signature by Marc Crail, the Vice Mayor. That letter states it is a "Retainer Agreement for Representation".

Councilman Rolfson made a motion to appoint Lindsey Greene, and discussions ensued. The bottom-line result was for the City to enter into an Agreement with DSK, hiring attorney Lindsay Greene to investigate the "Whistleblower Letter / Complaint".

DSK Contract and PO:

At some point on 1 Aug Mr. Crail executed the retainer agreement. I don't know at what time it was signed, it isn't time stamped, only signed and dated 1 August, 2023.

It is very important to note that during a previous City Council Meeting where Council asked Councilman Bryant to work with Councilman Dawson to develop a Statement of Work and contract with a firm to conduct conflict resolution services, Sherry Sutphen, at that time the City Attorney cautioned Mr. Bryant to follow all purchasing rules and regulations. His motion was revised to include such language (in accordance with purchasing policy) before the vote.

HOWEVER on this subject and this action she did not say a single word about following the City's Purchasing Regulations / Policy.

Assume the vote was to enter into a contractual relationship with DSK for legal services of Lindsey Greene, then one must also assume that instruction included the direction to follow the Purchasing Rules & Regulations.

Assuming the motion was to enter into the Agreement with DSK in accordance with Purchasing Policy, one must ask:

1. Where is the Sole Source Justification document required to award a contract absent of competition?
2. Where is the requisition authorizing the necessary funding?
3. Where is the Statement of Work used to define the scope of the efforts being sought?
4. Where is the written delegation of authority which gave Mr. Crail the authority to execute the Agreement?
5. What is the maximum liability of the City under the Agreement?
6. What is the period of performance? i.e. When will the Scope of Work (whatever that is) be completed?
7. Where is the Price Analysis which shows the pricing (hourly rates, total price, max. liability) to be fair and reasonable?
8. Was this Agreement reviewed by Legal? If so, where is the written approval from that review?

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Please note paragraph 6 of this Agreement states that all notices and information regarding this matter will be sent to Mr. Crail. This makes him the primary point of contact for the City on all matters and issues in this regard. This aspect of the Agreement was not followed.

It's also important to note the Agreement put the City's Purchasing Manager, Director of Finance and the City Manager in the awkward position of ratifying this Agreement. Consequently when DSK invoiced for "Legal Services Rendered Through 8/31/23" in the amount of \$23,695, a City Purchase Order had to be issued to cover the costs. Note: That invoice includes \$210 in charges incurred prior to the formal execution of the Agreement by the City on 1 Aug. The City issued PO No. 23-00736 on 8/18/23, in the amount of \$23,695 for "Legal Retainer for the Investigation and Related Expenses Through 9/30/23". Note: Prior to receipt of an invoice, the City issued a PO in the exact amount that was invoiced 9 business days later. How could that happen? Coincidence?

There are many more unexplained issues with the Agreement with DSK, but it is most important to understand what exactly was the City seeking under this Agreement. It was intended to be a single item, investigate the "Whistleblower Letter / Allegations" and nothing else, so why was Ms. Sutphen so heavily involved with guiding Ms. Greene's investigation when Mr. Crail was the primary point of contact for the City.

Attachment to DSK Contract Issues

All City, Meetings cited in this paper are listed below. Each meeting cited includes links to each specific meeting and provides a transcription of pertinent summary discussion matters.

20 June Council Meeting:

The agenda included 'City Manager Discussion Conclusion'. Councilman Rolfson was not in attendance making it impossible for Council to vote to terminate or suspend the City Manager as all Council Members must be in attendance per the City Charter. However, there was extensive discussion by the Council and the public. It should be noted that the Council determined that the City Manager should not be terminated, rather a consultant should be hired to conduct conflict resolution and team building. After nearly an hour of discussion, the Council voted to identify a consultant. All Council members except for the Mayor voted in favor (6-1). Only the Mayor voted NO. A clear indication of her determination to remove the City Manager.

A link to the video of that Council Meeting is found here.

<https://mountdorafi.portal.civicclerk.com/event/1418/media>

Pertinent discussions begin at ~55:13 minutes into the video:

- At minute ~55:13: Mayor Stile opens the discussion by announcing the "next action item is City Manager Discussion, Conclusion."
- At minute ~55:24: After an 11 second pause, City Manager Patrick Comiskey states: "... I had an attack made against my name, my reputation with an effort to try to take away my livelihood and my career, I take those things seriously, I responded to every action of substance and they were all shown to be false. The one thing that was true was that I have recommended to the mayor and Council that we not approve the JPA that was presented and approved the other night. ... I told the mayor that and the City attorney when they were in my office or on the phone with me and wanted me to cancel the work session on it. I would like for this matter to be resolved... The surveys I was very pleased to see how positive the results were and I'd like for the Council to wrap this up and close it and let's get on with the business of the City and stop tearing apart City workers and get back to business."
- At minute ~1:01:59: Councilman Bryant continues "... Now, as far as where we go from here, I think, like everybody else on Council, we've spent a lot of time thinking about this, a lot of time and I think we do need to pursue having a third party consultant but not a third party consultant who is going to come in and investigate further... what I am more concerned about is trying to get past this juncture and get us back where we should be as a City government... I think a third party consultant would probably be someone along the lines of somebody skilled in conflict resolution, somebody who's skilled with personal growth, training ... Once again it's been a little over a month and we just need to get back on track, we need to start the healing process, and I think this is a way to do it. And I don't know that

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we need to necessarily bring this up at every meeting in the future as long as we know that the process is moving forward”.

- At minute ~1:03:45: Councilman Cataldo clarifies that Mr. Bryant is not suggesting termination of the City Manager, rather having a consultant for improvement.
- At minute ~1:03:57: Councilman Bryant responds, “... yes... and when I say conflict resolution, this isn’t necessarily pointed directly at the City Manager, it involves the Mayor, the Executive Assistant, it involves any number of people that have come up in conversations and frankly it probably may involve Council members ourselves”.
- At minute ~1:04:44: Councilman Dawson agrees that “there needs to be some sort of healing or team effectiveness that has to happen within his team. According to the survey, the Management is equally divided so they need to come together and work as a team. Patrick shared with him some plans around communication. He agrees that someone should be brought in to work with Patrick and his team. “It’s not just Patrick but it is all of his direct reports working together”.
- At minute ~1:09:49: Councilman Bryant “... I don’t want to see us get too far off track here as to what the question is before the Council right now, and that is, where are we going from here? Where are we going from tonight. Maybe to put a name to a proposal to contact a third party or a consultant for the purposes of conflict resolution and moving forward.... (He proposed Mr. Dawson or Mr. Crail)
After discussion (Mr. Crail is going to be out of the country, and Mr. Dawson will not be In attendance at the next Council meeting are not available to aid in the search).
- At minute ~1:12:22: Mr. Crail suggests Mr. Dawson and Mr. Comiskey work together to identify a firm or consultant. Mr. Dawson agrees to have information for Mr. Comiskey to present at the next Council meeting on the 18th of July.
- At minute ~1:12: 55: Mr. Comiskey asks, “as a point of information I would like for this to include the root of the problem and not just symptoms.”
- At minute ~1:14:13: Councilman Bryant starts to offers a motion, “to authorize Mr. Dawson to contact a consultant or consulting firm to assist the City in moving forward with conflict resolution and any recommendations for personal growth in behalf of its’ employees. And that that recommendation be presented to Council at the next meeting”.
- At minute ~1:15:05: City Attorney Sherry Sutphen interjects stating the effort must be accomplished in accordance with “Purchasing formalities”, then recommends creating a scope of work to give to a couple of firms to give quotes for their work. “If your Motion authorizes Mr. Dawson in conjunction with Patrick to write that scope...”
- At ~ minute 1:17: Mayor Stiles asks Counsel Bryant to add that to his motion.
- At minute ~1:19: Counselman Cataldo speaks of the main purpose of the agenda action item being discussed is “Conclusion of City Manager Discussion”. He asks for clarification of the topic, i.e. what is the “conclusion”. And finally states “So we’re pursuing the ‘Conclusion’ as hiring a consultant by the 18th of July.”
- At minute ~1:20:25: Following much discussion Mr. Bryant offers the motion. “I would move that this Council authorize Councilman Dawson to make contact with consultants in

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accordance with our purchasing policy to obtain quotes to move forward with conflict resolution given (the uh) what's happened up to this point with the City Staff and Council". Mr. Walker seconded the motion.

- At minute ~ 1:52:05: The motion is re-read and a vote is taken. The result 5-1 with Mayor Stile voting NO

July 18 City Council:

During this meeting discussions focusing on Labor Attorney Issues were opened.

Link to meeting can be found here

<https://mountdoraf.portal.civicclerk.com/event/1419/media>

- At minute ~ 42:00: Agenda item 8, was moved from the Consent Agenda to the Action Item Number 3. This item is for the Mayor to execute an engagement letter with Fisher & Phillips, LLP for legal representation regarding FOP and general labor and employment services.

At minute ~ 57:28: The City Manager begins to describe the reason for the item. This issue came about when the City Manager discovered that services from this firm have been on-going for years without an executed engagement letter. The sole intent was to ensure any future services provided by this firm were contracted in accordance with existing Purchasing and City Policies.

During the discussion Councilman Rolfson challenges the statements made by the City Manager with a series of crafted questions related to policy, and then looks to the Ms. Sutphen for confirmations. This takes the discussion to another level and Ms. Sutphen adamantly states it is her job to handle personnel issues.

In our opinion it is inherently obvious by the questions raised, the ensuing discussions and the way this topic was addressed, this approach had been colluded between Mayor Stile, Ms. Sutphen Mr. Rolfson. Although precedent for any legal involvement relative to city personnel issues had previously been resolved using the Fisher & Phillips firm, the Mayor, City Atty and Councilman were determined to have Ms. Sutphen investigate the "Whistleblower Letter".

- At minute ~1:03:09: Mayor Stile asked Councilman Rolfson if he had seen the letter from the interim HR Director?

NOTE: This is the very first mention or reference the "Whistleblower Letter" during a Council Meeting.

- At minute ~1:11:30: Councilman Bryant makes a motion to table the discussion until a later date after more details and facts revolving around the use of the law firm Fisher & Phillips are obtained. That motion passes later in the evening with a unanimous vote.

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- At minute ~1:20:25: Mayor Stile initiates a question to Ms. Sutphen, how does the process work when the HR Director files a complaint against the City Manager, and the two are supposed to work together on personnel issues, how does the process work in that situation? (Again, an inference to the “Whistleblower Letter”.

In her reply to the question Ms. Sutphen recommends Council reach out to Jeff Mandell, an attorney who practices for Fisher & Phillips. This seems odd since given the positions she and Councilman Rolfson had taken earlier about using the firm for personnel issues. Nonetheless, Council agrees to allow Councilman Crail, with support from Ms. Sutphen as needed, to contact Jeff Mandell for advice on how to proceed with the complaint from the HR Director.

July 24 Budget Workshop

A link to the video of this workshop is found here:

[July 24, 2023 City Council Budget Workshop: Governmental Funds and Internal Services • • CivicClerk](#)

- At Minute ~2:38:30: Councilman Crail provides an update on his task from the previous Council Meeting. He explains what he has done, and the only recommendation he received was to contact Ms. Lindsey Greene. He also states this should be a “one and done” type of investigation, it is only needed for this particular instance because normally the HR Director and the City Manager would work together to resolve personnel issues. However in this instance, both of those individuals are involved and we need a neutral and fair investigation of the issue.

1 Aug 23 City Council:

A link to the video of that Council Meeting is found here.

<https://mountdorafi.portal.civicclerk.com/event/1420/media>

- At Minute ~22:38: The Council moves to discuss the Action Items, and the first item was to continue discussions relative to hiring an outside legal firm to investigate the complaint against the City Manager.
- At Minute ~22:59: Councilman Crail presents an update on his action from the previous Council meeting. He reminds Council of the update he had provided during the 24 July meeting, where he had talked with Attorney Jeff Mandel, and also said he had reached out to Ms. Greene, but had not received a reply. He states that Ms. Greene contacted him the next day (25 July).
- At Minute ~25:32: Rolfson makes a motion to appoint Lindsey Greene to investigate employee complaints against the City Manager. (NOTE: He had bragged on how well she did previous work for the City, but he couldn’t recall her last name, nor could he remember the name of the Law Firm. He also struggled to actually clearly state the motion. Also it’s strange the Mayor was quick to provide the name of the firm.)

It is very confusing to understand what exactly his motion actually is and what it entails.

Discussions ensue with Crissy going into an emotional tirade.

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Rolfson wants to read his speech which culminates in a motion to suspend the CM, however he does look at Crissy and say he has more to add, but should they vote on the current motion first, which they agree to do.

- At Minute ~34:40: Jeananne holds a vote on the issue, which passes 7-0.

NOTE: At no point in time did she read the motion being addressed. But it is assumed they were voting on entering into a contractual relationship with DSK, using its employee Lindsey Greene to conduct an investigation.

It is also very important to note that during a previous City Council Meeting where Council asked Councilman Bryant to work with Councilman Dawson to develop a Statement of Work and contract with a firm to conduct conflict resolution services, Sherry Sutphen, at that time the City Attorney cautioned Mr. Bryant to follow all purchasing rules and regulations. His motion was revised to include such language (in accordance with purchasing policy) before the vote.

HOWEVER on this subject and this action she did not say a single word about following the City's Purchasing Regulations / Policy.

Assume the vote was to enter into a contractual relationship with DSK for legal services of Lindsey Greene, then one must also assume that instruction included the direction to follow the Purchasing Rules & Regulations.

So in addition to the previous questions raised in this document, we are now left with the previous situation where we're still waiting on something to be done from previous Council Meetings which called for a Contract with some entity for Conflict Resolution and thus bring "Closure of City Manager Discussions".

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*Former HR Director Support Letter
For Mr. Comiskey*

January 8, 2024

RE: Investigation that was conducted by Lyndsey Green on Patrick Comiskey on behalf of the City of Mount Dora.

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my understanding that this investigation was to determine if a whistle blower claim filed against the city by the Interim HR Director held merit. The investigator asked council if should could further investigate incidents that were being brought to her attention. The City Council voted "no" until this investigation was completed. The investigator did not heed the wishes of council but continued going down rabbit holes. Most surprising, was that the investigator opined throughout her report making it appear the answers of those she was investigating were different than what was said or given.

For example, she opined that Patrick did not take my advice when that is not true at all nor is that what I said during my questioning. Lyndsey Green said, "Mr. Comiskey obviously did not give much weight to Ms. Kraynik's opinion because he appointed Ms. Helfant the Interim Human Resources Director over Ms. Kraynik's recommendation (albeit Ms. Helfant was appointed prior to having facilitated the survey)."

The common theme I see through out the report is that the people that were interviewed were all relatively new in their positions. Most of them had been promoted during Patrick's tenure. I do not know who created the witness list and why certain people were included and others were excluded. All Directors were not included in the interviews.

Patrick Comiskey is the CEO of the City. He is privy to much information and relies on his staff to help him gather additional information so he can make the best possible decisions for the City. A Director level individual should give their opinion to Patrick especially if their opinion is different from his. But at the end of the Day, Patrick is the City Manager. His decision stands and should be executed and supported by his staff. Just because a staff member does not understand everything behind the decision (and sometimes are not privy to this information) does not mean that Patrick is wrong. It means that they need to do their jobs and execute his plan. He is responsible for all Hiring and Terminations in the City. This task is usually conducted by his appointee, the HR Director. As the former HR Director, I never would have hired an employee's spouse, much less a Director's spouse, without first informing the City Manager. I also would never have instigated an investigation against anyone in the City without first making the City Manager aware of the situation. HR does not work in a silo. Employees are the City's greatest asset and its greatest liability. It is imperative that the City Manager is apprised of all situations that involve employees. If the interim HR Director was not keeping the City Manager properly informed, then these duties were fairly removed from their charge.

I felt that this report was rife with whining, either misunderstanding or all out lies, and a lot of hearsay. This is coupled with the investigator interjecting her own opinions and asking leading questions. I found numerous untruths in the report and incidents where a situation was taken out of context and made into something it was not.

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I also feel that the employees were afraid of retaliation from the Mayor. Mount Dora as a City does not have a diversified job market. It is a tourist town and most of the jobs are either in hospitality or in the Medical Field. (Due to the number of retirees that move there.) Employees need their jobs. Mayor Chrissy Stile made it clear that she wanted Patrick fired. I believe this stems from his decision to hire a seasoned and experienced fire Chief instead of promoting an inexperienced Fire Chief who also happens to be the Mayors friend who she frequently goes out with socially. The employees had to choose a side so they chose a side that they thought would benefit them the most and protect them from the Mayors retaliation. If the Mayor was successful in firing Patrick, then any employee that sided with him would be next in line for termination. I have heard that she made that very clear in statements to employees.

It is also interesting to note that the investigator primarily spoke to employees who had negative things to say about Patrick. Most of the people she spoke with had received promotions from Patrick into their positions and had held them for less than 2 years. She did not include interviews from employees that were positive about Patrick. As the former HR Director of Mount Dora, I have only positive things to say about City Manager Patrick Comiskey. However, when she spoke to me, she only asked me about 2 incidents that Patrick brought up in his interview and nothing more. (And then she added her own opinion to change what I said into something completely different. See page 50 2nd paragraph.)

I do not know who Lyndsey reported to during this investigative process. I believe that she was given a charge to remove Patrick from his office. I do not feel that this was a fact-finding investigation but instead was a witch hunt to build a case against the City Manager.

Patrick has been very fair in promoting both men and women into higher positions. In the two years that I worked with him, I never heard him raise his voice or utter a curse word. He is the epitome of professionalism and is very experienced and intelligent. (I also never witnessed him falling asleep in a meeting and we were in plenty together.) Just because some Directors want to work in Silos and not keep their City Manager properly informed does not make him a bad manager. It actually makes them bad directors and mid managers. I am ashamed of many of my former fellow co-workers.

This is a travesty beyond belief. However, Patrick can overcome this and continue being the professional City Manager he has always been. Patrick should not be removed from his position. Patrick is the only person I know that can re-build the City and the employee relationships from the inside.

If you would like further information or discussion, please reach out to me at any time.

Sincerely,



Sharon Kraynik

Former HR Director for the City of Mount Dora

*Recommendation Letter from
Mayor Rideout*

Judge Stephen W. Rideout (Ret.)

Advisor to
Governments, Foundations & Non-Profits on Juvenile & Family Court Matters

May 15, 2024

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to recommend Patrick Comiskey to be the city manager of your community. I was a Commissioner in Cambridge, Maryland when we hired Patrick to be our city manager. At that time, our city had many challenges and a limited budget due to a long-time government structure without professional management. Cambridge, after a two- and one-half-year community effort, established a city council-city manager form of government in 2015. Patrick was our second city manager.

I retired from the city council before Patrick moved on to Mount Dora, Florida but was elected mayor here in September 2022. Patrick and his wife, Jane, are and were friends and both were fully engaged in our community during his time in Cambridge. We often discussed the multiple challenges that the city faced and that he faced as city manager in a community that was resistant to change.

Patrick's time here also had to confront the Covid-19 crisis and its unique challenges and the many new ways that had to be created to keep employees safe while seeing that the day-to-day work of running the city continued. Through all of those difficult days, Patrick used his experience and exceptional knowledge of good and fiscally balanced government to keep our city going and was able to adapt to the multiple issues that we faced.

I have learned from my experience as a commissioner and now as mayor that a city manager can face political challenges when there is a change of administration, none of the former elected officials who hired him are in the current administration, and none of the newly elected officials have previously held public office.

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Patrick faced that situation here along with a workforce that was not used to the city manager form of government and wanted to go back to the old ways of city government. Patrick was caught in the middle of those challenges and worked with staff and the elected officials to ensure that Cambridge met its obligations both financially and to the community.

I hold Patrick in the highest regard for the hard work that he put into his time here and his mild-mannered way of doing business to help reduce conflict and address employee concerns equitably and honestly.

I believe that you will see from his experiences here and in Mount Dora that he is the kind of city manager that can help your city be well run and responsive to your community needs.

If you would wish to talk with me further regarding Patrick's application, my cell number is 703-655-6149.

Sincerely,



Stephen W. Rideout

CB&A Reference Notes

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

Jim Faulkner – Former IT Director, City of Mount Dora, FL 325-875-6732

Mr. Faulkner met Mr. Comiskey in 2021 when he came to Mount Dora. Toward the end of his tenure Mr. Faulkner was acting as a Deputy City Manager, though he did not have the title.

Mr. Comiskey was a good supervisor, and he held people accountable. He managed the staff well. His hiring decisions were good. Because he was logical, he always considered what was in the City’s best interest when making decisions.

An innovative manager, Mr. Comiskey had a creative way of solving problems that had never been thought of by previous managers. He was always out in the community. He had a dog and liked to walk around town. He was visible in the community. He had the support of the public and they responded very well to him. He was down to earth and genuinely cared about their issues.

Information flowed daily from Mr. Comiskey, and everyone knew what was happening. He saw the vision for the community or organization and gets there. His financial skills were excellent, he did far better than other City Managers.

The water treatment plant had an issue that involved the Department of Environmental Protection. He worked with employees on the utility side to resolve the issues. He was proactive and put monitors in while checking levels every day. He worked through the problems well, but it became political in the end. Mr. Comiskey was very calm in situations that would have been very upsetting to anyone else. He took a deep breath and worked through it. He brought the right people in to resolve it. He was one of the calmest individuals that Mr. Faulkner has ever known.

The political environment became so negative that Mr. Faulkner resigned. The Mayor had it out for Mr. Comiskey. Mr. Faulkner was not working for Mount Dora at this time and does not know the details. The Mayor, and the Directors Mr. Comiskey held accountable, may not speak as positive about him as Mr. Faulkner. The Directors did not like being asked to step up to the plate.

Mr. Comiskey was honest and had integrity. Because his character was without reproach, everyone was surprised when the Mayor and others came after him the way they did. The actions he was accused of are not in line with his character and Mr. Faulkner suggests that anyone looking at hiring Mr. Comiskey ignore the accusations. They were politically based, and not substance based.

Mr. Faulkner would hire Mr. Comiskey. In fact, Mr. Comiskey would be his first choice. Of the 20+ city or county managers that Mr. Faulkner has worked for, Mr. Comiskey is the best. He can manage any community of any size. He has integrity and does what he says he will do.

Reference Notes
Patrick "Pat" Comiskey

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Detailed,
- Responsible,
- Compassionate,
- Involved,
- Genuine, and
- Helpful.

Strengths: Really good with finance, can see what is happening before most and works through the issues well ahead of time.

Weaknesses: He is cautious and takes time making decisions at times.

Bob Gordon – Historical Preservation Board Member, Mount Dora, FL 352-360-3019

Mr. Gordon and some other like-minded citizens regularly attend Mount Dora Council meetings and speak up from time to time. After Mr. Comiskey was hired in 2021, Mr. Gordon became acquainted with Mr. Comiskey through these meetings.

Mr. Comiskey performed his job exceptionally well and did what he was hired to do. While they did not agree with everything that he did, they agreed with over 90% of his actions and applauded his efforts even when they did not agree. He did a great job. He asked staff to answer the questions from Council so they would be seen and receive credit for the work they did.

Visible at local events, Mr. Comiskey was a presence in the community. He took casual Saturday afternoon strolls, walked the parks, and spoke to the residents. He interacted well with everyone both out in the community and at Council meetings. He met with residents both privately and in groups. His door was always open, and everyone was welcome. If he was busy at that moment, he made an appointment with them. He was always gracious in his interactions with others.

When asked a question Mr. Comiskey could not answer, he either quickly found the answer or he had the appropriate staff member reach out. He was very responsive over text and email, as well.

The best way to describe Mr. Comiskey in stressful situations is very professional. When the issues started coming to a point Mr. Gordon and a handful of other people dug in and listened to every minute of the Council meeting to learn what was said by whom. They documented these comments and took them to the State Attorney's office. While they do not know all the details, it was clear to them that something was awry. Mr. Comiskey responded graciously by tendering a resignation and moving on. Nothing in his background would concern an employer.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

Mr. Gordon would hire Mr. Comiskey without reservation, he did a great job. Some do not like being held accountable, or having to stick to the budget and resources they are given, and these individuals may not appreciate Mr. Comiskey. He held them accountable.

Mr. Comiskey is honest and forthright. He does what is best for the community despite his personal beliefs. He is a true gentleman and anyone who hires him will be more than pleased with his performance. He is viewed by many in the community as a good person and an excellent manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Great manager,
- Gives credit where it is due,
- Personable,
- Responsive,
- Professional, and
- Honest.

Strengths: Delegates, holds staff accountable, does not take all the credit, gives staff the opportunity to shine.

Weaknesses: When the first accusation was lodged against him, he was perhaps not vocal enough. That said, the issue came out of the blue and caught everyone by surprise. He had no warning that the Mayor was going to ask for his resignation.

**Michael Starling – Former General Manager, Cambridge Radio Station, Cambridge, MD
410-415-3042**

Mr. Starling has known Mr. Comiskey since 2018. They often met in the community and in work related capacities, and bumped into each other socially. They met when Mr. Comiskey came into the radio station to introduce himself to the Cambridge Association of Neighborhoods. The station has a big room that groups can reserve. Mr. Starling watched Mr. Comiskey and was very impressed with how thoughtful he was and how well he communicated with the group. Mr. Starling was reserved at first but quickly became a fan of Mr. Comiskey. Mr. Comiskey provided his phone number and was always good about returning calls even when he could not comment. He was also good about following up once he could share information. He is very professional.

Mr. Comiskey is a solid professional. He is more reserved than a political appointee, he does not commandeer the conversation. He is composed and thoughtful. He is very approachable and a great communicator. He made excellent decisions.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

The County refused to run the election. Mr. Comiskey took ownership of this political hot potato, during the turmoil of the Covid-19 pandemic. He found a group in Maryland that had run many municipal elections and went through the process chapter and verse with them. He was brilliant in his handling of the election. They put the voting site downtown at the Chesapeake College satellite office because it was much closer to Wards 2 and 3 which are underrepresented. Citizens could vote by mail in or in person. He orchestrated the entire election, and they had by far the highest turnout that they have ever had, winding up with a new City Commission and Mayor. The votes between the candidates ranged between 2 and 6 votes in some wards.

Those who lost the election hired lawyers to challenge the results and the NAACP was involved. Mr. Comiskey laid out the process. The change in voting site was much more advantageous for the African American community, their voting numbers were higher than in any election in the past. The election was ratified. He never received the credit that he deserved for this achievement.

In the community Mr. Comiskey was out and about. He was very approachable and very accessible. He talked with constituents and stake holders for as long as they wanted to talk. He was very good natured.

Mr. Comiskey has a thorough grasp of the finances and was never challenged in any aspect of his budget. As a reporter, Mr. Starling watches the leadership when they are in the hot seat to see how they react. Mr. Comiskey never showed any discomfort. He paid close attention to the conversation, but he waited until asked to speak and then was calm and collected in his response.

Mr. Comiskey was unfairly criticized at the end of his tenure through a mishandled power play by the incoming administration who essentially made him the scape goat. Even so, several of the elected officials and the mayor had really nice things to say about him and what he did in Cambridge. He was a straight arrow and nothing in his background would concern a reasonable person. He played every hand he was dealt correctly.

Mr. Starling would hire Mr. Comiskey. In fact, he stepped down as General Manager from the radio station he founded and believes Mr. Comiskey would have done well replacing him. Mr. Comiskey has a great persona, and he comports himself well. He has the right demeanor for a public servant. Whoever hires him will be happy with their choice.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Good natured,
- Professional,
- Dependable,
- Approachable, and
- Solid.

Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey

Strengths: Communication, thoughtful, approachable.

Weaknesses: He is not gregarious and outgoing, so some misjudged him thinking he did not have much to offer. He has much to offer, he is just not gregarious.

Brian Roche – Commissioner, City of Cambridge, MD 443-205-0447

Mr. Roche has known Mr. Comiskey since 2018. Mr. Roche was on the Board of Directors for the Main Street Organization, and he was involved in the Eastern Shoreland Conservancy. They interacted in this capacity and when he needed resources or letters, Mr. Comiskey was always willing to support their efforts and send the right people to help. Mr. Roche ran for the Commission in 2020 and was elected. He took office in January 2021.

The entire Commission was newly elected, and Mr. Roche gained much respect for the responsibilities that city leadership has and of Mr. Comiskey. They are constantly bombarded with requests, even in a small town like Cambridge. In addition, the city manager form of government is new to Cambridge, he was only the second manager to serve the community. The Commission and the community are still trying to understand and embrace this form of government. Mr. Comiskey was a great resource because he was very likeable and always professional. He was always cool under pressure, which was a wonderful trait.

Cambridge is very resource constrained and Mr. Comiskey could have used a larger staff. They were particularly thin in the finance and public works departments. He served as the finance director when the position was vacant and recruited until he found a strong candidate. Even though it was his decision, he brought the candidate to the Council for their approval prior to making the employment offer. Their finance department received high marks, and everyone loved the individual he hired. He understood the need to find the right fit, particularly in government with public scrutiny. He was good at navigating the issues. He allowed department heads to make decisions for their areas. He did not always agree with who they hired, and unfortunately, he was ultimately responsible when it did not work out.

The former manager was never out in the community, and she did not respond to emails. Mr. Comiskey was quite the opposite. He moved right into the heart of the City and was a real joy and positive influence. He walked his dog around the city and was very visible.

Cambridge had a small budget and Mr. Comiskey managed it well. When Commissioners sprung projects and expenditures in public forums, he never balked. He worked as well as he could with them. He utilized grant money and shuffled money to meet obligations.

Mr. Comiskey embraced more progressive concepts and was energetic about them. They had many initiatives in process. Only a small percentage of constituents in their community supported ideas like storm water treatment. He worked with those who were not supportive to try and bring them along.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

The redevelopment of an \$18 million dollar building was led by Mr. Comiskey, and he was tremendous in the process. He has engaged in facilitating necessary change. When an elected body wants to go in a particular direction, he will get them there.

While Mr. Comiskey did not have many resources to keep the community informed, he did the best he could with what they had. He put the word out on Facebook and sent emails and texts. He communicated well and completed every task he was given.

A Commissioner was found to not live in the ward she represented. Because of her heritage, some tried to turn it into a racial issue even though it was not. While the Commission was responsible for navigating the issue, they told her she had to live in her Ward, Mr. Comiskey helped facilitate the process and navigate the controversy. She later ran for Mayor because she realized she did not have to live in a particular ward to serve in that role.

During covid they needed to provide absentee ballots for the election. Mr. Comiskey navigated the process, brought in a professional firm, and adeptly handled this extremely touchy subject. He is skilled and established a professional process that the residents felt confident in. Nothing in his conduct would concern a reasonable person.

Mr. Roche would hire Mr. Comiskey and hated to lose him. Mr. Comiskey will thrive in a community that has accepted the City Manager form of government.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Personable,
- Collaborative,
- Accommodating,
- Progressive, and
- Energized by the positive.

Strengths: Helpful, supportive, professional, very likable, hires well, always cool under pressure, extremely visible in the community.

Weaknesses: Mr. Comiskey did not fail Cambridge, Cambridge failed Mr. Comiskey. The organization and elected body have not fully accepted the city manager form of government. He could have used his position to steam roll the departments, but instead he tried to collaborate and build compromise. His efforts are commendable but did not work in an organization so resistant to change.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

**Tom Puglisi – Secretary, Community Association of Neighborhoods, Cambridge, MD
240-418-2827**

Mr. Puglisi has known Mr. Comiskey since 2018. They lived in the same neighborhood and knew each other well. Mr. Puglisi is the Secretary of the Neighborhood Association, and they interacted professionally in this capacity.

Mr. Comiskey was very even keeled and diplomatic when addressing the community. Commission members mentioned that one of his strengths was the proficient way he relayed information that they did not want to hear. He worked long hours, even through the weekend, and stayed on top of his responsibilities. He had a background in human resources and was good at managing departments and people. He held employees accountable. He made great decisions though they were not always supported for political reasons.

The former Manager was relatively new to the role and her organization of staff was inconsistent. Some directors were over extremely large areas while other directors had very little responsibility. Mr. Comiskey reorganized and realigned the staff so that the organization was more efficient, and responsibilities were more evenly spread.

The City Commission tried to micromanage the organization. Mr. Comiskey did well in this environment. Some Commission members were upset because they could no longer dictate who was hired or how the budget was developed. He tried to educate them about human resources, budgeting, and management in general which are areas of strengths for him.

Cambridge essentially has three community segments, an African American community that is divided within itself and has a history of racial tensions, the “from heres” whose families have lived in Cambridge for generations and the “come heres” who have lived in the city for decades in some cases but are still considered outsiders because their ancestors did not live in Cambridge. These division lines are very strong, in part, because the city was isolated from the state and county until 1950. In addition, the city and the county are very low income overall. Mr. Comiskey did as well as anyone could have. He tried to meet the interests of the entire community. He was not able to fill positions because funding was not available. The Commission was very averse to anything that might be seen as a tax increase, and they lowered the tax rate which left the city with less money than the prior year. Despite these challenges, the city ran more efficiently under Mr. Comiskey’s leadership.

Always at community events, Mr. Comiskey met with various groups in town and attended all city functions. He was very low key and liked to meet with the community in small groups to talk to residents. He ran the first election ever managed by the city. The former manager neglected to make arrangements with the County for the election, and they refused to run the election. Mr. Comiskey organized the election, hired a professional management company, and held a very efficient election. This election had the highest voter turnout in decades, even though it was not held in conjunction with the federal election and was on an entirely different day.

Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey

The only controversy related to disagreements between Mr. Comiskey and the Commission was over the retention of employees. Mr. Comiskey wanted to let some underperforming staff go but they had advocates on the Commission, and he was not allowed to. Other decisions were made behind closed doors and those decisions were always respected by Mr. Comiskey. He did his best to implement what the Commission decided, and he advocated for what was in the best interest of the city. Nothing in his conduct or background would concern a reasonable person.

Many residents do not like the City Manager form of government and they feel that the manager has too much power. In addition, the Commission wants to oversee personnel decisions. Their complaints are not specific to Mr. Comiskey, they are related to the form of government. The only person who may speak negatively of Mr. Comiskey is the department head that he wanted to let go but was not able to because the Commission intervened.

Mr. Puglisi would hire Mr. Comiskey, he is a great manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Great integrity and honesty,
- Cares about the people in the community,
- Communicates clearly,
- Tells elected officials what they do not want to hear,
- Attentive, and
- Good listener.

Strengths: Excellent manager, very even keeled, soft spoken and diplomatic but not afraid to identify problems and be frank in describing them, low key, kind, his concern for others is apparent.

Weaknesses: He is not interested in selling himself as a power broker or a force, which Mr. Puglisi appreciates but others may not.

Mark Lewis – Former Police Chief, Cambridge, MD 410-330-8294

Mr. Lewis has known Mr. Comiskey since 2018. Mr. Comiskey did a nice job and was very supportive of the police department and city operations. He was not a micromanager, which directors appreciate. When they brought issues to him, he worked through it with them, but he did not have his thumb on department heads all the time.

Departments hire their own staff and Mr. Lewis has a set process he uses. Mr. Comiskey was involved in the interview portion. Mr. Comiskey made good decisions both when hiring personnel and in general. He maintained operations at a high level of performance. He had good financial skills, and he met deadlines. He appeared to handle the stress well.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

Visible in the community, Mr. Comiskey was at every event. He supported the ironman triathlon. He was out in the high crime areas during the National Night Out and participates in the PAL program. He was customer service oriented.

To stay informed Mr. Comiskey met with staff once a week before the pandemic. During the pandemic they stayed in regular contact through phone and email. He was a leader who rallies employees around the vision of the elected body.

Mr. Comiskey has not been involved in any controversy that might concern an employer. Mr. Lewis does not know why Mr. Comiskey decided to resign, but the Council was moving in another direction and was taking human resource responsibility away from the manager’s purview. Demoted employees may have a negative opinion of Mr. Comiskey, but he was by the book when it comes to managing an operation.

Mr. Lewis would hire Ms. Comiskey, he is an overall great person. Any employer can be confident in hiring him.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Trustworthy,
- Great person,
- Great personality,
- Great leader,
- Very professional,
- Family oriented,
- All around great person, and
- Very personable.

Strengths: Good leader, great listener, overall great manager.

Weaknesses: Some may prefer a manager to be more involved in the departments, but Mr. Lewis truly appreciates Mr. Comiskey’s hands off style.

Matt Pluta – Choptank Riverkeeper, ShoreRivers, Cambridge, MD 814-881-2165

Mr. Pluta has known Mr. Comiskey since 2018. Mr. Pluta is an environmental advocate who lives in Cambridge, and he really appreciated Mr. Comiskey’s personality. Mr. Comiskey was easy to talk to and get along with. His interest in the topic at hand was admirable. He showed up at every event and engaged with everyone.

The decisions that Mr. Comiskey made were aligned with what Mr. Pluta wanted to have happen in the city. The former city manager was not visible, but Mr. Comiskey was constantly out in the

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

community. He attended the trash cleanup on the weekends and is very community oriented. Residents admired his engagement. He was a role model for how to engage with a community.

Mr. Comiskey communicated as much as was expected and was appropriate. When someone else needed to be part of the conversation, he brought them to the table and made sure that everything was followed through on. He was connected to the issues.

Pollution was coming off the streets into rivers and the waterway. When the issue was brought to the City’s attention, Mr. Comiskey took it upon himself to get funding, purchase new equipment and provide training for the staff. He identified and worked through the issue. Mr. Pluta’s job is focused on protecting the river. Mr. Pluta worked for about four years before Mr. Comiskey was hired and he did not make any progress in his efforts to protect the river until Mr. Comiskey was hired. Mr. Comiskey saw the opportunity and kept at it.

City Council meetings were often stressful, but Mr. Comiskey was levelheaded. He did not overreact, he really listened and then responded appropriately. He made the constituents who come into City Hall feel important.

Cambridge has significant issues with racial disparity. Mr. Comiskey came into a town where discrimination is still very real but not in the traditional sense. The white population is the minority, but African Americans have a long history of being dealt a tough hand. The situation was very challenging, but he did the best that Mr. Pluta has ever seen. Mr. Comiskey made sure all areas of the City were given equal attention and services.

If Mr. Pluta were the Mayor, he would want Mr. Comiskey to be his Manager and was sad to see him leave. Mr. Comiskey is the best manager Mr. Pluta has seen.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Thoughtful,
- Levelheaded, and
- Passionate.

Strengths: Easy to talk to, easy to get along with, interested in the topic at hand, shows up, always present and engaged.

Weaknesses: He was dealt a tough hand and had good intentions but his reaction for trying to change what might be considered hard to change was a little slow. However, he was strapped with the limitations of his employment and the staff. Cambridge has a strong culture bias for people who were not born there. He brought out the best spirit in his work.

**Reference Notes
Patrick “Pat” Comiskey**

Rusty Blackston – Former County Commission Chairman, Thomaston, GA 706-975-9598

Mr. Blackston has known Mr. Comiskey since about 2002. At the time, Mr. Comiskey was hired as their City Manager and Mr. Blackston was a County Commissioner and eventually became the Chairman. Mr. Comiskey is a fine, family man and professional through and through. When he sets his mind to something, he digs in and accomplishes it, no matter how long it may take. For example, it was not uncommon to see him working on projects in the office until 10 or 11 at night.

Mr. Blackston and Mr. Comiskey got along very well. Mr. Comiskey worked well with the elected city officials, but a division existed between city and county officials. He worked to heal the situation by working with and promoting the County. He also focused on obtaining grants to repair water and sewer issues. He worked successfully with the industrial development authority, and the recreation departments.

Mr. Comiskey was incredibly effective at managing the budget. He held department heads accountable when they proposed budgets to make sure money was being responsibly spent. He made decisions quickly if he was knowledgeable of the subject. If he was not, he did his research and then made a prompt and timely decision.

Mr. Comiskey has nothing controversial in his background and whoever ends up hiring him will be getting one of the best. Mr. Blackston would hire him in a heartbeat.

Words or phrases used to describe Patrick Comiskey:

- Dedicated,
- Determined,
- Devoted,
- Professional,
- Articulate, and
- Detail-oriented.

Strengths: He was determined. If he was on a project, he found a way to get it done, and made sure every t was crossed and i was dotted. When he passed you something and said it was good to go, you never had to worry that he missed something.

Weaknesses: He could have been a little friendlier, and willing to joke around a bit more.

Prepared by: Lynelle Klein
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/after-parting-ways-with-the-city-mount-dora-city-manager-speaks-out/ar-BB1iWDVk>

Microsoft Start
March 2024

After parting ways with the city, Mount Dora city manager speaks out

Author: Hayley Crombleholme

Less than a week after he and the city parted ways, we're hearing from the former Mount Dora City Manager for the first time. It's been months of testy council meetings as members discussed with each other neighbors and even heard from an outside law firm on how to move forward. The law firm interviewed city employees and listed concerns like the length of time city positions were left open and claims **Patrick Comiskey** missed meetings or could be hard to get ahold of. **Comiskey** shared his side of how things happened Monday. "When you push on the bureaucracy, it'll push back. And that's sort of what, we were sort of the victim of that here I think," **Comiskey** said. He says he came to Mount Dora in 2021 with years of experience as a city manager. "Fourth city as the city manager," he said of his position in Mount Dora.

He started work just one day before Mayor Crissy Stile was sworn in. "There was an election soon after we accepted the job here," he said. "So, we had a change in a couple positions. So naturally, you have a change in perspective, I guess. Change in objectives." By May of 2023, Mayor Stile made it clear she felt the city needed a change. "**Patrick**, I would like to offer you the opportunity to resign you position because I don't think you're at retirement age, and I do want to offer you that opportunity," Stile said in a city council meeting. "I decline," **Comiskey** responded.

The city ultimately hired a law firm to conduct an internal investigation into some of the claims made against **Comiskey**. They interviewed city employees, and concerns the firm listed in their conclusions and findings included how long it took to fill open positions and the fact that "numerous employees" mentioned "Mr. **Comiskey's** failure to attend scheduled meetings; falling asleep at meetings; or abruptly leaving meetings." It ultimately recommended termination. "There was no expectation of objectivity from that report," **Comiskey** said

Some spoke out against **Comiskey** after the report was released. "Since Mr. **Comiskey** became city manager In November of 2021, we have a disproportionate number of department heads and direct reports to the city manager resign," One resident said in a meeting.

But a number of people spoke in his favor. Including at the final meeting in which the city approved a resignation agreement. You have a city manager that you're sending out the door with his character defamed on what was previously an unblemished record, and you call that honorable? I think not." A resident said. **Comiskey** signed the agreement on Feb. 19. Parting ways about two and a half years into his five-year contract.

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"I was pretty much boxed in to either I was going to accept what they wanted to propose or I would have to go the litigation route, and I didn't want to do that route and I told my attorneys I didn't want to do that route. I wanted us to go ahead and just take the best we could get and move on," **Comiskey** said. He plans to stay in the same line of work. Just somewhere else.

"I think there's going to be mayors and councils out there that want a manager with a lot of experience that isn't afraid to make decisions that are not popular but need to be made," he said. "That's one of the things I've always been willing to do."

WESH reached out to the city of Mount Dora for comment. They declined at the advice of their attorney.

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The Daily Commercial (FL)
February 27, 2024

Mount Dora parts ways with its city manager

Author: Deb Hickok

The Mount Dora City Council voted 5-2 during its Feb. 20 meeting to accept the resignation of City Manager **Patrick Comiskey**. Council members John Cataldo and Dennis Dawson casted the dissenting votes. Lawyers from both sides negotiated the "voluntary agreement" between the manager and the city, which was signed beforehand by **Comiskey**. The settlement includes a severance package to **Comiskey** totaling nearly \$92,000 effective Feb. 26. Before then, he may revoke the agreement. The city also committed to paying **Comiskey's** legal fees. City Attorney **Patrick Brackins** said that a recommendation on how to move forward as quickly as possible in the selection of a new city manager could be presented at the next council meeting. The council's approval of the agreement culminated nine months of public debate regarding the employment of the manager. Prior to that, **Comiskey** received a positive review and a raise from the council in November 2022.

During a council meeting last May, Mayor Crissy Stile requested that an item be added to the agenda in order to address her concerns about the city manager. She started the discussion by asking **Comiskey** if he would offer to resign, which he declined. The mayor then listed issues with **Comiskey**, including disrespect for employees and poor decision making. During the subsequent four months spanning nearly 10 meetings, the city council grappled with several failed attempts to oust **Comiskey** as well as had on-going discussions regarding ways to proceed forward to resolve management issues.

The decision came on the heels of a council meeting one month ago when the same majority suspended the manager with pay and benefits. At that meeting, the council also appointed city Planning Director Vince Sandersfeld as acting city manager. These actions were taken after attorney Lindsay Greene, a labor specialist with Orlando-based DSK Law, submitted a 62-page report to the city in early January. The council hired Greene last August to address an employee's charges against **Comiskey** under Florida's Whistle-blower Act. The \$156,000 investigation included 1,800 pages of record and testimony from 20 current and former city employees. The report concluded that **Comiskey's** conduct was not in violation of the whistleblower act or federal and state civil rights acts. In the report's summary, Greene recommended the termination of **Comiskey** based on her determination that his conduct was in violation of multiple city policies.

Prior to Monday's vote, Cataldo sought a resolution by the council other than accepting the resignation. He stated that initially the council voted 6-1 — and they voted five separate times altogether — to not dismiss the city manager. Cataldo also said that processes the council had requested were not followed, such as a "360 review process" and the hiring of a "conflict resolutionist." "So, I am wondering between all of us, do you really feel content in the process of

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accepting the resignation?" asked Cataldo. "Or do you think that there is room to resolve this? And is this the right way to resolve this conflict?"

"This was not handled in the best way," said Dawson as he agreed with Cataldo. He estimated that the city spent \$500,000 on the situation. Dawson recommended that the council put "serious performance metrics in place" no matter who was the city manager going forward. Cataldo's suggestion to pursue another path did not gain traction with the council.

"We now have an agreement that **Mr. Comiskey** has agreed to under oath to resolve it," said council member Cal Rolfson in speaking in favor of approving the agreement. "And it's honorable for him. It's honorable for us." Rolfson mused that the alternative might be to terminate **Comiskey** for cause as one of the options because "if you look at the 62-page report, there's more than enough cause, in my opinion, to do so." "And now, at this late date, to deflect further makes no sense to me at all.," he added later in his remarks.

Citizens voiced support for the manager. "I beg to differ with you, sir," said local resident Charlie Sanz as she directed comments to Rolfson during the public comment period of the meeting. "He (**Comiskey**) did not do this by choice. He was given a choice, basically by blackmail." Sanz interpreted **Comiskey's** alternatives as either he signs the agreement or faces getting fired without remuneration. "That's not the fair way to do this," she said. "Mayor, before you move on to additional public comment, when the city is accused of blackmailing somebody, it's my job to speak up," interjected Brackins. He cited a Florida statute that sets the legal limits that a city is allowed to pay to resolve an employment dispute with one of its employees. "**Mr. Comiskey** is receiving the full benefits that are allowed under Florida law," said Brackins. "Under no circumstance is he being blackmailed. This agreement was negotiated with his counsel and myself over many weeks in good faith."

"This is not about deflection, this is about reflection," said Joe Lewis, owner of a Mount Dora-based business, during the comment period also in response to Rolfson. "Reflection on the council's actions in the past ten months that brought us here."

Conspicuously absent from the audience was the group of employees who sat together at a council meeting a month ago. "I come to you out of great concern for our employees," said Tara Halcomb, a Mount Dora resident since 1990 and a 16-year city employee, during public comments on Jan. 22. "Since **Mr. Comiskey** became city manager in November of 2021, we've had a disproportionate number of department heads and direct reports to the city manager resign," said Holcomb, who then named 10 employees who resigned. Her comments received applause from the employee contingent.

Earlier during public comments, resident Jay Smith said, "If we are indeed in the position to search again for a city manager, I would hope that you would lay a clear, achievable plan that he or she could be evaluated against." Smith also chastised the city for allowing "the mayor and the city council to overstep their authority and cut the legs out from under the city manager by

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inserting themselves — the mayor in particular — into the operational and administrative issues in this city." "I wish you good luck in finding a candidate," ended Smith.

During Monday night's public comment period, resident Bob Gordon referred to a letter dated Feb. 19 that was circulated to the council. "It presents to you a viable way to work this situation out in an honorable, in a fair, and in a reasonable method," said Gordon. The letter was signed by 21 people who were identified as "We the Citizens of Mount Dora." They suggested 12 provisions to be implemented during a year's period. Their recommendations were designed to give **Comiskey** "the opportunity to once again prove himself and reestablish himself as an effective leader." "Those allegations are merely the opinions of Ms. Greene and each of those claims have been clarified, explained, explicated and dispelled in **Mr. Comiskey's** letter of rebuttal," said the group. They were referring to a 10-page letter with 11 exhibits dated Jan. 22 that was circulated by **Comiskey** to refute the DSK Law report written by Greene. "Instead of **Mr. Comiskey's** name, insert the words 'city manager' and those 12 provisos would still apply," said Gordon in a subsequent interview on the Thursday after the council vote. A 27-year resident of Mount Dora, Gordon drafted the letter, coordinated its review, and gathered the signatures.

In concurrence with other citizen and Dawson's remarks during the meeting, Gordon said that the new city manager should meet with the council to identify a set of performance goals. "What is important today may not be the most important issue for tomorrow, so (they) need to periodically review the goals and objectives during the year," he advised. "The city manager should do the same with his reports," he said. "It kind of rolls downhill." "There's been a lot of interference by the mayor and other council members that is clearly in violation of the charter," said Gordon. "The mayor and the council members should refrain from interfering in the day-to-day operations. That is not their role." "**Patrick** came to me and others to thank us for our support," recounted Gordon. "I am not doing this for you, I am doing this for us, the citizens of Mount Dora," he replied to **Comiskey**.

The city manager relays a statement after council's decision. "I was hired as a change agent with the task of finding ways to improve city operations, counter the spiraling growth of city government, and offer some stability with the revolving door of managers here," said **Comiskey** in a statement emailed on Feb. 21. "No one is ever happy with the guy who has to make cuts," he wrote. "And change is hard to accept sometimes."

Comiskey had previously prepared a document in which he detailed nearly \$19 million in savings and cost avoidance since becoming city manager in late 2021. "The bureaucracy here fought back to the point where my position became untenable," continued **Comiskey**. "In spite of this, we were able to achieve many objectives and positioned the city for future successes while saving the city taxpayers millions of dollars." He expressed his and his family's love for Mount Dora. He also conveyed appreciation for the support from "civic and business leaders and citizens in the community who are appreciative of the progress we accomplished."

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<https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/mount-dora-city-manager-suspended-notified-of-intent-to-remove-him/ar-BB1h6BfV>

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Around January 2023

Mount Dora city manager suspended, notified of intent to remove him

Author: Hayley Crombleholme

The Mount Dora City Council is suspending their city manager with pay and notified him of their intent to remove him. It happened in a Monday special council meeting to consider a report from a law firm hired to conduct an internal investigation of allegations against city manager **Patrick Comiskey**.

The lawyer who put together the report after interviewing more than a dozen current and former city employees recommended terminating both the city manager and his executive assistant. The lawyer was asked to investigate a whistleblower complaint from an employee that had been directed by the city council to initiate a survey into **Comiskey's** management. That employee had expressed concerns about being retaliated against for conducting the survey. The lawyer found that this employee's "conduct in facilitating and overseeing in internal survey of the City Manager's direct reports" did not fall under activities protected by the Whistleblower Act. The lawyer also found **Comiskey** did not violate the Civil Rights Act or the Florida Civil Rights Act for unlawful retaliation.

A number of people took issue with the investigation and defended City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** Monday night. "The report and the summary in particular were extremely biased," said one city resident. "If Mr. **Comiskey** and Ms. Lovern are removed, I don't know how we can possibly expect to find anyone of worth to work in this town with all of the drama, discord, suspicion and rumors that have been spread."

But at least one city resident supported the report's findings. "Since Mr. **Comiskey** became city manager In November of 2021, we have a disproportionate number of department heads and direct reports to the city manager resign," the resident said. "We will continue to lose dedicated employees and leaders if we ignore the honesty and vulnerability that our staff have displayed in this report."

DSK Law was hired to perform an internal investigation of allegations concerning the city manager. Some of the concerns the firm listed in their conclusions and findings included how long it took to fill open positions and the fact that "numerous employees" mentioned "Mr. **Comiskey's** failure to attend scheduled meetings; falling asleep at meetings; or abruptly leaving meetings." It also listed concerns with his supervision of his executive assistant, whose termination the report also recommended. However, the city council does not have the authority to terminate his executive assistant.

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WESH reached out to **Comiskey** and his executive assistant for comment. His assistant shared a letter **Comiskey** sent to Councilmembers Monday. In it, he called out the report for taking months to put together at a cost of more than \$150,000 dollars to the city. "One could easily surmise from this year-long circus and resulting report, there has been an obvious and concerted effort by a handful of people with the intent to prevent me from doing my job, ruin my professional reputation, and create a false narrative in support of the termination of my employment," he said. He said allegations he played favorites was simply not true, said information was left out in claims he took too long to fill open positions, and said he strongly denies that he ever slept during a meeting.

The council ultimately voted to adopt the report's findings. "To notify the city manager orally and have the city attorney notify the city manager in writing of our intent to remove the city manager under section 21 of the charter based on the reports findings, credibility, determinations, conclusions and recommendations," Council member Doug Bryant said in his motion.

Mr. **Comiskey** had the right to request a due process or name-clearing hearing, which he did. That will be held Feb. 12. Another vote will need to be taken by the council in another meeting to remove **Comiskey** or not.

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The Daily Commercial (FL)
October 2023

At City Hall, Mount Dora brings drama

Author: Deb Hickok

The Mount Dora City Council unanimously appointed Andrew Hand and Patrick Brackins of the Maitland-based law firm of Shepard, Smith, Kohlmyer & Hand, P.A., as the new city attorneys during its Sept. 21 meeting. The selection came about two months after city attorney Sherry Sutphen of Orlando-based Roper, P.A. submitted her resignation to council members.

In a letter dated July 19, Sutphen pointed out the deterioration of the relationship with the city manager, **Patrick Comiskey**. There are only two positions – the manager and the attorney – that the city council directly hires, both through contractual engagements. "While the City is designed to operate with a checks and balances system that enables the City Council to base its decisions on the separate but equal functions of the City Manager and City Attorney," wrote Sutphen, "of late, the City Manager has taken overt steps to hinder and circumvent my role as City Attorney in this fundamental process." "Specifically, my legal opinion has been undermined, second-guessed, and outright ignored by the City Manager," lamented Sutphen. Citing the risk of liability for her firm because "my review has been ignored or passed over," she decided to tender her resignation. She urged in the letter that the council be expedient to find a replacement but offered to remain as legal counsel to the city until that time. Sutphen was named the city's interim city attorney in August 2018 after the city terminated its previous legal counsel. Through a unanimous vote, her contract was finalized the following January. She continued to function as its attorney until the city's appointment of Hand and Brackin. Sutphen will continue to work with the city to update the new firm during the transition.

Also during the Sept. 21 meeting, the mayor, council and manager debated the merits of the process in selecting the firm. A Letter of Interest went out for bid on Aug. 13 for 18 days with two law firms responding, according to the mayor. Stile asserted that the process would typically take two to three months, including steps such as interviews of potential firms by the council. One of the firms withdrew.

Vice Mayor Marc Crail defended the process, saying that it followed what the council agreed to at its Aug. 1 meeting. While council member Cal Rolfson praised the qualifications of the new firm, he was frustrated with the process. "We abandoned our rights to do it the way it should be done," he said.

Council member Doug Bryant voiced that the conversation about the process did not apply to the agenda action item of retaining a new city attorney firm that evening, but rather it may provide guidance for the future. "Has our process has been a little bit disjointed at times? Has it been maybe a little bit acrimonious at times?" asked Bryant rhetorically. "Yes, and yes." But he said that he did not have a problem with the way the solicitations for the firm were conducted. "I am

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particularly happy with the yield of the solicitations," he said in approval of the hiring of the new firm.

Four months of discussion to date about the city manager Social media conversations have referred to the city as "Mount Drama," as it has publicly grappled with controversial issues during the past couple of years. Under debate have been topics such as the Joint Planning Agreement with Lake County, land development proposals and, most recently, a focus on personnel matters.

During the past four months, spanning nearly 10 meetings, the city council has grappled with several failed attempts to oust **Comiskey** as well as had ongoing debates regarding ways to proceed forward to resolve management issues. Beginning during the May 16 council meeting, Mayor Crissy Stile requested that an item be added to the agenda in order to address concerns about the city manager. Stile started the discussion on the new item by asking **Comiskey** if he would offer to resign, which he declined. Stile said in the meeting video that she was about to have "probably the most uncomfortable discussion that I have ever had in my life." She mentioned that she was compelled to have it in public, citing Florida's Sunshine Law – also known as the "open meetings" law.

Stile then spent 30 minutes detailing complaints about the manager, which included personnel and decision making issues. Stile stated that, since **Comiskey** was hired nearly two years ago, 98 people left employment with the city and noted that 54 of those left without stating a reason for their departure. "I am talking about disrespect for our employees, I am talking about uninformed decisions, poor decisions," said Stile about **Comiskey**. "I'm talking about not being engaged with what is happening within this city, and all-around unprofessional nature of our city manager."

Council members' comments in response indicated that they were unwilling to make a move to terminate the manager that evening. Some praised the manager's work performance. They then sought to establish a process to mediate the situation and garner employee comments. The council then voted unanimously to delegate council member John Cataldo to contact the Florida League of Cities for assistance. At the May 22 meeting, Cataldo reported to the council that the league recommended three executive professionals consultants who deal with conflict resolution. Council member Dennis Dawson was tasked to work with the city's human resources department to create a survey to assess sentiment about the city manager from those employees who report directly to him.

"I serve at the will and pleasure of the mayor and council," said **Comiskey** during his report toward the end of the meeting. He remarked that he thought he had the support of the council, but knew he lost the mayor's support the previous October. "But as I told her, I pledged to work with her and I want to work with everybody," he added.

At the June 6 council meeting, Stile asked again to add an item about the manager to the agenda. "In my opinion, things have gotten worse," she said. "I lack confidence in our city manager." The mayor motioned to terminate the manager's contract and requested the appointment of an interim

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manager. Council member Nate Walker seconded the motion "for the purpose of discussion." The motion failed, with only Stile voting in favor. Stile called an emergency special meeting of the council for June 15 to discuss the more than 60-page report prepared by the city's HR department that was the result of the employee survey. Bryant conveyed that he received an email with the report at 4 p.m. which he saw at 5:30 p.m., just 90 minutes before the meeting. "I think that we've had a calm, cautious approach to this whole matter," he said. "At this point in time, this strikes me that this is grossly premature. I don't know why we are here this evening." "I don't know why we are having a meeting here tonight," echoed Cataldo. "The sky is not falling."

"**Patrick** is unresponsive and evasive to phone calls," quoted Stile from employee's comments about the manager in the report. "Good luck getting him on the phone." "He doesn't show enough respect to his employees or directors to respond back." "Working for the city of Mount Dora has not been pleasant." Walker reiterated the council's desire to bring in an outside firm to address the conflicts. "This is messy," he said. "We have to right this ship." He added that he would not decide on the manager until he had adequate time to review the report. The council postponed further discussion to the next meeting. Fifteen days later, at the June 20 city council meeting, an agenda item was listed as "City Manager Conclusion." **Comiskey** conveyed his desire to reach closure on this issue. "In summary from my position, I've had an attack made against my name, my reputation in an effort to take away my livelihood and my career," he stated.

Council members discussed their thoughts on the report distributed before their last meeting. "It's sad to say that we need to take responsibility for what has transpired," reflected Cataldo. "I think it's a sad state of affairs of what we've caused. We've disrupted our community." "We have opened employees, endangered their credibility," he added. "What it showed to me is that there is room for improvement – particularly in communication," said Bryant.

The conversation concluded with the council authorizing Dawson to create a scope of work, and through the city procurement process, to contact consultants to "assist the city in moving forward for conflict resolution and personal growth for employees and council." Stile was the dissenting vote. The council was subsequently informed that the date for response to a Request for Qualification for such a firm was mid-August. Two items regarding hiring legal counsel for employee relations and claims were tabled to the next meeting.

At the Aug. 1 meeting, the council unanimously agreed to hire attorney Lindsay Greene to address investigating an employee's complaints against the city manager. Stile remarked that the council should consider suspending **Comiskey** in light of the fact that the employee who filed a whistleblower complaint had been relieved of some duties, while the city manager remained in his position.

Rolfson made statements in support of the mayor's concerns. He noted that he had expressed consistent support of the city manager until staff members came to him to express frustration with the **Comiskey**. Rolfson listed more than 10 items to exemplify the characterization of a "toxic work environment" made by an employee. Rolfson made a motion to suspend the manager with full pay and benefits until a full investigation was completed. The motion failed 3-4, with

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Rolfson, Stile and Walker voting for it while Cataldo, Dawson, Bryant and Crail were against. Debate continued as the city manager put forward the name of an interim city attorney, Daniel Mantzaris of Orlando-based DSK – de Beaubien, Simmons, Knight, Mantzaris & Neal – law firm. "I heard some things tonight that I was frankly not aware of," said Mantzaris when addressing the council.

Mantzaris advised that, if Sutphen was willing to continue in her role as city attorney until a permanent replacement was named, then that "may be the best course of action for the city of Mount Dora." "Even though we understand the issues...it will take us a good amount of time to get up to speed with the history," he said. He referred to the rarity of hiring an interim attorney unless it was an emergency. Crail looked to Sutphen to ascertain her willingness to remain. "I would absolutely be willing to stay six months, a year, or whatever it takes," confirmed Sutphen. "It is absolutely heartbreaking to me that the disrespect (of the city manager) is allowed to continue," she said.

Sutphen proffered a caveat to continuing as the city's attorney. She requested a point person in the city – other than the city manager – that she could work with to proceed forward. "**Mr. Comiskey** has proven that he will not work with me," she said. "He doesn't tell the truth sitting up here, and it puts me in a very uncomfortable position."

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The Daily Commercial (FL)
February 20, 2023

Proposed ‘intense’ multi-use project in Mount Dora

Author: Deb Hickok

"We're just the first applicant coming into Wolf Branch, so I think there's a shock factor," said Aaron Hakim, president of Apopka-based AMCO Development and property owner. Hakim was referring to public debate surrounding a multi-use development proposal to be in the City of Mount Dora more than two miles from the downtown core. "What I truly feel has been lost is all the wide range of economic benefits including increased economic vitality, job growth and community connectivity," said Hakim. He said that the proposed project, comprising nearly 40 acres, is estimated to cost \$1.6 billion for construction in two phases over a 15-year period. Hakim is also under contract to purchase two adjacent properties totaling 42 acres in unincorporated Mount Dora.

AMCO's revised master plan includes offices totaling 900,000 square feet, 325 hotel rooms and a 100,000-square-foot convention center, 1,530 apartment and condo units, a 275-unit senior-living facility, mini-storage, retail and commercial spaces, and an underground parking garage providing 95% of the required on-site parking. The proposed development borders State Road 46 to its north and Buttercup Lane on the east. Railroad tracks run south of the property. The Orange County border is nearby. Vince Sandersfeld, director of the city's Planning and Development Department, previously described the project as an "intense development" and a "monumental project that the city has never seen." AMCO first began conversations with staff in 2018, according to Hakim. For the past year, the Mount Dora planning staff has worked with the developer on the specific proposal. The Mount Dora City Council unanimously approved the annexation of the property in mid-August as the first step to clear the way for the venture. Hakim noted that he appeared before the city council at a public work session 1 1/2 years prior to annexation.

The council is scheduled to vote on this next phase of the project – the Planned Unit Development, or PUD – during its Feb. 21 meeting. Originally, the city's Planning and Zoning Commission recommended approval to the council with eight conditions, which the city planning staff determined have been met. In a memo to the council, City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** wrote that planning commission members "expressed overall concerns and issues with the density, intensity, schools, and vision of the Wolf Branch Innovation District." **Comiskey** also noted that "capacity for water, wastewater, and reclaimed is a concern for the full build-out scenario; therefore, no site plan approvals can occur until such time the City has sufficient utility capacity."

If the council approves the PUD on Feb. 21, a site plan will be required. Detailed in the city's Land Development Code, a site plan includes items such as the size and location of structures, parking areas, setbacks, source of utilities, landscaping, architectural design, tree protection plan, and storm-water management concept. AMCO's PUD plan has already included some of these

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items. "We have been ultra-accommodating in finding a way forward to make this work through clear and transparent means of addressing community and council concerns," said Hakim. "And we are committed to do so," he said. "We have never once dug our heels and said, 'That's it.' " "We looked at ways to improve accessibility downtown and not detract from it," said Hakim. "Although we have a Mount Dora address, we're in a completely different district: the Wolf Branch Innovation District." The 850-acre Wolf Branch district surrounding the interchange of State Roads 46 and 453 was collaboratively designed by the city and Lake County during a nearly 20-year process. Both entities approved its implementation plan in 2019. The district was intended to prepare for future growth by diversifying the economic base of the region. The governments looked to take advantage of new regional transportation linkages designed to create greater accessibility to Orlando and Sanford.

The highway plans included construction of the now-completed Wekiva Parkway and the widening of SR 46. The latter "will have a profound effect on the character and purpose of the eastern portions of the City," stated the city's June 2020 "Vision Update & EAR Report," which served as an update to its comprehensive plan. A key element of Wolf Branch is an employment center intended "to create jobs and educational facilities within the community, thus providing opportunities to retain local workforce in proximity to housing," according to the city's website. "The main factor is the job creation in targeted high-wage job growth," said Hakim. "We asked, 'How do we catalyze that growth?'" "All of these uses provide the necessary elements that would be required to secure those types of positions in the Wolf Branch that complement its live-work-play goal," he added. Hakim cited that high-wage positions produced would include professional, scientific and technical services, financial services, research and development, information technology, corporate headquarters, software distribution, medical and educational.

An economic analysis – expected to be released by AMCO on Feb. 21 – estimates that the project will produce 14,000 annual jobs in a stabilized year after construction. And it is anticipated to generate annual revenue from employment of more than \$2.4 billion, according to Hakim. Hakim asserts that the project is "hugely sustainable and environmentally friendly." He noted that green roofs have recently been inserted into the plan. "This design in this development has a focus on a quality of life – wellness and health – to create a dynamic walkable environment," he described. A key issue is concern with the maximum building height, as reflected in public comments from staff, city leaders and citizens in the past few months. The Wolf Branch design standards limit the height to 100 feet. A height change requires approval to rezone by the council. Building A was originally put forward by AMCO with a 350-foot height. It was then reduced to 310 feet. The plan in front of the council on Feb. 21 further downsizes the building to 250 feet, which equates to 14 stories tall. Hakim described the building as "a vertically mixed-use building with commercial, educational, R&D, and specialty office."

"The only reason that we came into the PUD process versus the straight Wolf Branch zoning was because we recognized that this development would need the flexibility of design in height requirement," said Hakim. "Every other aspect of our development aligns with the Wolf Branch designs and goals." Hakim asserted that the mix of uses makes the project work for job creation, which is taken into consideration when reducing building heights. "If I tried to drop any one of

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these uses, it wouldn't work," he said. "So, we had to find a really creative way to relocate (uses)," he said. "One of the ways we did that is by sinking the building 20 feet into the ground – one floor has been sunken to enter on the second story."

AMCO previously provided to the city a visual impact rendering that showed the 350-foot Building A from a SR 46 vantage point. "Obviously 100 feet of building height has been removed for the resubmittal, and if this rendering were to be revised, the top of the building would be just above the tree lines," said Hakim in a follow-up email. **Comiskey's** memo refers to the topography change on the property by noting that "there are existing conditions of the site which appear to provide justification for building height adjustments with the slope of the land from SR 46 to the railroad (north to south) ranging from 55 feet to 60 feet."

"In addition, the job creation associated with professional offices is consistent with the overall purpose of the Employment Center of the WBID," the memo said. An outspoken critic of the project, Josh Hemingway, said "absolutely not" to the 250-foot revision. Hemingway recently attended a presentation on the Wolf Branch district to the city's zoning commission. He said that the presenter, Blake Drury of GAI Consultants, "reaffirmed what most of us have been stating – that a lot of work was put into full design of the innovation district." "He gave examples of the height very clearly that they used as reference to keep it in keeping with Mount Dora," Hemingway added.

Social media posts have popped up about the project and are generating discussion. A post by Jay Smith of North Mount Dora on NextDoor against the project has generated more than 170 back-and-forth comments that were both pro and con. "Go live in Orlando if that is the life you want. DON'T ORLANDO MY MOUNT DORA," wrote Smith in one retort. A Northeast Mount Dora resident, Una Fox, posted on the same site to protest the plan, producing nearly 60 comments. "It's not that I am against businesses. It's what they're planning there with the architectural design is not in keeping with Mount Dora," said Fox in an interview for this article. "We're not a bunch of antiquated people that don't want Mount Dora to grow," she said. "We don't want the city to lose its flavor or character."

Sorrento resident Jessica Simmons started an online petition on Facebook to gather support against the proposed development. Created on Jan. 22, the link has been shared on other social media sites such as Instagram and NextDoor. As of Feb. 15, the petition had 2,040 signers. "Some of these buildings are massive and just don't fit with our small-town feel," Simpson said. Concerned about the possible influx of people and empty office buildings, she said that "I know progression isn't going to be stopped but they need to scale back." Hakim said that AMCO has been monitoring social media sites. "We have not brushed anyone aside," he said. "We have not taken their concerns lightly." "For a select group of people who want to turn this into a circus, I would encourage them to reach out directly to the applicant and ask them any questions that they may have," said Hakim. In the ongoing discussion since the city's annexation of the land last August, more than 20 people testified against the proposed project during the public comment period at a city council meeting earlier this month. The lone voice that spoke in favor was Mount Dora business owner Joe Lewis, who started by saying, "I got a feeling that I'm not going to get

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applause." "What I saw was a developer that was willing to work with the city," he said. "We should have learned a lot from Simpson Grove – we are not the only governing body in the Lake County." Lewis was referring to Mount Dora Groves, a proposed mixed-use project outside the city limit owned by Simpson Family Partnership LTD. It was debated last year. The Groves representative originally submitted applications, including one for annexation, through the city. The proposal drew fire from some area residents as well as reluctance from a few council members. The applicant withdrew the requests to the city in January and instead chose to move through the Lake County process. The county approved the rezoning last October. Construction is expected to begin this year. The combined project north and south of U.S. 441 covers nearly 225 acres and features 1,055 residential units plus commercial space.

Tensions arose between the two governments regarding process and design standards as the Groves project moved forward in the county. At the core of the disagreement was interpretation of the Joint Planning Agreement. The JPA addresses unincorporated areas adjacent to Mount Dora that are potential parcels for annexation. First signed in 2004 and amended in 2015, the JPA outlines cooperation between the two governments to facilitate "sound growth management." During the faceoff, both parties agreed that the JPA should be updated and clarified. Meanwhile, Lake County Commissioner Sean Parks is spearheading a Joint Planning Work Group with Municipalities to pursue JPAs with each city as well as update Mount Dora's and the few other existing agreements. Known for large master-planned communities, California-based Richland Communities purchased 550 acres in the Wolf Branch district for a total of \$24.8 million last December, as recently reported by the GrowthSpotter. A few new or expanded residential developments are also in the works in the area. City planning staff reported that they fielded numerous inquiries from developers about the district.

Hakim said that other developers have reached out to him. "Everyone in our arena is watching this transpire," he said. "If it isn't approved, they won't process their application through the city." "The growth is going to come here," said Hakim. "With access to the highway system, this development from Orange County has been planned for 15 to 20 years." "I have confidence that the city council members will do their civic duty and do their fiduciary responsibility to analyze everything out in front of them by the staff and the developer," said Hakim. "And do what's best for Mount Dora as a whole." City of Mount Dora officials declined to be interviewed for this article.

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https://insidelake.com/2022/11/30/former-police-chief-files-lawsuit-against-mount-dora-alleging-whistleblower-violation-says-he-was-ordered-to-stop-internal-affairs-investigations/#google_vignette

Inside Scoop, Mount Dora
November 30, 2022

Former Police Chief Files Lawsuit Against Mount Dora Alleging Whistleblower Violation, Says He was Ordered to Stop Internal Affairs Investigations

Author: Marilyn M. Aciego

The former chief of Mount Dora Police Department has filed a lawsuit against the City of Mount Dora. James “Brett” Meade, filed the suit in Lake County Circuit Court late Monday afternoon, alleging a violation of the Florida Public Whistleblowers Act. Meade was named the city’s interim police chief in July 2020 after former Chief Robert Bell abruptly retired following the firing of former Deputy Chief Michael Fewless. Fewless was fired after having a conversation with this reporter, and this reporter broke the story of his firing. Fewless sued, also alleging whistleblower violations and the city settled with him for more than \$250,000. Mount Dora has had four police chiefs in just three years. John O’Grady was fired in 2019 after an investigation into misconduct involving a statement he allegedly made to an officer. He later sued and reached a settlement agreement that paid him more than \$60,000. Bell was named chief following O’Grady’s firing and served less than a year before retiring after Fewless was fired. Bell faced allegations of a hostile work environment and favoring a female subordinate—the same officer who made the accusations against O’Grady— including having a relationship with her. During a deposition in the Fewless case, Bell admitted to the relationship though he “vehemently” denied it while he was chief, Fewless said in his deposition. Meade was named interim chief by former City Manager Robin Hayes following Bell’s abrupt retirement. Meade, along with former Deputy Chief Al Rollins were hired in part to assess the department. “Chief Meade was tasked with serving the Mount Dora Police Department as their Interim Chief of Police and to conduct a comprehensive department assessment, which included surveys from officers and staff as well as the public,” a press release from the City of Mount Dora stated when Meade was named permanent chief in June 2021. Hayes left the city nine months after the appointments of Meade and Rollins, in April 2021, when she and the city “agreed to part ways.” Rollins retired after a little more than a year and Capt. Michael Gibson was then named deputy chief; Gibson was later named interim chief after Meade’s separation from the city and holds that position today.

In Meade’s suit, he states he initiated two internal affairs investigations for excessive force by a Mount Dora Police officer on Feb. 15; less than a month later he learned that Human Resources Director Sharon Kraynick asked the Lake County Sheriff’s Office to take over the internal affairs investigation and to investigate Meade. Meade spoke with Kraynick and City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** by phone and informed them it was his responsibility to conduct the investigation and according to the Florida Law Enforcement Officer’s Bill of Rights, an outside agency cannot conduct departmental internal affairs investigations. The following week, Meade sent an email to **Comiskey** and provided him a copy of the state statute. “Mr. **Comiskey** nonetheless insisted

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(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Meade continue the City’s efforts to have the investigation conducted by an outside law enforcement agency,” the complaint states. Meade then contacted seven different law enforcement agencies and they all declined to conduct the investigation. On April 5, Meade sent a written memo to **Comiskey** informed him no other agency would conduct the investigation and asked for permission to move forward with the current internal investigation. **Comiskey** never responded and Meade resumed his investigation, according to the suit. On May 9, another video of a Mount Dora Police officer using excessive force was released, and in an interview with an Orlando media outlet, Meade said an internal investigation would be conducted; two days later **Comiskey** emailed Meade and said it was imperative the investigation be conducted by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE.) Later that day Meade and Gibson, who is now the department’s interim chief, met with **Comiskey** and again explained the investigation could not be conducted by an outside agency. **Comiskey** is alleged to have said he was being advised “differently” but would not say where he was getting his information. In mid-May, **Comiskey** contacted the FDLE commissioner and requested FDLE conduct the investigation; **Comiskey** was referred to a special agent who told him FDLE conducts criminal investigations, not internal administrative investigations.

On May 19, **Comiskey** emailed Meade and said he was securing an outside agency to conduct the investigation and Meade again cited Florida law and requested a meeting with the undisclosed person advising **Comiskey**. On May 31, Meade sent yet another email advising **Comiskey** of his authority and his intent to proceed with the latest investigation into use of force, in addition to a Florida Attorney General opinion regarding city manager involvement in police internal investigations. Meade followed up with a meeting with **Comiskey** and Kraynick and **Comiskey** ordered the investigation be stopped. Meade told the pair they were interfering with his duties, and they would have to fire him to stop him from carrying out his lawful duty. The same night, outside of business hours, at around 7:45 p.m., **Comiskey** emailed Meade and ordered him to cease his investigation and if he disregarded the order, he would be subject to termination. The following day, on June 1, **Comiskey** sent Meade another email “threatening that if Meade failed to follow his demand, he would be subject to disciplinary action including probable termination,” the complaint states. Meade was given two options, either allow the city to violate the law by circumventing his responsibility to conduct internal investigations or be terminated. “As Meade had sworn to uphold the law, the only action he or any reasonable employee could have taken in that situation was to involuntarily resign in order to escape illegal employment requirements. The involuntary resignation on June 1, 2022, amounts to a constructive discharge in retaliation for engaging on protected activity in violation of Florida’s Public Whistleblowers Act,” the complaint states. At a city council meeting following Meade’s involuntary resignation, numerous residents and business owners spoke in support of Meade and expressed their displeasure in his departure. A chaplain for the police and fire department likened his leaving to losing a parent. Meade, who earned \$130,000 annually as chief, is seeking more than \$30,000 in damages and is represented by Richard W. Smith of NeJame Law in Orlando.

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<https://mynews13.com/fl/orlando/news/2022/06/08/many-mt--dora-residents-frustrated-after-police-chief-s-departure->

Spectrum News 13
June 8, 2022

Many Mount Dora residents frustrated after police chief's departure

Author: Katie Striet

The City of Mount Dora is seeing a change in leadership within its police department. Last week, Police Chief Brett Meade resigned because of differences in leadership. It's a change that many residents aren't happy about. One by one, residents of Mt. Dora are speaking out and standing in solidarity with Meade. "Someplace special. Without Brett Meade it is not someplace special. He has played a part in the someplace special," said Minister Lillie Taylor, a lifelong Mt. Dora resident. Meade became chief in July 2020. Since then many residents say he's improved the training of officers, as well as worked to build trust within the black and brown community. "I just hate that this cycle keeps happening. It seems like every 2-3 years we're having to start over from scratch. And I'm tired, I'm tired," said Rev. Bobby Rowe. Rev. Rowe was working with Meade on building that trust. But with a new chief, comes uncertainty, not just for residents, but for men and women in uniform. "Every time there's a transition with a major member of administration, it's like losing a parent," said Michael J. Saxe, a chaplain for Clermont and Mount Dora Police.

The sudden resignation left many people confused as to why it happened. Just last year, the Mount Dora fire chief resigned. Resident, Rozann Abato, looks towards city administration for the reason. "Much of the written information I gathered is very revealing. It appears he was threatened with termination, in writing, twice in less than 24 hours. Is it any surprise he resigned," said Abato. She goes on to give more examples on how Mount Dora City Manager **Patrick C. Comiskey**, who was present at Tuesday's meeting, may be a factor in a larger issue within the city. "This debacle raises other management related issues. For example, the city has no finance director, no public works director, and no permanent fire chief despite the fact that interim chief rich loewer has been in that role for months. Is there an end in sight and who is running this show," said Abato. Spectrum News 13 reached out to **Comiskey** on the recent event and he sent us back a statement that read: "On Wednesday, June 1, 2022, I received and accepted the resignation of Police Chief Brett Meade. The decision to resign was unilaterally made by former Chief Meade. As you all know, the former Chief was very visible in our community and scored high marks for attending festivals, events, and meetings with civic groups, as well as engaging with local citizens and business owners. We appreciate his service to our community, and we wish him well as he enters the next chapter of his life" Spectrum News 13 also submitted a FOIA request, asking for all communications between **Comiskey** and Meade in the last year. They have confirmed receiving the request.

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<https://www.facebook.com/CityofMountDora/posts/the-city-of-mount-dora-is-pleased-to-introduce-our-new-city-manager-patrick-comi/10160272382724467/>

Facebook
November 15, 2021

The City of Mount Dora is pleased to introduce our new City Manager, Patrick Comiskey.

Patrick C. Comiskey was selected as City Manager of the City of Mount Dora on September 29, 2021, with a start date of November 15, 2021. **Patrick** brings with him more than 20 years' experience as a city manager, having served at the City of Cambridge, Maryland from 2018 to 2021, the City of Thomaston, Georgia from 2002 to 2016, and the City of Wellsburg, West Virginia from 1998 to 2002. In addition, he served as the Director of Purchasing and Personnel, and then as the Director of Personnel at the City of Clarksburg, West Virginia from 1993 to 1998. Prior to working in local government, **Patrick** was the District Executive for the Boy Scouts of America in Clarksburg/Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Patrick received a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from the University of Florida, Bachelor of Science in Business with a concentration in Accounting from Middle Georgia State University and Master of Public Administration from West Virginia University. Additionally, he is an Eagle Scout, Certified Purchasing Manager (C.P.M.) and a member of International City Managers Association (ICMA), Institute of Supply Management (ISM), and a lifelong member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians. His prior service includes Harrison County United Way Allocations Committee Chair, Flint River Council Commissioner, Pine Mountain District Membership Chairman, and Thomaston and Wellsburg Kiwanis Clubs.

Patrick resides in Mount Dora with his wife Jane (a native Floridian) and their handsome dog Weaver. He enjoys hiking with Weaver, reading and learning American and Irish history, exploring places with Jane, and spending time with friends and family. He is excited to join the City of Mount Dora and looks forward to working with residents, business owners, visitors and councilmembers to showcase Someplace Special.

“The family and I are extremely excited to join the Mount Dora community. I am confident that Mount Dora's best years lie ahead of us. We have a great team here and I am excited to build upon that team as we continue to serve the residents of this great city.”

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Dorchester Star
July 9, 2021

Cambridge City Manager Comiskey to step down

Author: Mike Detmer

City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** has declined to seek renewal of his employment contract when the current contract expires July 31, according to a statement from Cambridge Mayor Andrew Bradshaw. **Comiskey**, who was hired following a search in 2018, is Cambridge’s second city manager, having served in that role for three years. Bradshaw said, “**Mr. Comiskey**’s time as city manager has seen many transitions for Cambridge, with development and growth occurring across the city.”

“I wish **Patrick**, his wife Jane, and their beautiful dog Weaver all the best in the next phase of **Patrick**’s career,” said Bradshaw. “The care they all have shown for the city of Cambridge, and their work to make this city a better place to call home cannot be overstated. **Patrick**’s good-heartedness and genuine love for others makes him the kind of public servant that is an asset anywhere he goes.”

The Council echoed the mayor on the decision. Ward 1 Commissioner Brian Roche said, “I’ve appreciated **Mr. Comiskey**’s service and assistance while Cambridge continues to go through inevitable growing pains of the early stages of our professionally managed form of government.” Commission President Lajan Cephias, Ward 2, added, “We must remember that at the completion of each lap, the City Commission did not run the race alone. **Mr. Comiskey**, thank you for the contributions you and your wife Jane have provided to the city of Cambridge.”

Ward 3 Commissioner Jameson Harrington said, “It was always a pleasure to see **Mr. Comiskey** out at the many local events and businesses in Cambridge. It was nice to have a city manager involved with the local community.” Ward 4 Commissioner Spuddy Cephias said, “**Mr. Comiskey**, thank you for time and commitment to the city of Cambridge. Best wishes on your future endeavors. Continue to share your knowledge and skillsets.”

Ward 5 Commissioner Chad Malkus wrote, “I want to wish **Patrick** all the best in his future endeavors and to thank him for the great work he did over the past few years. I look forward to the hiring process for a new city manager, and my hope is that we can hire someone with equally extensive municipal experience and knowledge of strong fiscal governance.”

The mayor and commissioners will discuss the city manager vacancy at an upcoming meeting in July. A review of requirements will occur with regard to naming an interim city manager, as well as requirements for search committee members for the hiring of a permanent city manager.

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WMDT.com
December 15, 2020

Cambridge officials discuss recent development plans, other city projects

Author: Kyleigh Panetta

The current mayor of Cambridge and City Council held their final meeting Monday night, before an entirely new group of people take over those roles in January. “There’s hope for a lot of activity out there. The state has been an important player and very excited about it,” says **Patrick Comiskey**, the City Manager for Cambridge.

Waterfront development was one of the main topics discussed at Monday’s Cambridge City Council meeting. More specifically, a piece of land known as the Gateway was officially turned over to Cambridge Waterfront Development Incorporated (CWDI). “As the development occurs they can work with the community to plan on a garden or open space or murals to make that area look more inviting to people come down route so they’ll come into the city,” says Stephen Rideout, a Cambridge City Commissioner.

CWDI is also planning to develop other properties in the city in the future but officials felt those discussions should be postponed. “Everybody kind of felt it was the type of project that the new city commission and the new mayor ought to be involved with since they are going to be the ones carrying the project forward,” says **Comiskey**. “There’s an interest there of the current Yacht Maintenance to expand their facility. They’re going to put in a larger lift. They’ve already told council this a while back, when the city commission leased additional land, that they were going to go in put in a big lift to bring bigger boats in.”

CWDI, in partnership with BCTDesign Group, is launching an online survey to get ideas and opinions about the future of waterfront development at Sailwinds. Officials say ideas will be considered by CWDI in the shaping of a development master plan which will guide development decisions over the next several years. The Cambridge Waterfront area subject to development planning extends from the Burton Fishing Bridge to Cambridge Creek and encompasses approximately 40 acres.

The survey website is <https://www.bctdesigngroup.com/cambridge>. It can be accessed beginning December 10th. If you prefer a paper copy of the questionnaire, you can contact Sandra Tripp-Jones, Executive Director, by email or phone at 805-453-4480. City leaders also shared plans to fix up the fencing at Cornish Park on Phillips Street. “It was a no brainer. The state was providing most of the money. The city had to put in a little and the county put in a little and it will make that park a more attractive place to be,” says Rideout. Perhaps one of the most exciting developments involves the Mace’s Lane Community Center. The city is officially on board with supporting programming there which may involve a potential chapter of the Boys & Girls Club of Annapolis. “I think it will provide an opportunity for us to help the children in this community and the elderly to have programming and resources that they have not had before,” says Rideout.

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Meanwhile, Fairchild Properties is working on a few projects by the Walmart so city leaders say they're excited about that area's future as well. "It's good to see that there's still positive growth and interest in the development of the business community along the corridor," says **Comiskey**. The hospital will likely be moving into the new location in the Cambridge Marketplace late next year. The current hospital building will likely be demolished and that is expected to cost anywhere from one-million to two-million dollars. Additionally, Delmarva Community Services is planning to put a 61-unit housing building for seniors and low-income families on Chesapeake Avenue near the high school.

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The Star Democrat (Easton, MD)
December 1, 2020

Cambridge voters head to polls Tuesday for runoff elections

Author: Angela Price

Cambridge voters go to the polls Tuesday, Dec. 1, to decide three runoff elections — for mayor and commissioners for wards 2 and 3. Incumbent Mayor Victoria Jackson-Stanley faces challenger Andrew Bradshaw, and incumbent Ward 2 Commissioner Donald Cephas faces challenger Lajan Cephas. Gary Gordy and Jameson Harrington are vying for the Ward 3 seat. Voting will take place from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. at Chesapeake College at 418 Race Street. Anyone waiting in line at 7 p.m. will be allowed to vote.

City Manager **Patrick Comiskey**, who also serves as election supervisor, said the post office had received 2,314 mail-in ballots as of Saturday morning, Nov. 28, 10% higher than what they received prior to the regular October election. With the high COVID-19 case rate and anticipating a large turnout, **Comiskey** said the standing distance for the hallway will be increased from 6 to 12 feet and the number of voters in the hallway will be limited. Bathrooms will only be available for the election workers.

Poll watchers will be limited to three in the room at any one time during voting. “We have three designated poll watching seats, so if we have more than three poll watchers, one will have to wait until the first watcher has been allowed to watch for one hour,” **Comiskey** said. Voters must enter the college from the rear entrance. Only poll watchers and candidates may enter and exit the building from the front entrance on Race Street.

Once the polls are closed, six seats will be made available for each candidate or designee to sit and watch the ballot tabulating process, though it is not mandatory, **Comiskey** said. Candidates who do not want to wait and watch will be sent email when the process is finished. He estimated it will take three hours or more to count all the votes — mail in and in person — and announce the results. A camera has been set up so people can watch the counting process from home using town hall streams, **Comiskey** said.

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WMDT.com
August 30, 2020

Cambridge residents protest alleged illegal tactics by city officials

Author: Camila Fernandez

Protestors gathered in front of City Hall on Sunday to try to put an end to the city's alleged corruption and illegal tactics that prevent residents from choosing who they want for mayor. The event was organized by the group Millennials Demanding Change. City of Cambridge Commissioner La-Shon Foster spoke at the peaceful protest. She says the City Manager and other city representatives are scheming to have her application for mayor denied.

City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** tells us none of the applications have been rejected, but according to Foster, they haven't even approved hers since she brought it in on August 19th. Foster says the city hasn't been clear enough about the information they're looking for in order to accept her application. On top of that, she says they had an illegal hearing about her residency, which she won but still hasn't gotten her application approved. "This rally out here is not for La-Shon Foster," said Foster. "It's for every citizen in Cambridge that wants to choose who they want as their candidate and it's for every single candidate that wants to get on the ballot that will be illegally given the runaround not to apply," said Foster.

City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** responded to the allegations saying, "Commissioner Foster's allegations are false. No prospective candidate has been denied. Seven of the eight prospective candidates reviewed thus far by both the election committee and the city's ethics commission have been asked to provide missing or additional required information, including Ms. Foster and the current mayor, Ms. Jackson-Stanley.

The deadline to file for candidacy is Wednesday, September 2, at 4 pm. A listing of the candidate names will be posted on the city's website and the city's Facebook page Wednesday evening and later in the local newspapers. The city will be mailing out a ballot to all registered city voters in late September. City election officials are expecting this election to have the highest voter participation in city history."

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WMDT.com
August 12, 2020

Cambridge city manager announces ongoing plans for the Pine Street revitalization project
Author: DeJon Burgess

The city of Cambridge is well into their revitalization efforts in a neighborhood that desperately needs it, despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. According to city manager, **Patrick Comiskey**, says the revitalization of Pine Street is moving forward. He says Pine Street has a number of homes that have fallen into disrepair, which is why these revitalization efforts are underway.

Comiskey says the city has had the benefit of working with the choptank chapter of the habitat for humanity on this. He says they are much more experienced when it comes to building homes and they've already completed building some homes some on high street.

We're told people can expect to see the demolishing of some homes in the area soon now that the city council has given their approval. **Comiskey** says the city has quote, "acquired some properties with our partners on this project, the county government. They have been good about working with us to help us secure properties that need to be demolished or fit in to our hopeful revitalization plan." **Comiskey** also says the city has brought on a new housing specialist to work with city commissioners to help with the revitalization project.

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The Banner (Cambridge, MD)
July 8, 2020

City confronts fireworks attacks

Author: Dave Ryan

“Our firefighters are being assaulted,” Mayor Victoria Jackson-Stanley said during a City Council conference call on Thursday afternoon. It’s not only firefighters, either — police officers have been in the line of fire in recent nights, as storms of fireworks have been ignited in the streets of the city. Police patrols and firefighters responding to incidents have been met with verbal abuse, physical attacks and more. “One of our officers had fireworks thrown or shot at them,” in the 800 block of Phillips Street on Wednesday night, CPD Capt. Justin Todd said in an earlier conversation with the Banner.

Vehicle damaged

That assault caused minor damage to the officer’s vehicle. “No one is in custody for that as of yet,” Capt. Todd said. Residents of this usually quiet town have been losing sleep and sometimes feeling threatened in their own homes, as loud explosives have been set off, sometimes all night long. Those who live in other neighborhoods might not see it in their own streets, but many have heard the loud booms echoing across the city. Incidents have occurred not only on Phillips Street, but also Greenwood Avenue, South Pine, Central Avenue and other areas. “It’s all over town,” the mayor said.

The meeting got off to a rocky start, as the numbers of residents calling in to listen or comment exceeded the limit of 40, causing some council members to have trouble getting linked in. After that was straightened out, the mayor, commissioners, City Attorney Chip MacLeod, State’s Attorney Bill Jones, Rescue Fire Company Chief Adam Pritchett and City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** were on the line to examine the issue, as were about three dozen citizens.

Gathering comments

The council is gathering comments from the public and findings of fact from the Cambridge Police Department necessary to impose a curfew on city residents under the age of 18 in an effort to deter late-night incidents including the pyrotechnic disruptions. That’s not something that simply be declared, however. “There is a process to doing this,” Mr. MacLeod said, beginning with recommendations from law enforcement. “Curfews can be tricky, but they can be navigated, if done so carefully,” Mr. Jones said. The facts presented to the council would have to justify the curfew, he said, which itself should be no more restrictive than necessary. “There are certain things we have to be careful about, in terms of making sure the curfew, if enacted, is applied fairly and equally to all parts of town,” Mr. Jones said. “It would have to be carefully written, and carefully executed, by your officers.”

Cambridge Police Department Chief Mark Lewis said, “It would be a limited tool for our officers to use in situations. There is a juvenile issue, a problem in some areas, and that would be used as a last resort,” to help get juveniles to return to their homes. Five men were arrested earlier this

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week, as the CPD tries to bring the situation under control. Richard Blanks Jr., 31; Byron Herndon, 29; Donnell Jones, 25; Naail Thompson, 20; and Tyonbre McKnight, 19 were charged with discharge of fireworks without a permit and related offenses. Chief Pritchett said his organization has been stretched thin by emergencies caused during the incidents. “We’ve had five fires since Friday, directly from fireworks,” he said.

Young children

Though the men charged in connection with the discharges of explosive devices are not minors, there have been reports of children, some quite young, being on the streets at all hours. “How do we hold parents responsible?” Mayor Jackson-Stanley asked. Mr. Jones said there are legal avenues through which parents can be held responsible for the actions of minor children, including violation of curfews.

Citizen Lynette Wongus called for quick action and an increased police presence in neighborhoods — in person, not only in their patrol cars. “People are afraid, in their own apartments,” she said. “We will have officers working overtime,” Chief Lewis said. Ms. Wongus didn’t leave it all up to law enforcement, as she urged residents to speak up to protect their community. “As residents, we need to step up,” she said.

The need to allow public comment required another meeting to be scheduled, this one for Tuesday at 5 p.m., on townhallstreams.com. The mayor and council acknowledged that public comment had been limited by the technical difficulties, and asked that citizens email their comments on these issues to **Mr. Comiskey** at pComiskey@choosecambridge.com. “We want to work with the police department and the community to resolve the problems that have been presented to us for solution,” Commissioner Steve Rideout (Ward 1) said a public email. “We need to hear from you.”

Mr. Comiskey forwarded the comments to the mayor and council by Saturday, allowing them to consider citizens’ views before Tuesday’s meeting, which took place after press time for this issue.

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The Banner (Cambridge, MD)
June 24, 2020

City protesters demand racial equality

Author: Dave Ryan

A series of protests took place in Cambridge on Friday, during Juneteenth observances across the nation remembering the day in 1865 when the last slaves were freed. Local groups gathered in this city, known for its civil rights activism, to call for racial equality. Recent deaths of African Americans, some at the hands of police officers, have set off protests in cities and towns across the country. Though some of the events have turned violent, most did not, including the ones that have taken place in Cambridge since the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis. As he was pinned to the street by former officer Derek Chauvin, one of Mr. Floyd's last statements was, "I can't breathe." Those words were echoed in the name of the group that organized the day's first demonstration, "United We Breathe." Also taking place Friday was a cross-town march by "Millennials Demanding Change," and work on the "Black Lives Matter" mural on Race Street.

United We Breathe

The day's first event began in the parking lot of Cambridge Marketplace, where a multi-ethnic group displayed signs calling for justice and equality. United We Breathe began their demonstration some time ago, and found that it would occur on Juneteenth. "Everything happens for a reason," said Marjorie Vilson, who with Gerleene Dorce, Michiah Grainger and Shaneka Vickerie form the leadership of the group. "Our goal is to promote justice everywhere." She said the demonstration was to celebrate 155 years of freedom and to honor the lives of taken unjustly by police brutality.

Ms. Vilson acknowledged that it can be a painful process to create change, but a necessary one to correct half-measures made in the past to rectify the country's social and racial issues. She was pleased with the turnout for the demonstration, which included elders and young children, black and white, and a man beating a rhythm on a Native American drum. Cooperation also came from local authorities, something not seen everywhere in the nation over the previous few weeks. "We want to thank the Police Chief [Mark Lewis], and the Mayor [Victoria Jackson-Stanley] and the City Manager [**Patrick Comiskey**]," Ms. Vilson said. "They definitely made this process easy," Ms. Dorce said.

Ms. Vilson saw the surge of activity both locally and nationally as a part of a generational change. "We have millennials taking charge," she said. That generation's familiarity with digital tools and social media means messages and organization spreads faster than ever. Mr. Floyd's death, and his calling for his mother in his final moments, created a feeling, Ms. Vilson said, of, "Enough is enough." The group moved from the parking lot to the side of U.S. 50, where participants held up signs with messages including, "Justice for All," "Black Lives Matter," "The Second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself," and "The Revolution will be televised." Many passing motorists blew their horns and waved to show their support. There

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was also the occasional shouted insult and obscenity. Now, the organization's youthful energy and passion is being used to organize new groups and projects. The activists of United We Breathe are working to set up an official non-profit organization, Ms. Vilson said. To contact the group or to donate, email unitedwebbreathe2020@gmail.com, or call 443-304-8827. "I pray that this not be in vain," Ms. Vilson said.

Millennials Demanding Change

The new generation was also on the street across town, where Millennials Demanding Change had scheduled a march with guest speakers at stops. Mya Woods, one of the leaders, said, "I feel as though the older generation fought their fight." "It's time for the younger generation," she said, looking over to where her son sat in his stroller. "I'm doing it for my baby." She said she didn't want the days to continue in which African-American parents have "the talk" with their sons, about the dangers of contact with police. "It's a real conversation," she said. Ms. Woods sensed a change in viewpoints among her peers. "Our generation is filled with open-minded people," she said. "I feel like this generation will be the one to change things." Organizers of Millennials Demanding Change, in addition to Ms. Woods, are Alondria Stanley, LaSarah Kinser, James Sullivan, Marco Garcia and Meg McDermott." Dr. Richard Molock, a pharmacist, was there, as well. "We're here to finish the work that was done in the 1960s," he said. Part of his motivation is his own home life, where he has to consider the future of his children and the situations they could face. "I have four young men," he said. As participants gathered before the march began at 3:30 p.m., Veronica Taylor spoke about the effect of modern communications and devices — when something happens, citizens around the nation don't have to take anyone's word for the facts of the matter, they can often see for themselves on their phones or tablets how a crisis unfolded. "Technology has changed everything," Ms. Taylor said. Dr. Molock said activists today must maintain their unity and focus on the issues, which include not only police brutality, but also housing and other economic inequities. "You have people who are intentionally dividing everyone," he said. As a pharmacist who treats patients the same regardless of race, he didn't see the sense in that. "You're a human, I'm a human," he said.

Race Street mural

Race Street has a message for residents of the town and anyone else driving through downtown. "Black Lives Matter" is being painting in large white letters down the middle of the road, created by a group of activists and artists. The display mirrors a similar project in Washington, D.C., in which city workers painted the same words on 16th St. Similar street displays have been created in other cities, including Salisbury. Organizers of the Race Street project Alpha Genesis Community Development Corporation Jermaine Anderson and Adrian Greene pulled together permission, volunteers and supplies in just a few days, and got to work on the job early last week. The words, "Black Lives Matter" stretch almost the width of the street, and for most of the length of the 400 block. The letters are decorated with portraits of civil rights leaders including Gloria Richardson and Frederick Douglas, as well as images of life in Cambridge. The design for the mural was created by local artist Miriam Moran, who worked in cooperation with Project Manager Shelton Hawkins. She works fast when inspired by an idea. "It took me about an hour to come up with the design," Ms. Moran said. Her goal was to create an image promoting unity, love and compassion. "I wanted everybody to come together," she said. LaSarah Kinser finished

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marching with her group and headed to Race Street to paint, a natural move for the Mace’s Lane Middle School art teacher. “A project like this is so important because all these people are volunteers,” showing unity in purpose, she said. Ms. Kinser said public art is an effective way to communicate a message of protest in a peaceful way, something that is used in many areas. But the mural has its own, unique merits, she said. “The difference is that Miriam was able to fill in our specific Dorchester County history,” Ms. Kinser said. “It really speaks to who we are as a community.” Alpha Genesis promotes the arts as a way to forge bonds. “Each community has its own soul,” a statement from the group said Sunday. “Cambridge’s soul is one of resilience.” “We can really learn a lot from projects like this,” the statement said. “When people are moved, the arts are truly an outlet for people to speak and come together for a common cause as one voice, with many gifts and talents to share.”

Legal approval

The mural received city approval on June 16. The legalities involved were confirmed by State’s Attorney for Dorchester County Bill Jones, who visited the scene as volunteers were busy with their brushes. “It’s nice to see how everyone has come together,” he said. “Certainly it highlights an issue that is significant nationally and right here.” As the county’s highest law-enforcement officer and a former policeman, Mr. Jones has a unique perspective on issues regarding brutality. “The vast majority of cops are good people who do it right,” he said, while acknowledging the value of the work being done on Race Street. “Still, we have to double down on those who are bad officers.” Asked about comments made by opponents saying the project was illegal or vandalism of public property, Mr. Jones said he and his staff had researched the issue of painting on a street. “We saw nothing in the law that would prevent this,” he said. As for vandalism, he said in the law that is referred to as “malicious destruction of property,” with the first word in the phrase being the operative one. Glancing down the block at the group working on the mural, he said, “Show me the malice.” Finally, he noted that the city owns the street, and had approved the project. “Who would be the complainant?” he asked. The statement from Alpha Genesis said, “We’re not feeding into any negative comments, thoughts or actions. We’ll continue to bring awareness to facing race through art and culture.” “Change is never easy, but necessary,” the message said. “To our young people, keep your light shining.”

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

Myeasternshore.com
May 15, 2020

Cambridge City Manager explains Council's State of Emergency renewal

Author: Mike Detmer

Cambridge's City Manager clarified the City's recent renewal of the declaration of the local State of Emergency in a statement on Thursday, May 14. In the explanation, City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** wrote the renewal of the existing declaration of emergency at the May 11 live streamed council meeting was to "make certain the city did not exclude itself from any federal funding that becomes available."

Comiskey said that the City of Cambridge will continue to comply with Gov. Hogan's pandemic-related orders. The statement also said that city parks and the marina are opened, while playgrounds, basketball courts, and picnic tables are closed. City buildings will remain closed to the public, and city meeting will continue to be live streamed for remote participation for city officials and citizens.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

Myeasternshoremnd.com
May 15, 2020

City of Cambridge introduces annual budget, hearing before vote set for May 26

Author: Mike Detmer

The Cambridge City Council introduced the ordinance that includes the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2020-2021, and announced a public hearing on the ordinance on May 26. Cambridge Mayor Victoria Jackson-Stanley and the Council members introduced Ordinance 1162, which sets real and personal property tax rates, and Ordinance 1163, which is the City's budget for July 1, 2020—June 30, 2021.

The mayor, council, and city staff began the public discussion of the budget with a work session on May 1, and a follow up budget work session on May 5. The scheduled work session for May 7 was not needed. After the May 26 hearing, the Council can opt to pass the budget, which will then take effect July 1.

During the first work session, City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** said the biggest issue about the budget was the COVID-19 crisis. He said \$1.9 million of revenue could be at risk, and recommended the City use reserve funds set aside for emergencies in order to cover shortfalls. The Council grappled with requests from the police department for consideration to replace two retiring officers and from Rescue Fire Company to acquire more turnout gear to replace worn out gear and properly equip all members. The May 26 meeting is scheduled for 6 p.m. in the Council Chambers.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Patrick C. Comiskey** is listed below]

<https://cambridgecan.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/09.13.2018-BD.pdf>
September 13, 2018

Board of Directors Meeting

September 13, 2018

Minutes

City Manager, Mr. **Patrick Comiskey**. CAN President Chuck McFadden introduced new Cambridge City Manager, Mr. **Patrick Comiskey**, who has been on the job here for about six weeks. **Mr. Comiskey** was born in Havre de Grace, grew up in Aberdeen, and still has family in Maryland, as well as many local ties. He has worked in local government throughout his career and comes to Cambridge from a similar position in Georgia

Mr. Comiskey has been impressed by many positive things in Cambridge, including the natural beauty of the area with its energy and conservation projects and its parks and recreation programs; its attractive Visitors' Center; forward-looking planning activities, including riverfront and medical facility development; and as energetic spirit of volunteerism. His goals for Cambridge include increasing home ownership and expanding job opportunities.

Based on his six weeks here, **Mr. Comiskey** considers the biggest challenges to be: infrastructure maintenance and improvement (water/ sewer, roads, and homeowner responsibility for sidewalks); economic growth; City employee salaries and benefits; City equipment replacement costs; housing; equipment replacement costs; housing; and code enforcement. He invited the audience to send him suggestions in the following areas: (a) Big ideas to make Cambridge brighter; (b) small-scale tasks that would improve Cambridge; and (c) best things to like about Cambridge. CAN will distribute these questions to all its members.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Patrick Comiskey** is listed below.]

[CB&A Note: Please note that **Patrick Comiskey** also made the Presidents and Dean's List for the Summer Semester, ending September 2017]

<https://www.mga.edu/news/2018/01/presidents-deans-fall2017.php>
January 9, 2018

MGA Announces Fall 2017 President's And Dean's Lists

Author: News Bureau

Middle Georgia State University announces the 2017 fall semester President's List and Dean's List. Students on the President's List had a grade point average of at least 3.8. The Dean's List includes students who had at least a 3.5 grade point average. Students must take a certain number of credit hours to qualify.

The President's List (the Dean's List follows):

Thomaston GA
Patrick Conway Comiskey

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

The Upson Post
January 14, 2016

After 14 years of Progress, Thomaston City Manager Patrick Comiskey Resigns – Letter of Resignation

Thomaston Mayor J.D. Stallings and Thomaston City Council
106 E. Lee Street
Thomaston, GA 30286
January 5, 2016

Dear Mayor Stallings and City Council:

I am submitting my resignation from the post of Thomaston City Manager. I am willing to continue to serve the city until such time as the mayor and city council secure another city manager. I am also willing to serve during a period of transition with a new manager. There are several projects we have in process that are in the works for 2016.

Silvertown West Village Neighborhood Sewer Line Replacement

This Project is potentially the largest sewer line replacement project we have undertaken. The mayor and city council approved a predevelopment and planning grant application at the November 3rd city council meeting to develop the project for submittal to the USDA. If successful, the city will receive up to \$3.5 million dollars of grant funds in the form of a forgivable loan so long as we borrow at least \$1.5 million at an interest rate of approximately 2%. We expect to hear back on this by August.

The plan is to build new sewer lines in the alleys or in the street, if the current sewer line runs in front of the houses, and run the household services to the new lines. The old lines would be grouted in and the manholes buried into the ground. Another objective is to replace part of the current force main at the lift station behind Walmart with a ductile iron line. A further objective, maybe not with this project, is to run a new sewer line up Town Branch to the lift station behind West Central Bank so the sewage might flow with gravity down the new line and the lift station might be closed and taken down. If we have success with this project, the next step would be to apply for the same project to replace out all the sewer lines in East Silvertown using the same strategy.

Silvertown West Village Water Line Replacement Project

We plan to submit a CDBG grant application to the state's DCA office this spring for a \$500,000 grant for replacing water lines in the southern half of Silvertown West Village from West Goodrich to the Silvertown Ballpark. This project will also involve sidewalk replacement in the same area. The city has already submitted a request for a loan with \$500,000 in loan forgiveness from GEFA for 2016. We will borrow approximately \$1.5 million at a reduced loan rate (we received a rate of 1.03% on the last loan). We use the GEFA loan to strengthen our CDBG application showing the city's additional investment in the project. We should hear back on the

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GEFA loan forgiveness by March. The word on the CDBG grant will probably be announced in August.

In 2018, we plan to submit the other half of West Village for the same work. The plan from there is to jump over the highway and march through the remainder of Silvertown, then continue south through town submitting a \$2.5 million project every other year.

Storm Water Replacement Project

We submitted a loan request last week for a \$2 million dollar storm water grant through GEFA. The objective is to put together several storm water replacement projects such as the line from E. Main that runs through Weaver Park, the road area at the end of N. Green Street, storm water retention and filter beds along Bell Creek, and possibly the line that runs under businesses in the downtown. The loan request we made includes \$400,000 in loan forgiveness. We should hear back on the loan forgiveness availability by March.

Silvertown Tennis Courts

The county is required to expend \$200,000 toward the Silvertown Tennis courts. The original plan to build two sets of two courts over the existing site ran three times that amount. The best option might be to replace one set of the tennis courts with grade A courts and create or allow a second utility court for whiffle ball and/or pickle ball.

Lake Thomaston Development

The city acquired the railroad spur from Norfolk Southern Company that runs inside the lake side property and continues out toward Hugo Starling Drive. A link up with Hugo Starling Drive and an additional linkage along the power line easement south of Avenue F would allow a bike trail to develop for Lake Thomaston to Weaver Park. The city has already developed linkages between Barnesville Highway and Avenue F and from Dye Branch to the civic center swimming pool. A linkage was developed from Weaver Park to Matthews Field with the help of the county government.

Lake Thomaston Proper

The plan for Lake Thomaston is to hire lifeguards to work in pairs at the lake under a head lifeguard three days a week (Friday through Sunday) from spring through the fall after the construction is completed. The city workers will haul sand from Butler and develop a beach adjacent to the boat docks. Citizens will be able to check out small fishing craft, canoes, kayaks, paddle boards (the stand on upright boards gaining popularity today), paddle boats, or small sail boats and navigate most of the 70-acre lake. The city would also rent out bikes for use on the 1.6-mile loop trail that surrounds the lake. Later, bike renters will be able to take the bikes out of the lake park site and travel to Weaver Park and the town square.

The band shell will be ripe for hosting concerts or plays sponsored by the city or other community or civic groups or churches. Fifteen percent of the current rentals for the pavilion at the Greatest Generation Park are from citizens that reside outside Upson County. It is likely the lake will draw people to Thomaston from adjoining counties.

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The following personnel opportunities are coming up this winter.

Police Department

We planned to have the Georgia Police Chief Association put together an assessment center for promotional opportunities for an additional patrol lieutenant position (giving us two patrol Lieutenant spots), a patrol sergeant position, and a detective sergeant position (in addition to the two we currently have). These positions are in addition to the reopening of the administrative officer and lead detective positions. The association director advised that the next available opportunity to undertake an assessment would be in February. The new police chief will sit on a panel to review each position. The new police chief will also have a number of police officer applications to review.

Fire Department

We are inviting the firefighters to apply for three available Lieutenant positions. The process should wrap up by April.

Street Department

We need to post an opening for the Street Department Crew Leader position. We will likely have several applications from inside the city. A good candidate will be Horace Montfort who has been relied upon to handle work orders and field citizen requests.

If anyone has any questions about these or other projects, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,
Patrick Comiskey

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
December 18, 2015

City holds budget hearings

Author: Larry Stanford

The City of Thomaston is beginning a series of public hearings on the 2016 budget today at noon in the council meeting room of Thomaston-Upson Government Complex on East Lee Street. The General Fund Budget is proposed to be \$7,409,925, a reduction of \$1,060,000 from the 2015 budget. The Electric Fund is proposed to be \$15,245,407, while the Water and Sewer Fund is proposed at \$7,553,053. For residents and business owners in the city, the good news is that the city is not considering a tax increase, nor an increase in electricity rates. However, water and sewer rate increases are expected to be approved. The water increase would be 43 cents per 1,000 gallons, and the sewer increase would be 35 cents per 1,000 gallons. For a household which uses 5,000 gallons a month, the total increase would be around \$3.90. But, warns City Manager **Patrick Comiskey**, the city needs to come up with new revenue or get their current tax revenue up because the tax digest continues to shrink. The Thomaston City Council held a work session on December 7 to go over the proposed budget. Newly sworn in City Councilman Ryan Tucker, as well as council members-elect LaKeiitha Reeves and Jeff Middlebrooks, along with mayor-elect J. D. Stallings, attended the meeting and **Comiskey** took time to explain each part of the budget process to the newly elected members. With the exception of Tucker, the newly-elected members will not take office until January 1, 2016, and will not vote on the new budget.

Electricity

The proposed budget for Electricity is \$15,245,407. **Comiskey** began the session by discussing the cost of electricity to the city, which is a member of and receives its power from the Municipal Electric Association of Georgia (MEAG). “In the last decade, the cost of electricity has grown dramatically,” **Comiskey** said. “From 2005 to last year, our cost of electricity grew basically about 50 percent over the last decade. Meanwhile, our billing to our customers only grew roughly 28 to 29 percent. In essence, we’ve absorbed about a million dollars worth of electric costs increases over the last decade. The money we were making 10 years ago is not the money we are making today. We are pulling in less money versus expenses, and we never passed on all those expenses. “One of the things that we’ve heard in the community is, ‘Our bills have gone up.’ They haven’t gone up as much as our bills that we pay to purchase the electricity,” **Comiskey** stated. “As a result, our margins are smaller, which means we have less money to work with than we had 10 years ago with the electric utility.”

Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head put the issue of electrical revenue into context. “There has been a lot of conversation about the utility rates and can you lower them. The thing that is the challenge at that point is that we aren’t passing along even close to what the increases have been. But in addition to that, this electric fund, along with taxes, is the heart of the body. It is able to pay the expenses to provide the services that we’ve got. It supports the water utility, and all the other expenses. In 2014, we transferred \$1,239,000 out of the electric fund. That is how much blood this heart is pumping to cover expenses for all the other services we provide.” Reeves and

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Middlebrooks still expressed concern about those in their districts who are not always able to pay a high utility bill. **Comiskey** replied that the city works with people every month who are having problems paying their bills. He added that they are also looking into working out a budget program where, based on their past history, customers would be given a set price to pay every month in order to be able to maintain their services.

Water and Sewer

The proposed budget for Water and Sewer is \$7,553,053. As an overview, **Comiskey** noted that water usage in the city declined every year between 2007 and 2013. “The first two years, our biggest single customer was Martha Mills, and they shut down,” **Comiskey** said. “Yamaha shut down. We lost about 55 percent of our industrial users over two years. Then the county started putting in wells, and we lost some more there. “People tend to use the same amount of water. Historically, people are using a little more electricity each year. That’s why through the 70’s, 80’s and 90’s, if you had an electric utility, you automatically had growth and revenue. That’s no longer the case. But with water, people always use about the same amount each year, so the only chance you have to get more revenue is with new customers coming in, or with price increases. We’ve had the inverse – we’ve lost 37 percent of our customers over that time, and our revenue has gone down. “

Mayor Arnold added that the city has had to increase rates, but has tried to so gently. “We have incrementally worked on increasing water and sewer for 15 years,” he said. “We’ve had to, because we cannot justifiably sap the electric department for more and more money to subsidize water and sewer, and if you don’t keep bumping your water and sewer rates, that’s exactly what will happen.” **Comiskey** said since 2007, the amount of water usage has dropped 39 percent (300 million gallons) because of the loss of customers, yet the cost of the chemicals and other items needed to keep the water safe has continually increased in price.

Victor Cozart, the Project Manager with Severn Trent, the company contracted by the city to run the water and sewer department, said the main increase in the budget of \$175,000 is for the purchase and installation of a SCADA system which would greatly automate the system. Cozart noted that many of the current water system employees are nearing retirement age, and water and sewer work is not attracting younger workers to replace those retiring. He said the SCADA system will automatically keep track of everything at the water and sewer plants, and if something goes wrong, will send out an alert to the system operator. Cozart estimated that the system could conceivably pay for itself within two years with personnel retiring and by not having to replace those personnel. **Comiskey** stated with the proposed increase in water and sewer rates, with a household average 5,000 gallons a month, the increase would be \$3.90. The increase is projected to provide \$166,000 for water and \$107,000 for sewer in revenue gain.

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The Thomaston Times
December 2, 2015

**Thomaston Council approves budget revisions
Purchase of boats, increase in legal services among changes**
Author: Larry Stanford

\$50,000 for boats for Lake Thomaston, and other funds including an increase of \$40,000 for legal services and an increase of \$20,000 for professional services were approved by the Thomaston City Council in a budget revision at their meeting on November 3. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** explained some of the budget revisions to the council, who had sheets showing all the revisions in front of them. “Recognizing that part of our Uptown Downtown project spilled over into 2015, we have \$1.3 million as a recognition of work and expected loan reimbursement,” **Comiskey** stated. “Also, we had performed a project over by Interfor to move a water line in order to allow the intersection expansion there. Those costs and reimbursements are identified also. We have also identified changes in our General Fund, basically decreasing and increasing in our total expenditures.

“One of the items is a reduction from the Lake Thomaston budget \$25,000 for docks and \$50,000 for boats and accessories for the Lake Thomaston project,” **Comiskey** continued. “Also, we had upwards of \$50,000 for an additional CDBG project spillover from 2014 that we’re recognizing those expenditures in the offsetting revenues. Also we have our LMIG, which is our annual allocation that we receive from the state. We took two years of allocations to put towards our \$1.5 million milling, road reclamation and paving project that we did this summer.” Council member Patsy Perdue made a motion to approve the budget revision. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

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The Thomaston Times
November 15, 2015

Thomaston electric winter rates drop

Author: Larry Stanford

Thomaston electric power residential consumers may soon begin seeing a reduction in their city power bills as the winter electric rates have kicked in. At the Thomaston City Council meeting on November 10, City Clerk Clint Chastain advised the council and mayor that as of October 1, 2015, in accordance with the city's electric ordinance, the winter residential electric rates have been installed in the utility billing system and will be effective through May 20-16.

Mayor Hays Arnold stated that the winter rates represent a decrease of 15.2 percent for 1000 kw users from the summer rates. For 2000 kw users, the decrease will be 20.2 percent, and for 3000 kw users, the decrease is 32 percent. He added that the decrease should be good news for a lot of citizens. Chastain also noted that summer maximum usage of 20,000 gallons per month for billing sewer charges ended on September 30, 2015.

In other business, the council approved the city manager spending up to \$40,000 to have engineering, survey and design work done toward the installation of another trunk line along Town Branch for sewer purposes. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** noted that this is a long range project, but that this is the first step. City Attorney Joel Bentley added that they have found in past Town Branch projects that this is the best way to do it.

“One of the things that we’ve found on this Town Branch project is the difficulty that most of the easements that lie along this line are so old that they’re either prescriptive easements or they’re so poorly described that you can’t follow where they are,” Bentley said. “The benefit of doing it the way **Mr. Comiskey** is proposing is that it will be platted out, actual easements will be secured, and for posterity purposes, the easements have provisions in for future repairs and replacements as a part of the easement purchase price. For that reason, as the attorney, I would recommend that you undertake this project in the manner in which it is laid out.”

Comiskey said that as the project moves along, he will be recommending the city purchase portions of the property. “Just for clarification, because this is a trunk line that will be running along the creek, I’ll be recommending that the council purchase those sections not in traditional easements,” he said, “because of the long term expectations we’ll have with storm water down the road, and maintaining creek banks and things that will probably be the municipality’s responsibility in the long haul.” Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head made a motion to approve the city manager spending up to \$40,000 on the engineering, survey and design work. Council member Gary Atwater seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

The council also approved spending up to \$30,000 toward a grant application with the USDA for major sewer line replacement. “We’re seeking approval of a USDA pre-approval planning grant application authorizing the manager and mayor implement an application grant with USDA

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requiring preliminary engineering,” **Comiskey** told the council. “This grant would be up to \$30,000, depending on what the authority would grant us. It would be an exploratory grant toward doing some major sewer lines replacement work and hopefully getting USDA to help us with that.” Mayor Arnold stated that he has read the pre-application and the certification for USDA grants and that everything is in order. Council member Patsy Perdue made a motion to approve the funds for the grant application. Atwater seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

Finally, the city council approved the appointment of Ryan Kellett to the Thomaston-Upson Transportation Committee. Kellett is an employee with the Georgia Department of Transportation and recently made a presentation to the council concerning the dangers of the city’s speed bumps. Mayor Arnold said Kellett has agreed to fill the position on the committee, and noted that the city has one more position on the committee that still needs to be filled. Perdue made a motion to approve the appointment of Kellett. Atwater seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

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The Thomaston Times
August 12, 2015

Lake Thomaston bids higher than expected - Bid on Lake Thomaston and Park Street \$45K over

Author: Larry Standford

The Thomaston City Council unanimously approved a bid of \$935,128 from Tommy Gibson Builders of Warner Robins for the construction of an amphitheater/boat storage building and pavilion with attached restrooms at Lake Thomaston Park, and a pavilion with attached restrooms at Park Street Playground. The action came at their August 4 meeting. Prior to their vote, City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** advised them that the city received four bids for the project, with Tommy Gibson being the low bid. The other bidders and bids were Headley Construction for \$978,000, Renfroe Construction for \$999,000, and McLeroy Inc. for \$1,100,000. **Comiskey** also noted that included in the bid is \$50,000 for site and preparation work, and \$40,000 for any alterations that the city might decide to do beyond the original scope of work.

The Lake Thomaston Park project came as somewhat of a surprise to residents, who first read about it in their June city newsletter. The city has plans to build a boat storage building with a roof that will double as the stage for an amphitheater, and a pavilion with restrooms. The city could then rent canoes and small watercraft to visitors, and host band concerts and plays in the amphitheater. While the Lake Thomaston Park project has met with unanimous approval of the City Council since the beginning, it has caused a division between city residents, with some believing the city would be better off spending that money on other needs, such as more manpower in the police and fire departments, business retention, or lowering utility bills.

At their July 7 meeting, the council approved spending \$600,000 on the two buildings, and another \$200,000 on site work, for a total of \$800,000. Following the August 4 meeting, **Comiskey** answered questions from the local news media concerning the difference in the price approved by the council and the final bid. He noted that the bid also included a pavilion with restrooms at the Park Street Playground, and stated they had projected the cost of the amphitheater/boat storage building to be \$400,000, and the cost of the two pavilion/restrooms to be \$200,000 each. “We did the same footprint for the bathrooms at Park Place as we did for Greatest Generation and Lake Thomaston, with the idea that mirroring those would help to get a better bid price,” **Comiskey** said. “These buildings will have brick as opposed to what we used at Greatest Generation, with the idea that these buildings should last longer and be less maintenance than non-brick. The two new bathrooms will have pavilions on the sides of them. “We estimated these three buildings would cost \$800,000, so minus the \$50,000 for site work and the \$40,000 for anything extra, the bid came in \$45,000 over what we estimated.”

When asked if he could provide the price specifications on the buildings, **Comiskey** said he could not. “I can’t on the buildings, we did them all as a group,” he said. “We won’t know until the contractor will have to do that for us, because he did them all as a package, and he’ll be

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providing that as we go through the project so we'll know where to post those payments." When questioned about the \$200,000 the council had approved for site work at Lake Thomaston, **Comiskey** stated they have more improvements planned. "\$600,000 was what we projected for the two buildings at Lake Thomaston, and then another \$200,000 to do any work out there in addition. We're also going to do other things down there besides the prep work for the building. We're hoping to put some docks in there for putting the boats on. That's something we hope to do within that \$200,000."

The city manager was also asked if the city was considering purchasing the corner lot at Lake Thomaston, on 6th Avenue next to the city water tower. He said they are looking into it. "We had talked to the previous owner 10 years ago," he said. "We had approached them again, and we may or may not, that depends on if the owner is interested and is interested in a price that we all can agree on. I would recommend that to the mayor and council. That would give us access to the reservoir property from 6th Avenue, rather than having to put it through the neighborhood. That was something we tried prior to building the reservoir. The funds to purchase that property would come from the water fund."

Comiskey said later that the city is also looking to replace the water tower next to the lot, and having it for truck staging and access would make it easier to do so. "That site is the ideal site to do that. We can build one and take the other one down. That tower wasn't built by the city; it was built by Thomaston Mills; they had two water towers in their system. The problem it is too short and doesn't integrate into our system, so what will happen probably, anytime after 2018, when it comes time to look at that tower and refurbishing it, we'll be looking at the option of building a bigger tower that can better integrate into our system."

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The Thomaston Times
August 1, 2015

Citizen calls for mayor, manager to resign
Author: Ashley Biles

City of Thomaston Mayor Hays Arnold and City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** received heated comments from a local citizen at last week's City Council meeting when Terrell Brooks stated he did not feel either gentleman had done anything for the community during their tenure. "For the people of Thomaston, black and white, you have not done anything," said Brooks. "You can get mad, but that is the way I feel and I feel it is time for a change." Brooks went on to ask for the resignation of both Mayor Arnold and Mr. **Comiskey** before adding that James Harris was going to run for mayor in the upcoming election. Mr. Harris was also present at the meeting and raised his hand and stated he intended to run. Mayor Arnold announced last year that he would not seek re-election at the end of this term; qualifying for those intending to run for the position will be in August. Also during the public comment portion of the meeting, Rhondalynn Traylor asked council several questions, with the first being for an update on Thomaston Police Officer Phillip Tobin. Both Arnold and **Comiskey** stated they did not have any information to share and City Attorney Joel Bentley stated he did not either as he is not the attorney assigned to the case. Traylor then asked when the terms for the mayor and the two council seats up for grabs end this year and Mayor Arnold stated the terms end on December 31. Traylor, who is part of the Thomaston Improvement Association, made the comment that the group will be working to have someone run for the council seats and for the position of mayor. She also asked for an update on candidates the city is considering for the position of Chief of Police for the Thomaston Police Department, however Bentley stated that was a personnel matter and the city would have no comment.

Prior to the public comments, Bentley had reminded the crowd of the rules of that section of the meeting. He stated the Mayor has the authority to keep the peace and has the right to ask the police to remove anyone who continue to disrupt the meeting. Another point he made was that each individual who signs up for public comment gets five minutes to speak, however no one may sign up and choose to give their allotted time to another individual. He also added that as a general rule, questions will be taken under advisement, but the council is not required to respond during the meeting. In reference to the rules, Traylor asked if it would be possible to have set bi-monthly meetings for citizens to meet with their district representatives and the police chief to discuss matters more in-depth than is allowed during the council meetings. "When we come to the meetings, of course we only have five minutes, but sometimes issues are more pressing than coming in here for five minutes and not getting any answers," said Traylor. "Is there any way we can have district meetings? That way when we get in here, it doesn't seem so improper when you are trying to ask a question that you can't get an answer to because you only have a certain amount of time." Bentley stated the City of Thomaston has a "city manager run" form of municipal government, which means City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** is the Chief Executive Officer for the city. He added that the mayor and council make the policy decisions and then the manager puts them into place, therefore **Comiskey** would be the person to discuss having

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meetings with the police chief. Bentley also added that citizens would have to address their district council member about meeting with them. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head added that any citizen could call any councilmember at any time to say they would like to come speak with them about any city issue. The final question brought up by Traylor dealt with the options for youth activities in the community. “I know that we have to live with the \$800,000 decision for the park,” she said, referencing the recent unanimous vote for the Lake Thomaston Park project, “but we also have to have something equal for our youth development. We have not done anything, as far as the city or the county when it comes to youth development.” She suggested something such as a bowling alley or a skating rink that have been in the community before. Bentley stated the Recreation Department is a joint project between the city and county and to keep an eye out for when they meet to discuss the budget. He continued, stating the meeting between the two entities would be a public meeting and that would be the time to come and state that citizens would like to see more money being budgeted for recreation. Kelsey Rockemore had also signed up to speak during public comment; however he was not present at the meeting.

In other business, the council approved several items for improvements around town; with the first of those being the Glendale sewer line project. The council passed a motion which authorized the city manager to spend up to \$38,000 to complete the project. **Comiskey** told the council he is hoping to have the work done before school starts. Next, the council approved spending up to \$52,000 with Meeks Grading and up to \$73,000 with Double A Concrete for the prep work being done at Weaver Park and the Park Street Playground for new playground equipment. Third, the council approved spending up to \$85,000 to relocate the water line for Interfor, located on Highway 36. The line is being moved to accommodate the turn lane project at the intersection of Highway 36 and Ben Hill Road that the Industrial Development Authority is working on to address safety issues with the increased truck traffic. A budget revision was also approved to accept the FEMA and GEMA grants which will be used for the purchasing of three generators: one for the Town Branch sewer plant, one for the water treatment plant on North Center Street and one that will be a mobile unit. City Manager **Comiskey** stated the council accounted for the 15 percent match they would have to put in for the grants when working on this year’s budget. Mayor Arnold stated the city will be paying roughly \$100,000 for a total investment of approximately \$562,160 and noted that was a good return on an investment.

Finally, Council member Patsy Perdue brought up the topic of the online article by Roadsnaacks.com which designated Thomaston as the third worst community in Georgia. Perdue stated she was so upset by the article that she wanted to write something disputing the information in it, but added that she did not have to thanks to the wonderful column written by The Thomaston Times Editor Larry Stanford. Perdue encouraged anyone who had not read the column to check it out. The column can be found online on The Times’ website and Facebook page, or in the July 17th issue of The Times.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
July 31, 2015

Open letter to citizens of Thomaston

Author: Doug Head - Mayor Pro Tem

The purpose of this open letter is to express some of my thoughts on several issues that have gotten a lot of publicity lately. I have seen many comments both in the paper and on social media concerning numerous important topics that range from police and fire protection to the Lake Thomaston project. I'd like to hopefully provide some thoughts that will help people understand things a little better. Most of what has been said about the new Lake Thomaston project seems to center around the fact that there is not enough money to both protect the public and improve and develop parks. Second, I have seen and heard a great deal of misinformation. Last, I have heard it said a number of times that we on the City Council do not care. I would like for people to know that all of us on the council do care. I cannot imagine why anyone would want to do this job if they didn't care. We don't do this job for the \$204 pay check every month. I ran for this job in 2004 because I saw what the Mayor, Council and the City Manager had done and I supported the kind of vision they had. That same vision has gotten us to this point down the road and we should ask: Are we better? I say yes we are, but check for yourself. Here are the facts.

Despite the loss of 5,000 to 7,000 jobs:

* We have low property taxes in the city. Our city millage rate is lower now than it was in 2004. Your county and school taxes may be higher, but your city property taxes are lower unless the assessed value of your property has gone up.

* We have low electric rates – See the Georgia Public Service Commission Residential Rate Survey or go to Georgia Power's public site and see what your bill would be with Ga. Power compared to a city bill. On the commercial side, I am told that 4 of 5 businesses are the same or lower.

* We have the Greatest Generation Park and we are headed to better parks in the future. Yes, we are spending more on parks but it must be remembered that we have just taken over two of our city parks (Weaver in 2014 and Park Street a few years before) that had fallen into disrepair. This time next year you will see them being well cared for. The Greatest Generation Park has far exceeded most people's expectations. I feel Lake Thomaston will be a completely new and exciting opportunity, not only for city but for county residents and visitors from out of town.

* We have smaller government: If we hadn't cared, then in 2000 when the mills closed we would have taken the easy and typical path that government often takes; we would have done little. Instead, we responded to the closing of the mills and began to cut costs. If we had continued on course, we would currently need an additional \$1.5 million to \$2 million a year in our budget to operate. Instead, we made government smaller so that Total Expenditures in 2013 are less than they were in 2004 and the millage rate is lower than when Hays took office in 2004.

In addition to keeping costs down we have also built reserves as recommended by our CPA firm. Reserves are needed over time to do things like creating a financial standing that allowed us to refinance our debt at lower rates and save \$80K a year. Those reserves also allowed us to put

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down money that led to GEFA (Georgia Environmental Finance Authority) loans of funding at a lower interest rate with substantial loan forgiveness.

What are the city's priorities?

Public Safety:

This is an issue of primary concern that we should always be reviewing to consider how we could provide the best public safety and attract the best candidates for employees. Regardless of the fact that we are ahead of many cities and the national average as far as staffing, I am not as concerned about them as I am about us. Public safety is a top priority for all of us. We can and will provide superior policing and fire protection. We are committed to public safety as a council and we take this responsibility very seriously.

Jobs and Industry:

We all, city and county, contribute to the effort to attract industry. The city continues to repair and upgrade our infrastructure which is important to attracting industry and to do things to improve the quality of life, like the parks. The Industrial Development Authority is the agency primarily charged with efforts to recruit industry and does what it can for our existing industry and businesses that have supported our community all these years. IDA Director, Kyle Fletcher, along with the IDA board are continually making the effort to do these things as well as maintaining contacts with Georgia Industry and Trade. But in the end it comes down to money and the options that money can afford. Our governments, city and county, should return to the dedication of a mil of tax to fund the IDA's efforts. That is how you would grow the effort to bring new jobs to Thomaston and Upson County.

Improving Infrastructure:

The City continues to improve infrastructure through repair and replacement of water and sewer. Just to let you know, we have:

- 99 miles of electric lines and 4 substations
- 60 miles of streets and 31 miles of sidewalks
- 80 miles of water lines, a water filter plant, 8 water tanks
- 67 miles of sewer lines and 2 treatment plants

When all that is added up it totals 337 miles of infrastructure.

Utilities:

So you ask if we have all of this why do we raise utility rates or ever propose a tax increase? The answer is because costs do rise over time and if you do not pass that cost along at some point, your savings will dry up and you will have to raise taxes more. Our utility funds are the businesses we run to provide services for our citizens and to provide revenue to cover the cost of services that are the very reasons people choose to live in a city.

Transparency:

I feel we are as open as anyone. We have public budget hearings over four meetings, some at lunch and some in the evening to try to accommodate schedules. Public and press are always invited. Over those days, we go through the entire budget, not necessarily in detail, but we have

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the detailed budget documents always available to the public. Also, the City Manager, the Mayor, and several of our council members make numerous talks during the year to various clubs and community groups and city hall always has an open-door policy to its citizens. And lastly, we put city news and information in our utility bills (“The Bugle”) that goes out to all our customers. I hope in the future we can have one or two public meetings during the year to talk about the “State of the City” and give citizens the ability to hear more information about the city and to ask questions.

In conclusion

All of these good things have come together because we do care and because we did the difficult work of growing our government smaller. These good things have come in large part because of the vision of Mayor Arnold and our City Manager, **Patrick Comiskey**, and the support of the council, as well as the vision of former Mayor Sam Brewton and councils before us.

We will never be where we want to be, but we have to think about a lot of things at one time. Police and fire protection, water and sewer and roads, taxes, utility rates, parks, and joint projects are just some of the balls we juggle. We do need to take a long hard look at where our staffing levels are with both police and fire and how to attract the best personnel. Additionally, we need to continue to support the IDA and their efforts to attract new industry and employers to town. We need to continue the very important work of supporting and doing what we can for our existing industry and businesses. Some people say that we are a welfare community. Some say we can’t do both – improve and develop parks and have adequate police and fire protection. That is simply not true. The planning and savings over the years make this possible. Some people have told me we are just a town of older people and we don’t need Lake Thomaston. But I see Thomaston and Upson County as more than that. I want the IDA to get that next great industry that will employ another 200-300 people. I want a future for this town. But if all you want is to give up, bunker in, and reduce taxes and utility fees and spend our savings, then I am afraid you may have already given up. I am not in that group and the council is not in that group. We want more for this town; we want a future for this town. A future of good and improved infrastructure, improved roads, beautiful parks and murals as well as good, well-staffed police and fire and an IDA properly funded to be able to make the best effort to attract industry. Your City Council will continue to work on the important things we need and continue to work on how we can improve Thomaston and serve the citizens of Thomaston because of one overriding reason – WE DO CARE. Doug Head is Mayor Pro Tem of Thomaston.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
July 9, 2015

City sets SPLOST goals

Author: Larry Stanford

With 12 proposed sewer line projects totaling more than \$21 million approved for the new six-year SPLOST (Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax, and probably only getting about \$5 million for its portion of the one-cent tax, the Thomaston City Council is looking to get as much done as they have funds for.

At a called meeting on June 23, City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** provided information to the council on the 12 proposed projects. They range in price from \$4.3 million for a project to continue to replace sewer line along Town Branch, run it to the sewer plant, tear down the current water department building and install a backwash tank there, and relocate Severn Trent to the armory, to \$300,000 to replace sewer lines on Meeks Terrace, Raines Terrace, and possibly Reeds Terrace.

In addition to not yet knowing what percentage of the SPLOST they could receive, **Comiskey** added that emergency work could also cut into the project list. The city manager noted that the way the ballot read during the last SPLOST vote in 2011, it left a way for the city to use sales tax funds for emergencies, and that proved insightful. “What in essence happened this last time was we woke up one morning and South Green Street had caved in, so we used some of our SPLOST money to replace that section of line,” **Comiskey** said. “We’ve gone out and had another situation behind Phillips Street. We went over and did that section of line. We’ve had sections that we found caved in or were beyond patching and have had to replace the line from manhole to manhole instead of patching bad lines. “If this turns out to be a six-year SPLOST, that is a long time,” he added. “We may have something that pops up a month after it starts, and we want to address that first, because we have to.”

The council unanimously approved the 12 projects for the SPLOST list. **Comiskey** said the next step will be for him to present their list to County Manager Jim Wheelless, and for the Board of Commissioners to then decide how they will divide up the SPLOST funds. “What will happen in essence is, the county does the SPLOST,” he said. “It is not like the joint projects, where we both sit down and work it out. They have the opportunity to sit down with us and work out a contract, and then we have input into what goes on the SPLOST list. The other option is they just say they are going to go ahead and do it, then there is a formula where we get a certain amount, which is what happened last time. It ended up with us getting approximately 25 percent of the SPLOST.”

Comiskey added that the SPLOST being proposed is six years, which they hope will generate \$20 million in revenue. If the city were to receive 25 percent again, that would be about \$5 million to work with. “Obviously we have more projects on here than we’ll have the money to do,” the city manager said. “If we’re lucky, we might be able to get through four or five, six or possibly seven projects. I would say that would be optimistic.”

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Council member Patsy Perdue noted that developing the list of projects shows residents what the city wants to do. “This shows the process that we’re taking to replace out all the stuff that we need to replace,” she said. “It’s like the oil filter commercial – you either pay now or you pay later.” Mayor Hays Arnold agreed, adding that this is what the city has been working on. “It’s exactly what we’ve been doing for years. It’s exactly what we told people we were doing,” Arnold said. “We’re not wavering from that. This is sewer work. This is what we said we would go for with the SPLOST, and this is exactly what we’re doing.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
June 26, 2015

New sewer, water lines approved

Author: Larry Stanford

Thomaston has been busy the last few years replacing aging water lines, and continues to do so, but the city is also working on replacing its sewer lines. At their last two meetings, the Thomaston City Council has approved more than \$5 million worth of sewer and water line replacement work. At their June 2 meeting, the council approved an expenditure of up to \$3.9 million to replace sewer lines along Town Branch and Avalon Road, approximately 7,000 feet. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** said the project actually came in under the estimated cost. “The engineering estimate was a little over \$3.4 million and he was just under \$3.4 million,” **Comiskey** said. “I’m asking council to authorize the expenditure of up to \$3.9 million for the engineering and sewer line work, and also the oversight work. We have a low bid of just under \$3.4 million, but want authorization of up to \$3.9 million to cover additional engineering and oversight contingency costs.” Mayor Hays Arnold noted it is always good when a project’s bid comes in closed to what was expected. “It is always more comfortable with that” he said. “This will be another major project going on in the community and it will benefit the community. We’re glad to be a part of making this possible.” At their June 16 meeting, the council also authorized **Comiskey** and City Attorney Joel Bentley to spend up to \$35,000 to negotiate for land easements for the Town Branch project.

At the June 2 meeting, the council also approved:

- Up to \$90,000 for design work on the next sewer line project. **Comiskey** said it will be a continuation of work on the Town Branch/Avalon Road project.
- Authorization to spend up to \$25,000 for work associated with replacing approximately 250 feet of sewer line under Mill Race Road.
- Authorization to spend up to \$25,000 for sewer line extension under A Street, near the Martha Mill Building.

At their June 16 meeting, the council approved a request from the city manager for approval of a Drinking Water Revolving Fund Resolution for establishing a loan with Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority. “The city is looking to do a revolving loan of \$2 million, **Comiskey** explained to the council. “The interest rate is 1.03 percent, and we’ll have \$500,000 forgiven if we spend the full amount. Plus, this is matching of the CDBG grant that we already having approval of, which is another \$500,000. This will be a continuation of the water line project which will involve the southeast section of Silvertown East Village. We’ll be able to eliminate old lines that have been leaking. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head stated with it being a \$2 million project, with \$500,000 being forgivable, and with a 1.03 interest rate, it is pretty incredible that type of deal is available. “It will help us accomplish a lot of things we need to do,” Head said. “This deal is historically pretty incredible.” The council also gave **Comiskey** approval to hire Allen Smith Consulting to put together a Fiscal Year 2016 Community Block Grant Application. This is for replacing water mains and connections in Silvertown West Village.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
June 13, 2015

City Awarded \$2M Loan - Thomaston will use loan to replace leaking water mains

Author: Larry Stanford

The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority (GEFA) has awarded the City of Thomaston a \$2 million Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (DWSRF) loan. The loan will finance replacing more than two miles of existing leaking water mains within the Silvertown East Village. This project will also install new hydrants, valves, services lines, and meters. Thomaston will pay 1.03 percent interest on the 20-year loan, which includes principal forgiveness of up to \$500,000, if all loan funds are drawn. The loan qualifies for a reduced interest rate because it's an eligible water conservation project.

Thomaston Mayor Hays Arnold credited City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** with getting the grant, and added they were lucky to get the reduced interest rate. "Over time, that will basically amount to another grant," Arnold said. "Those interest rates will not be around forever, and I think we can depend on that." "GEFA's water and sewer programs assist local governments with improving their environmental infrastructure. As part of the Drinking Water program, cities and counties can also receive affordable financing for water conservation projects," said GEFA Executive Director Kevin Clark. "I'd like to express appreciation to Gov. Deal, state Sen. John F. Kennedy and state Rep. Johnnie Caldwell Jr. for their support. The state's commitment to helping cities and counties finance infrastructure projects contributes greatly to improving Georgia's water resources."

The DWSRF, a federal loan program administered by GEFA, provides communities throughout Georgia with low-interest loans to fund water infrastructure projects that deliver safe, affordable drinking water. Eligible projects include a wide variety of public health or compliance related water supply projects. These projects conserve and improve water resources, and facilitate economic growth and development. Low-interest loans from this program are available up to \$25 million.

City Manager **Comiskey** stated that the city will be receiving contract documents from GEFA within the next month that will need the city council's approval "This is part of the Silvertown East Village, where we will be replacing our water lines on 4th, 5th, 6th, and Double C streets," **Comiskey** added. "We have a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grant that will be part of this, and a \$500,000 loan forgiveness that will be part of that \$2 million that was identified. The balance at \$1.5 million will be at an interest rate of 1.03 percent, which is a very low interest rate."

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times (GA)
March 28, 2015

Thomaston paying part of new 911 equipment

Author: Larry Stanford

The Thomaston City Council approved paying a portion of the costs for new 911 equipment for the 911 center. The action came at their first March meeting. Council member Gary Atwater was absent. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** requested the authorization of approval of purchase of the new equipment. He explained the cost will be shared between Thomaston and Upson County. “Basically, the current equipment was purchased around 2004,” **Comiskey** said. “Evidently, Sheriff Dan Kilgore and 911 Director Carl McKinney are concerned about whether they can get replacement parts, and they feel it is time to go ahead and venture forth with a new 911 system. “I’m asking council to authorize the city manager to enter into a contract to spend up to \$221,000 over five years for a new 911 system. We will be participating with the county based on our service delivery strategy, and Upson County will be sharing in the \$221,000.” Council member Patsy Perdue asked for clarification that the \$221,000 would be spent over a five-year period and would be paid by the city and county together. **Comiskey** said that is correct. “It would be a joint project with the city and county,” he said. Based on the schedule from EmergeTech, the first year would be \$149,500, and then the next four years would be \$17,500, \$18,000, and \$18,500. The percentage we pay each year is based on the property tax breakdown.”

Council member Don Greathouse asked where the funds would come from. The city manager replied that he and county manager Jim Wheelless will take a look at it, and if the funds cannot come from the current SPLOST account, that they will be part of joint projects budget for the next five years. Greathouse asked if residents pay a certain percentage of their telephone and cell phone bills for construction and operation costs of 911 centers. **Comiskey** stated they do, and based on what they are looking at, based on the joint projects budget, the city and county will pay for anything beyond that is not covered by those fees. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head asked if **Comiskey** had reviewed the proposal, and he said he has not. “My recommendation is based on accepting what Sheriff Kilgore, Mr. McKinney, and also IT Director Robert Haney have looked into the system and are recommending it,” **Comiskey** said. “I haven’t been involved in reviewing it myself personally, but those three are confident that this will meet the needs of the 911 center.

Perdue made a motion for the city to pay its percentage of the \$221,000 over a five-year period, sharing the costs with the county. Head seconded the motion. Prior to the vote, Perdue asked 911 Director Carl McKinney if he believes the new system will work for a while. He replied that he is. “The system that we have now is obsolete,” McKinney said. “The company that made it is not sure if they can get the parts to fix it. EmergeTech says their system will not become obsolete. Most systems last about five years, but they say theirs will go further. So hopefully we’ll have this new system for a while, at least until I retire,” he added laughingly. The vote was called and was 4-0 in favor of the motion.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times (GA)
March 20, 2015

City studying possibilities of police review committee

Author: Larry Stanford

Thomaston Mayor Hays Arnold and City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** have launched a study of the possibility of having a Citizens Police Review Board. They are expected to provide the Thomaston City Council with a summary of their findings within the next 90 days.

The issue of a police review board first came up last summer during a series of public hearings concerning Thomaston Police Officer Philip Tobin and the tasing of a person in a local convenience store parking lot. Since then, numerous other complaints about Tobin have surfaced and both the Georgia Bureau of Investigations and Griffin Judicial Circuit District Attorney Scott Ballard's office have both conducted investigations. The GBI investigation has been completed, but D. A. Ballard's office is continuing its investigation.

At one of the hearings, Thomaston resident George Carreker said other cities have had success with a Citizens Police Review Board, and he suggested it might be helpful for Thomaston to have one, too. Mayor Arnold agreed to look into it. At a city council meeting in February, Carreker brought the issue back up, and Mayor Arnold said it would be put on the agenda for the next meeting on March 3. At that meeting, City Manager **Comiskey** said they are looking into it. "Mr. Carreker, Rev. Johnson, myself and the mayor had a meeting last week to talk about potential talking points for what a police review board would look like, and who might serve on it," **Comiskey** advised the council. "What we decided was the best bet is to go ahead and try to investigate this, come up with as much information as we can, and come back to the council within the next 90 days with a summary report at to what options the council may want to choose to enter into." Mayor Arnold assured Carreker and others in the audience that they would be kept in the loop. "As we receive the information, we'll be glad to share it with you, also," he said.

In other business, the City of Thomaston is reacquiring approximately 189 acres of land on Pobiddy Road that was to have been the site of a future landfill. At their March 3 meeting, the Thomaston City Council voted to purchase Upson County's portion of 30 acres at the site, and also voted to request the Thomaston-Upson Office Building Authority to transfer back 159 more acres at the site. Council member Gary Atwater was absent.

City Attorney Joel Bentley brought the issue to the council. "The City of Thomaston, along with Upson County, many years ago looked at a solid waste landfill," Bentley said. "It did not come to fruition. There were three tracts of land that were to be dedicated to the solid waste landfill. One tract that is of particular interest this evening is a tract of 30 acres that is jointly owned by the city and the county. There are two other tracts, one of 56 acres and the other of 103 acres, which are currently titled with the Thomaston-Upson Office Building Authority, and I'd like you to take two actions this evening. "We have been in negotiations for quite a while about how to handle the 30-acre tract jointly owned between the city and the county. The county has agreed to

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sell its ½-undivided interest to the city for the sum of \$25,000. It would be sold on an ‘as is’ basis. My recommendation is that the city agree to purchase this property for \$25,000.

The second matter is since the landfill is a dead issue at this point, I recommend that you ask the Office Building Authority to transfer the other two tracts back to the City of Thomaston. “ Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head asked of the tracts are being used. Bentley stated that there may still be some yard waste that goes out there for further distribution.

City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** said the sale of the county’s portion to the city would mean one entity watching over the land instead of two. “There is some material out there, but this is a way to resolve the issue of who is going to take care of the property,” **Comiskey** said. “Instead of having two people, you’ll have one person responsible.”

Mayor Hays Arnold agreed. “The city manager and I visited the property and everything seemed to be in order,” the mayor said. “I would agree that the best way to handle it is with one person in control.” Mayor Pro Tem Head made a motion to approve \$25,000 for the purchase of Upson County’s interest in the 30-acre tract of land. Councilmember Patsy Perdue seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0. Head also made a motion to ask the Thomaston-Upson Office Building Authority to give back the 56-acre and 103-acre tracts of land the city had given them. Councilmember J. D. Stallings seconded the motion.

Mayor Arnold explained that the Office Building Authority was set up many years ago to help the city and county get low interest financing. He said the two tracts of land were needed as collateral when a bond issue was sponsored by the authority. Arnold added that the bond company the city uses now does not require such collateral. Bentley noted that are there are other tracts of city-owned property that are currently being held by the Office Building Authority, and at some point in the future, the city could also request that those properties be deeded back to the city. With no further discussion, the vote was called for and was 4-0 in favor of the motion.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
December 24, 2014

Thomaston Council approves \$32.8M budget for 2015
Budget includes water and sewer rate increases

Author: Ashley Biles

At a called meeting on Friday, December 19, the Thomaston City Council unanimously approved the city's 2015 budget at a grand total of \$32,885,555. The budget includes \$8,469,925 for the General Fund; \$5780,550 for the Water/Sewer; \$15,339,232 for Electric; \$1,165,848 for Sanitation; \$200,000 for Community Development; \$1.5 million for SPLOST funds; \$200,000 for CDBG (Community Development Block Grant); \$90,000 for LMIG (Local Maintenance Improvement Grant); \$20,000 for Law Enforcement; \$70,000 for Hotel/Motel tax and \$50,000 for the Greatest Generation Memorial Park. Also included is a 1 percent across the board raise for city employees, which has been standard for the past few years, and a water and sewerage rate increase. The increases are 23 cents per \$1,000 gallons for water, and 16 cents per 1,000 gallons for sewerage.

The 2015 budget is just over \$2 million more than that of 2014, however City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** stated the council is not projecting any increase in the millage rate for 2015. "Next August (2015) we won't be projecting an increase," said **Comiskey**. "Eventually we are going to need one though, as we've gone years without one. We are at a point where I don't see us being able to gain much more by reducing personnel." **Comiskey** added that hopefully things are beginning to look up in the community as there have been a lot of positive signs lately. He noted there has been an increase in the amount of sales taxes, showing citizens are spending more money locally, as well as several new small businesses are opening throughout town.

The city has several projects planned for 2015, including improvements to the Thomaston Police Department, improvements to local parks, water/sewer line replacement and milling and paving. Plans for the police department include the addition of an improved evidence room, an additional meeting room and additional offices. **Comiskey** stated David Albritton is doing preliminary plans for the expansion, which looks to extend the building into the parking lot. He noted the city hopes to have a final plan in place this winter and begin soliciting bids in the spring. This would hopefully allow for the project to be completed in the summer of 2015.

As for park improvements, there are several items on the list. The tennis courts at the Greatest Generation Memorial Park are slated to be given a make-over sometime next spring. According to **Comiskey**, the final bid packet has been put together and there are plans to begin bidding out the project in the spring when the weather is better. The city also has recently taken over the maintenance of the Park Street playground and Weaver Park. Some improvements have already taken place at Park Street with a new parking lot and work being done to the basketball courts. They have been painted and now have a fence around the perimeter to keep the basketball from rolling away anytime someone misses a shot. As for Weaver Park, **Comiskey** stated the first order of business is to replace the wall at the playground and do something with the building in

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the center of the park. However, currently it is undecided what the building will be used for and if the roof on the building will be repaired or if the building itself will be torn down.

Comiskey continued saying there are also plans to improve the tennis courts at Weaver Park and eventually work on adding some parking. “We want to do parking at some point, but replacing the water line on that street is part of the project. Unfortunately, by the time that comes up, there probably won’t be enough time to get the other (parking) in this year. So that will probably be a project for a future year.” The city is working on replacing the water and sewer lines around town, as the lines are very old and cause many problems. **Comiskey** noted one of the larger projects is upgrading the clarifier tanks at the Bell Creek Sewer Plant, which is roughly a \$600,000 project. “This will be a big improvement for our Bell Creek Sewer Plant,” said **Comiskey**. “The best way to help your sewer plant is by replacing your sewer lines. Also by replacing the water lines we are reducing the amount of water being lost through small leaks.” **Comiskey** continued saying by replacing the lines, the city is also increasing the capacity at both the water and sewer plants.

Finally, the city is also planning on doing over \$1 million in milling and paving this year, particularly in the Brookwood and Springdale neighborhoods. **Comiskey** stated the water and sewer lines have already been replaced in those neighborhoods and now is a good time to do the road work. “We try to let the new pipes sit a year so any issues will have already showed up,” said **Comiskey**. “Most of the settling should happen in the first year also. So hopefully (by waiting), when we mill and pave we won’t end up having little concave spots in five years.”

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

The Thomaston Times
August 27, 2014

**City taxes will remain the same
Council listens to residents, changes mind on 2 mill hike**
Author: Ashley Biles

Many citizens in the community have stated lately that they wonder if the powers that be in local government actually listen to any concerns they have; especially when it comes to the property tax millage rate. Well, at a called meeting last Thursday, the Thomaston City Council assured the community that they do listen; by voting 4-0 to keep the millage rate at 3.84 mills, the same as last year. Council member Gary Atwater was not present at the meeting. According to Tax Commissioner Berry Cook, with this change city residents should see an 0.47 mills decrease on their tax bill this year if the county commissioners set their millage rate as proposed at 18.76 mills. This would put the combined rate in the city for state, school, county, city and joint projects at 35.36 as compared to 35.83 last year.

Mayor Hays Arnold opened the meeting by informing the crowd that filled the basement of the Thomaston-Upson Archives that things would be done differently at the meeting, with public comments being held until after the business at hand was finished. He continued, stating he wanted to take this time to speak from his heart to the citizens. “We had the question arise, if we actually listened to what people had to say, and I responded yes, that we did,” said Arnold. “I don’t know if you are aware of how seriously we all take that, but we are very serious about our love for and our interest in this community, as are each of you.”

Arnold continued stating the city has done some “pretty phenomenal things” in past years when it came to dealing with the worst financial scenario the city has faced since the Great Depression. He noted by being fiscally conservative, the city has been able to build reserves even in trying times. He made a recommendation to the council that the rate be left as it has for the past 13 years. Arnold also noted he had discussed the outcome of not having an increase with City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** and stated he was assured by **Comiskey** that he would be able to manage the city’s finances within the parameters set by the council.

Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head told the crowd the reason the council was proposing an increase was to help fund the significant challenges the city faces when it comes to maintaining the infrastructure. However, he noted the reason the council was able to not raise the millage rate was thanks to the incredible leadership of Mayor Arnold, **Comiskey** and those who preceded the current council. The rest of the council agreed and Councilmember Don Greathouse added that he felt this was the right move for the city to make. “We do have several continuous issues before us now, but we have to make the right decision and I think this is the right decision for this time, this day and this age. We are going to work together for the citizens because that is what our job is,” said Greathouse.

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The crowd thanked the council for making the decision to not increase the millage rate and many stated they felt the right decision was made. “I think they did the right thing,” said Dennis Harris. “It is just the wrong time to be going up on taxes; people cannot afford it, especially those on fixed incomes. I think the pressure that people put on them (the city council) caused the change because I believe before it was a done deal.” “It just goes to show that good things can happen when citizens peacefully come together for a common goal,” added Tim Tucker.

Ritz Theatre owner Malcolm Neal stated he was especially thankful for the change, noting the tax increase would have put an even greater burden on the small business owners since it would be coupled with the utility rate increase that went into effect earlier this year. “This would have been a double whammy, which would have hurt everyone, especially the small business owners,” said Neal. “Most of us have only a small margin and an additional \$50 a month makes a big difference.” Neal went on to say he understood that citizens and businesses have moved out of town, therefore reducing the tax income, but noted that continuing to raise rates on those who are still here could cause them to have to leave as well. “I’m glad they could try to level things off at this point and not penalize those of us who are left. I’m glad they listened to the people and realized they can make it work,” said Neal.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
January 9, 2014

City approves budget amidst business outcry

Author: Ashley Biles

During a called meeting last Monday, the Thomaston City Council unanimously passed a budget for 2014 with a grand total of \$30,789,664 which includes \$5,885,900 for the general fund; \$5,215,050 for water; \$15,343,732 for electric and \$1,165,848 for sanitary, \$216,450 for Community Development; \$16,625 for law enforcement; \$151,400 for the Greatest Generation Memorial Park; \$2 million in SPLOST funds; \$70,000 for Hotel Motel tax; a \$500,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG); and a \$179,659 Local Maintenance Improvement Grant (LMIG) . However, prior to the vote, the council received an earful from a group of small business owners concerning the forthcoming 6.5 percent increase in utility rates and the possibility of a two mill increase on the millage rate later on this year during the public hearing held prior to the meeting. Several citizens spoke stating the increases would create a financial hardship on their businesses, something they are unsure they will be able to survive.

Susan Erwin, who along with her husband Mike owns Sanders Supply in Thomaston, told the council that during the summer her utility bill is around \$900 a month and for a business that is already struggling, they will not be able to endure an increase in costs in utilities. She noted the couple wanted to stay in Thomaston, but had begun to think of moving their business to a more active business community and will heavily consider doing so with the increase in the rates. Mike Erwin added that he felt the possibility of a tax increase was also a terrible idea. “This county has seen negative growth for two decades. There is not any construction going on. People are moving out of this area and people are out of jobs,” said Erwin. “People in businesses like ours, when we are faced with process going up and other things we also have to realize we have to cut some places. And maybe you have done that, I don’t know. But I can tell you with negative growth, no construction, and people losing jobs, with you raising taxes, there are other businesses like ours that won’t survive that. People will move out of this county, further lowering your tax base and if you think that’s a positive thing, if you think that is the answer to things, then you are sadly mistaken.”

Ritz Theatre owner Malcolm Neal also spoke to the council during the public hearing and stated that the bill for electricity and water at the theatre often exceeds what the business brings in due to less people coming to the movies. He noted that the city offers tax benefits to new businesses coming into town, but that the businesses that are already here need help to stay here as well. “I’m just saying a bit more support from the city to the small businesses will go a long way,” said Neal. “When it comes to the utility rates, somehow if you have got the money in other resources or other ways rather than hit the local businesses and everybody who lives here, who are already struggling to stay in town and survive; then another percentage increase can amount to a lot of money.” Debbie Lord stated she had spoken with many businesses throughout the downtown area and numerous citizens who all said they will not be able to take another rate increase especially since the city raised utility rates both last year and the year before. She noted

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many people will not be able to afford another hit and suggested the council use some of the money they have in the bank to offset the rising costs of electric and water rates. “You guys have \$13 million in the bank for your projects, you made \$700,000 off of the utilities last year; you don’t have to go up,” said Lord. “We’re not asking you to decrease anything, we are just saying leave it alone.” Thomaston Mayor Hays Arnold told those in attendance that he knew what it was like to have to scratch to make a payroll and to pay the bills, but there is never a good time to have an increase of any sort. “As bad as I think of having to raise taxes and things of that sort, we find ourselves in a situation where we have got to do what we have to do to keep this community, to keep this city on a steady course,” said Arnold. “You’re talking about at the maximum month having a \$54 (monthly increase) on your utility bill. Is that \$54 the difference between you being able to make it or not make it in Thomaston?”

However, when asked how many people file for an extension on their utility bill each month, City Clerk Dennis Truitt stated he could not give an exact number, but there are ‘a lot’ each month. Even when filing for an extension, those citizens are still charged the \$25 late fee for not paying the bill on time. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** stated the city is pulling in less profit margins on the utilities than they did in the 90s and the electric bill for the city (which buys its power from MEAG) is projected to go up \$600,000. He stated that is a cost that has to be passed on to the citizens because the city has tried to keep costs down and reduce their margins, but it is no longer possible to do. He continued saying the city has cut their staff by one third since the closing of the mills in order to keep cost down and they have been taking money out of the bank to pay for things. However, he noted there are several projects that need to be done such as sewer line replacements and milling and paving of the roads once the lines are replaced. **Comiskey** stated the council is trying to do what they can to be good stewards for the community. After that comment, Lord asked if the city really felt they were being good stewards by adding a \$37,000 animal shelter to the bottom line when there is already a shelter in Upson County. To which **Comiskey** stated there is an agreement between the city and the county that a special tax district is supposed to be set up so no city businesses or residents will be taxed by the county when it comes to paying for the animal shelter. He continued saying having a shelter for the city will help to better manage the animals at the front end and they need to have a place to put an animal if it is picked up after the county shelter is closed. The city also already has their own Animal Control Officer.

Councilwoman Patsy Perdue noted she appreciated hearing everyone’s comments and stated she is also very concerned. She continued noting she did not want anyone to think the council was saying they were going to do something and they don’t really care how it affects anyone because that is not the truth. However, she stated while she respected the citizens opinion, she also asked they respect those of the city council. “I guess we just have a different way of looking at the way finances should be done,” said Perdue. “I wish there was a real easy answer, but they way we do our finances, I understand it, I agree with it. I wish during our work sessions we had folks come. We’ve had work sessions (on the budget); four of them and nobody came. I wish people had come and been able to hear the reasoning behind what’s happening.” After the public hearing, the council unanimously approved the 2014 budget with the aforementioned increases.

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The Thomaston Times
July 16, 2013

Thomaston Council approves bond issue
Low rate on \$8.2 million bond refinance will save city \$1.3 million over 14 years
Author: Larry Stanford

By a 4-0 vote at a special called meeting Tuesday evening, the Thomaston City Council approved a bond ordinance authorizing the issuance of \$8.2 million City of Thomaston combined utilities revenue bonds. The bonds are being sold to refinance the city's earlier bond issue done in 2002 and will save the city approximately \$1.3 million over the 14-year life of the bonds. Earlier this year, the council had authorized City Attorney Joel Bentley and City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** to look into refinancing both the 2002 bonds and several GEFA loans the city has. It was estimated at that time that refinancing both the bonds and the loans would save the city approximately \$1.2 million over the life of the bonds. But Bentley said they found it was not feasible to include the GEFA loans in the new bond issue, so the bond issuance will actually be for less than they had initially thought, and actually save the city more than they had estimated.

The city had also initially indicated the bonds would be sold on the public market, but Brian Ubell, a representative of Robert W. Baird & Company, an investment firm in the Atlanta the city chose to use, said they found they could get a better deal selling the bonds to a bank. "The past month has been a very interesting one in the fixed income markets," said Ubell. "As we were getting ready to embark on a public sale, the feds made their comments on potentially tapering the purchase of securities in the open market. As a result, you saw treasury rates spike and in the Muni Market (Municipal Bond Market) you saw rates increase very quickly as well. That's in addition to a move from May to June to significantly higher rates then as well.

"Given that movement, we contacted several banks to &what kind of rate could be achieved in the public market. Capital One provided a rate of 2.5 percent. Three other banks I talked to were higher than that. Capital One agreed to hold their rate, again as the Treasury's rates moved higher. So we recommended going forward with that proposal. We were able to lock in that rate that day. A public sale would take four to five weeks from today. So you eliminate a month of interest rate risks in an environment where rates are moving higher very quickly. "If we were to do this as a public sale in today's market, the cost of funds would be about 2.95 percent," added Ubell. "The savings on the refinancing of the debt over 14 years would be just over \$900, 000, or about \$64, 000 a year. At the 2.5 percent rate (from Capital One), the gross savings over 14 years is \$1.285 million, or about \$90, 000 a year. So there is about a \$350, 000 advantage to the private placement deal as it is structured, and \$25, 000 a year through 2027. "I think we are in an instance where the public markets moved very quickly, and the bank markets did not move quite as quickly and we were able to secure a rate and keep that rate."

Mayor Hays Arnold noted that in 2002, the city had to purchase insurance to buy the rate down, and that it did not have to do that this time, which saved the city another \$137, 000. Ubell agreed, stating that if the bonds had been sold publicly, they might have had to purchase

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insurance, but because the bonds were sold to a bank, no insurance was needed. Bentley added that the timing of the sale of the bonds necessitated the need for the called meeting. "So that we could close this transaction out before the rate lock expired necessitated that we have this meeting this evening," said Bentley. "Otherwise, we would have done this in a normal period of time. This is scheduled to close out August 5, which is a significantly shorter period of time than we had anticipated, because of Brian's hard work and **Patrick's** hard work."

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The Thomaston Times
January 27, 2012

Verdict is ‘guilty’ for Richard Harville

Author: Sheila A. Marshall

Thomaston businessman Richard Harville was on Thursday morning convicted of a single count of theft by receiving. The trial before Judge W. Fletcher Sams began Monday morning in Upson County Superior Court, and the jury began deliberating Wednesday afternoon. The verdict was reached Thursday morning following less than five hours of deliberations. Testimony in Harville’s trial, in which he was charged with a single count of felony theft of services, included details of the business transactions that prosecutors alleged resulted in the City of Thomaston failing to receive payment of approximately \$473,000.

Prior to sentencing, Griffin Judicial Circuit Assistant District Attorney Heath English said, “I think the truth came out and we’re very satisfied that the city and citizens of Upson County will have an opportunity to not only receive the money that’s owed to them, but also let any who conducts business in Upson County or in the Griffin Judicial Circuit know if they have any intention to commit fraud or theft, they should beware because our citizens aren’t going to allow it and you’ll be held accountable.”

Before he announced Harville’s sentence, Judge Sams addressed the defendant, stating that there is currently a serious push for prison reform that includes increasing probationary sentencing for non-violent offenders. Sams also cited the fact that Harville has no prior criminal history, and also thanked him for his service to the country, which included the awarding of two Bronze Stars earned during the Tet Offensive in Vietnam. However, he then said despite these facts, the case against Harville also involved aggravating factors.

“Petty theft is one thing, but anything over \$500 is a felony,” Sams said in reference to the almost half million dollars in losses the City of Thomaston incurred. “The most aggravating thing about this case is that the victim is a governmental entity, so that means the true victims are the taxpaying citizens.” Sams then announced that he was sentencing allowable under the law – ten years – with four of those to be served in prison, followed by six years probation. Harville must also make full restitution to the City of Thomaston.

The case revolved around what authorities say was a “gentleman’s agreement” between Harville, owner of such corporations as the now defunct Agricycle and Zurich Industrial, and Thomaston City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** and Mayor Hayes Arnold. In direct testimony, Harville acknowledged he reached an agreement with city officials, which would allow him to distribute in the Thomaston sewer system leachates, collected from the Taylor County landfill. Under that contract, Zurich Industrial was to pay Thomaston 4.5 cents for each gallon subsequently distributed for treatment at the city waste water treatment facility, which was run by Southwest Water at the time. Zurich had a separate contract with the owners of the landfill in Taylor County

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in which Zurich was paid 10 cents for each gallon it transported. While Harville did not dispute that the city is owed almost a half-million dollars, he categorically denied any criminal intent in the matter. Rather, he alleged it was changes in the process in which manifests were turned over to City of Thomaston representatives that resulted in the payment shortage. In cross examination by defense attorney Hale Almand, **Comiskey** acknowledged the city received a “substantial” amount of money as a result of this business agreement, while admitting he was not fully involved in the ensuing process. “From what I recall, Mr. Harville and (Southwest Water plant manager) Mr. Palmer were to discuss those issues,” he said. “To the best I recall, Mr. Palmer was responsible for providing the City of Thomaston with manifests.”

According to testimony from defense witness John Freed, Harville’s son-in-law, who was Zurich Industrial’s general manager from May 2008 to August 2009, manifest coordination was an ongoing problem. Due to changes at Southwest Water, Freed said Zurich drivers no longer had a specific location to leave manifests when leachates were distributed at the city’s wastewater facility. Therefore, rather than drivers leaving individual manifests at the time delivery was made, they would collect manifests in their trucks for approximately one week at a time prior to turning them in at the Zurich office in Taylor County. “Sometimes all the manifests didn’t make it into the office. It was fairly common that there would be a few loose manifests in the trucks,” Freed said, adding that he had no specific date for delivering manifests, identifying the criteria as “how big the stack was.”

Harville also alleged that mismanagement at Southwest Water, specifically on the part of Palmer and what Hale referred to as a slip-shod procedure, was responsible for the billing errors that resulted in the city of Thomaston’s payment losses. When specifically asked to address allegations regarding Palmer’s job performance that could have contributed to the errors, **Comiskey** said, “He was a Southwest Water employee; I never saw the file.” However, the City Manager later acknowledged that Palmer was relieved from his job following his own reports to Southwest Water officials. “My communication with Southwest Water was that I had concerns about his performance,” **Comiskey** said.

Despite this, prosecutor English built the state’s case upon an investigation into not only Zurich Industrial’s business records, but also those of Agricycle, which Harville concedes received almost \$400,000 from Zurich. However, the state’s contention was that Harville deliberately misled Thomaston officials with regard to the amount of leachates being disposed of locally and then used those funds to prop up the failing Agricycle in an attempt to sell the company for a profit.

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The Thomaston Times
January 6, 2012

Council passes budget for 2012

Author: Larry Stanford

By a vote of 3-0, the Thomaston City Council approved the 2012 budget at a called meeting at noon on Friday, January 30, 2011. The budget total is \$32, 500, 023. Council member Patsy Perdue was out of town and Council member Gary Atwater could not get off from work for the meeting. Present were Council members Wallace Rhodes, Jim Richards, Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head, and Mayor Hays Arnold.

Mayor Arnold noted that because of the way the city operates with several different funds coming out of the budget, it may look like the budget is bigger than it actually is. "We have funds that are operated out of the budget, not necessarily just water and sewer, electric, streets, and so forth," Arnold said. "We break down every single thing we do, and they all show up in the budget. They could be grants that amount to millions of dollars. It makes the budget appear to be quite inflated when it is not. "In actuality, we're looking at a budget that has the same spending level we have five or six years ago. It is a pretty substantial reduction. And I would say that unless things make some form of a dramatic turn, of which I am certainly not aware, then I don't necessarily see things getting a lot better a lot faster." City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** added that the city is operating on the same amount of revenue it was receiving eight years ago.

"The summaries of our general property tax and general taxes -we are proposing just under \$3.2 million for 2012," **Comiskey** said. "In 2004 we had just over \$3.2 million. So we are basically operating on revenue that we had in 2004. That's the main bread and butter revenue for our general fund." Mayor Arnold thanked the city employees for doing their best to meet the budget last year. "We know that our department heads and our employees, each and every one of them, have been called upon to do more, and they've done it, stepped right up and done it," said the Mayor. "I'm very proud of the city employees for what they have done this past year and the leadership they have been given." The city held five public hearings on the budget, receiving relatively little comment on it, even though electric, water and sewer, and garbage rates will be increasing. Council member Wallace Rhodes stated the lack of comment on the budget indicates the citizens' satisfaction with what the city has done. "I think this is a vote of confidence for the city," said Rhodes. Council member Jim Richards made a motion to approve the budget. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head seconded the motion, and it was approved, 3-0.

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The Thomaston Times
October 14, 2011

Thomaston Council approves \$1.5M for roads and sidewalks
Author: Larry Stanford

With the approval of the first budget revision of the year, the Thomaston City Council allocated funding for needed road and sidewalk work. The action came at their October 4 meeting. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** requested approval of the budget revision. "We're looking to do approximately \$1.5 million in paving and sidewalk replacement," **Comiskey** said. "It also accounts for the Highway 19 widening project. We're looking to have to move our electric utilities, and we've allocated \$150, 000 toward that project." **Comiskey** said after the meeting that \$739, 000 will come from reserves, \$500, 000 from the capital replacement account, and \$187, 000 from the city's contingency fund.

Mayor Hays Arnold translated the cost of the work to how much street and sidewalk paving will be done. "To put that into reality for some folks, that's about five miles or so of streets that we're looking to resurface in Thomaston, and about three miles of sidewalks," said the Mayor. "I want to commend Mr. **Comiskey** again for the financial management that he has given us during his tenure," Mayor Arnold added. "The fact that there has been very strong financial management in this community is the reason that we are to do things we are able to do right now, and I appreciate that." With no further discussion, Council member Patsy Perdue made a motion to approve the budget revision. Council member Wallace Rhodes seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

In other business, the Council approved a change in policy related to paying off loans. **Comiskey** said they had originally talked about paying off the city's GEFA loans in order to receive federal stimulus money, but he said based on what the bond markets are doing, it may be better to hold onto the money at the moment. "What I'm recommending tonight is to keep those loans, and when our 2002 bond issue comes up next year with an option where we can buy down some of those bonds, we'll take these loan balances, which are \$2.3 million paid at 3 percent interest and we'll buy down some bonds that we would be paying 4.6 percent interest on," said **Comiskey**.

Mayor Arnold added that this has been an ongoing area of study for the city. "We feel that the bond markets being where they are at this given point in time, that this offers the greatest opportunity we'll have to make a significant difference in finance costs to our citizens," said Arnold. "We do have step up provisions in the older bond issue that enables the interest rate to kick up from time to time, after so many years. That is what we're facing at this point, and this will head that off and we should be about to get substantially better rates." Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head made a motion to approve the change in policy. Council member Gary Atwater seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0.

The council also approved an amendment to the zoning ordinance which will allow the use of and restrict Halfway Houses to M-1 Industrial Districts. The Thomaston Zoning Commission

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voted last month to recommend amendment of the zoning ordinance. Council member Gary Atwater made a motion to approve the amendment. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Head seconded the motion and it was approved, 4-0. Head motion, Atwater second, 4-0. City Clerk Dennis Truitt advised the Council that in accordance with the city's electric ordinance, the winter residential electric rates have been installed in the utility billing system, effective October 1. The winter rates will be effective October through May. Truitt added that also effective on October 1, the summer maximum sewer usage amount for residents has been removed. The summer maximum usage of 20, 000 gallons per month for billing sewer charges is effective April through September.

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The Thomaston Times
April 26, 2011

City Manager Patrick Comiskey praised for service to city

Author: Larry Stanford

Nine years ago **Patrick Comiskey** moved to Thomaston and became its City Manager. At the Thomaston City Council meeting last week, Mayor Hays Arnold noted that anniversary. "I believe it was April nine years ago that Pat **Comiskey** came to Thomaston. The contribution that he has made to this community is incalculable," Mayor Arnold said. "I've had the privilege of working with him the entire time, as have several of you. He has been a Godsend for this community. "Again, some of you were here, and some of you were not here to understand and realize the situation that we faced 10 years ago. Pat has made it possible for us to not only survive, in my opinion, these times, but we have looked at a betterment of our bond rating, we have looked at a betterment in our financial condition in so much as it pertains to our reserve situation, we have witnessed and seen a betterment overall in the city's financial situation. "There are some things that neither Pat, nor any individual member of this council, nor I can have responsibility over or for -the loss of several thousand jobs in this community being one of those items. But to be able to take a situation that was as dire as it was and turn it into what it was turned into, in the face of all odds being against you, then I want to thank Pat right now." The Council and audience gave **Comiskey** a standing ovation.

In other business, the Council approved a tree removal bid for 42 trees in the Silvertown area. **Comiskey** advised the Council that Southtel was the low bidder with a lump sum proposal of \$20, 200, and recommended the city enter an agreement with Southtel. Council member Patsy Perdue stated she noticed some trees have had their tops removed, but were left standing. She asked if that was standing procedure. **Comiskey** replied that they will probably come back and finish taking the trees down, but he added that the city has a company that trims trees around electric lines that are also out cutting right now.

Council member Gary Atwater made a motion to accept South-Tel's bid. Council member Wallace Rhodes seconded the motion, and it was approved, 5-0. The Council also approved timber bids for parcels at Hannah's Mill Reservoir and Southview Cemetery. "We had Mr. Fred Whitaker help us to come up with some estimated tonnage figures and solicit some proposals," said **Comiskey**. "We have a total of seven proposals, and the high proposal was Resource Improvements Company for \$57, 616. That is an approximate figure, depending on the tonnage that is actually garnered once all the trees are removed. Mr. Whitaker has identified the trees that are being removed." (Editor's note: Unlike the first bid, in which the city is paying to have trees removed, the second bid is for companies wanting to come in and pay the city to harvest trees. The highest bidder will pay the city to remove the trees.) Council member Ed Bell made a motion for the City Manager to enter into a contract with Resource Improvements Company for the sale of timber at the estimated tonnage amount. Council member Atwater seconded the motion.

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Council member Rhodes questioned whether the Hannah's Mill Reservoir property includes the tract of land the city purchased from the Hightower estate. **Comiskey** said there are some trees on that property, and that the trees have been marked for selective harvest. Rhodes also asked if the harvesting at Southview Cemetery will be a clear cutting in some areas, or just removal of certain trees. **Comiskey** said it will just be the removal of the mature timber in the area, but will not be clear cut like the city did several years ago. He said it will more of a thinning process. Rhodes asked if part of the area behind the Veterans Club is included. **Comiskey** said the creek behind the club is the property line, and selected trees on the city's property up to the creek will be removed. With no further questions, the vote was called and was 5-0 in favor.

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The Thomaston Times
March 18, 2011

City Manager states why Thomaston chose not to participate

Editor's note: We asked Thomaston City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** to explain the city's reason for not wanting to participate in the Community of Opportunity program. He gave us the following press release on Tuesday. The City of Thomaston decided not to participate in the Community of Opportunity program for several reasons. Some of these reasons are presented in this article. These reasons have all been presented to the county government privately. We respond now, only because the county commission has made this a public issue and tried to give the public the false impression that the city is not cooperating in their effort to obtain grant money. First, citizens have been led to believe that this is a requirement to obtain a CDBG grant. It is not. It is merely an item added to give points toward an application. Citizens have also been led to believe that a community cannot obtain a CDBG grant in two consecutive years unless the community is a Community of Opportunity participant.

Thomaston is disproof of that statement. Thomaston received a \$500, 000 CDBG grant in 2009 and was awarded another \$500, 000 grant in 2010. Both grants are water or sewer infrastructure replacement or improvement projects. In fact, the City of Thomaston has been awarded more than \$4.3 million in grants in the past two years alone. Second, the county's objective for participating was to obtain a grant for Lincoln Park. We asked the county manager and chairman last September if they submitted a grant application in 2010 for Lincoln Park. The answer was no. Our recommendation was to submit an application and focus their time on the CDBG application and not on the Community of Opportunity Program.

Third, the city council prepared and approved a resolution supporting the county's effort to participate in the program as they requested. The council noted its own position of choosing not to participate itself in the program. The city does not have a need to participate in the program and is not interested in committing itself to a two year contract with a state agency. Fourth, this is not the first program created by a state government agency that the state agency has promoted and recruited participation. We need to first examine what programs we have already participated in before getting involved in a new program. A good example of a recent program was the entrepreneur friendly community program. We asked the chairman and manager to ask for input from the organizers and committee participants of that program for feedback. All such Atlanta-based programs have a list of requirements to complete, monthly reports to submit, and numerous committee meetings tying up local people and key staff. And finally, we recently expended tens of thousands of dollars on a comprehensive plan document, required by the state government; that involved numerous meetings and numerous hours of key staff over a two year period, with the result being a large binder full of plans, objectives and other support documents. We recommended to the county that we just follow the plan that we have and update it as needed.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
December 18, 2009

Council discusses budget revision at meeting

Author: Ashley Biles

The Mayor and City Council held their last meeting of the year this past Tuesday night. Among the items discussed was the approval of budget revision number four. The 2010 city budget will not include a tax increase, but City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** is suggesting an increase in water, sewage and electric rates. The proposed increases will be .30 cents per 1,000 gallons in water and .16 cents per 1,000 in sewage, which will bring in just over \$200,000 in revenue for the city.

Comiskey said that in the first quarter of 2009 industrial water use was down 55 percent from the previous year. He attributed the decrease to the closing of plants such as Yamaha and Royal Cord, and the fact industrial users are not using as much water as they once did. The increase in electric rate would be 2.5 percent for residential customers and 1.5 percent for commercial customers and will yield around \$160,000 in revenue for the city. **Comiskey** stated that MEAG, the main electrical supplier for the city, is raising its wholesale rates four percent over what it was this past year. However, even with the increase, the city's rates will still be among the lowest in Georgia.

In other business, the council voted to approve the renewal of the Cemetery Maintenance Agreement between the city of Thomaston and Ellington's Lawn Care. The agreement is for two years and will pay \$26.50 a month. The contract with Veolia Environmental Services will keep the price the same for the next three years. It also includes the addition of a recycling station next to the Gilmore Center for recycling of items such as newspapers and glass, at no extra cost. Council also approved the payment of the GEFA loan of \$1,020,000 and loan closing cost of \$68,000. The money from this loan has gone to pay for the city's sewer line project. Paying off the loan early has allowed the city to keep from raising water rates as high as GEFA would have imposed if it had not been paid off by the end of the year. **Comiskey** said that the loan should be paid off by the end of the week.

A uniform service agreement with Cintas, was also approved Tuesday night. The company had the lowest proposal cost of \$178.25 for a weekly rate. The city will be saving around \$4,000 with the new agreement, moving from \$14,400 to just under \$10,000 in total yearly cost for the services. The agreement also offered higher grade uniforms for the electric department. City Council member Wallace Rhodes commended **Comiskey** on his hard work on this contract as well as others. "He has done a great job on everything," said Rhodes. The city will have four budget hearings over the next two weeks. The first two will be on Monday, Dec. 21 at 12 p.m. and 6 p.m. The next two will be on Dec. 30 at 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. All hearings will be held in the City-County meeting room at the Government Complex.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
September 8, 2009

Thomaston prepared for economic crunch

Author: Ashley Biles

The current economic times are tough on everyone and the city of Thomaston is no exception. However, the city has been proactively taking steps to reduce their amount of cost since 2002. "Since Thomaston Mills and Martha Mills closed, we have been taking steps to reduce the size of city government, by working with fewer people and equipment," said City Manager **Patrick Comiskey**. In 2002 the city payroll was \$4, 076, 209 and by 2008 had been reduced to \$3, 619, 652, which equals out to be an 11.2 percent reduction. Every department in the city has been made smaller at some point, according to **Comiskey**.

One change the city has made in the budget was to reduce the cost of health insurance for employees. In 2002, insurance cost the city \$476, 792.75 and by 2008 it cost \$456, 919.63. However, the amount of coverage for city employees has increased since they are now working with a smaller staff. In order to help reduce its cost further, the city has lowered the amount of city vehicles used. "We were using over 100 vehicles and had cut it back to as low as 83. I think we have added a few since then, but we should still be under 90," said **Comiskey**.

In 2003, the city was able to cut back on the amount of mega watts it owned in the MEAG Power plant. Originally, Thomaston would have owned 7.4 mega watts, but that was cut in half to 3.4 mega watts, which saves roughly \$400, 00 a year in fixed cost. "With industries falling off times are tough and unfortunately we have had to constantly make cuts and figure out how to do things more efficiently and effectively. We have had to make the government smaller because the community has become smaller due to the loss of the mills," stated **Comiskey**.

Since the city has been reducing costs gradually, it has been able to create a couple of reserve accounts which can be drawn upon if the city is in dire need, such as if a tornado hits. "We try to make long range plans when making decisions," said **Comiskey**. "Right after the mills closed we started trying to figure out how to make changes. Everyone has been asked to take on more responsibility and everyone has stepped up and gotten the job done."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches
PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

The Macon Telegraph
September 7, 2008

For now, water grants for cities are gone

Author: S. Heather Duncan

In a year when Georgia has been weathering a historic drought and state legislators touted their new emphasis on water planning, a new program to expand local water supplies has evaporated in the state budget crunch. In March, the Legislature approved \$40 million for grants to local governments that wanted to build new reservoirs or expand existing ones, drill new wells, or create new connections between water systems. Gov. Sonny Perdue has announced that he is eliminating that funding as part of across-the-board cutbacks to offset a shortfall between the state budget and incoming revenue.

Virtually every state program is feeling the pressure, but few of them had received more political attention and fanfare this year than the need for water planning and increased water supply. The grant program was being administered by the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority. In Middle Georgia, the city of Thomaston had applied for a grant to replace an old pump station that would help fill the city's new reservoir. Thomaston was one of the few cities in Middle Georgia that banned all outdoor watering for a while last year because of concerns that its water supply was dipping too low.

Thomaston has purchased the reservoir formerly used by the now-closed Thomaston Mills. The city is deepening the reservoir and building a higher dam that will enable it to hold more water, City Manager Pat **Comiskey** said. This would increase by 50 percent the amount of water available to the city with its existing Hannah's Mill Reservoir, he said. The \$6.6 million project was funded mostly by the city, but Thomaston was seeking a grant of about \$1.5 million from the state. Without the grant, the city will likely rely on an existing, old pump station to fill the new lake from a nearby stream, **Comiskey** said. This will probably take longer but can suffice as long as the pump holds up, he said. "We in Thomaston planned for our own needs," he said. "When the grant funding came up, we saw it as a great opportunity. ... But we certainly understand the economic situation."

Thomaston was one of 13 local governments that had applied for loans, and about 20 other applications were expected by the state when the grant program was suspended a few weeks ago, said GEFA spokesman Shane Hix. Local governments are being encouraged to seek state loans instead through a several other environmental authority programs that remain intact. Legislation creating the new grant program was co-sponsored by House Speaker Glenn Richardson, R-Hiram. His spokesman, Marshall Guest, said it's reasonable to cut new spending during a shortfall. He said Richardson is waiting to see the big picture when he looks at the entire midyear budget before deciding what course to pursue. "We hope the money will eventually be forthcoming," said Amy Henderson, public information manager for the Georgia Municipal Association. "The water crisis isn't going to go away."

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Perdue press secretary Bert Brantley said the governor hopes to revive the popular grant program when revenues increase again. "But as you're looking to fill a \$1.6 billion hole, all options have to be on the table," he said. "Since there are still significant funds out there for local governments to tap into, we can save that money for other needs."

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times (GA)
August 8, 2008

City Council close to millage rollback

Author: Lee Coleman

The year was 2001. That was the last time the Thomaston Mayor and City Council raised the millage rate on citizens. Tuesday night, the "roll back" streak continued when the Mayor and City Council unanimously approved a letter to be sent to County Tax Commissioner Berry Cook committing the city to a rollback of last year's millage rate of 3.68. The approved roll back will create a new millage rate of 3.62 mils, a 1.7 percent drop from last year.

"Because of the timeline, Mr. Berry Cook wanted us to give him a letter committing to the rollback," explained City Manager Pat **Comiskey**. "What I'm asking council to do is approve the letter for the county tax commissioner to go ahead and put the city down for a rollback in 2008. "We can't officially approve the rollback until the next city council meeting." Councilman Wallace Rhodes was quick to make a motion to approve the letter, saying, "Mr. Mayor, the tax millage rollback is always good news so I'll be glad to make a motion to accept the rollback as proposed."

In further discussion, Councilman Ed Bell echoed the sentiments of Rhodes. " Mr. Mayor, I think its important to note that this is the fifth or sixth consecutive year we've had a rollback in our millage rate," he said. "That's attributed to the management of our city. I know the people appreciate that." Mayor Arnold, seizing the moment, thanked **Comiskey** for his efforts that in large part, amounted to the rollback. "I would like to thank **Mr. Comiskey**. The management style that we have appreciated with [**Patrick**] has been one of reviews of our budget on a regular basis," Arnold said. "He does not manage loosely and he does not manage occasionally. It is a constant management and I think this is one more testimony to the fact he does an outstanding job for the city and the citizens here. "We appreciate that Pat."

Although the economy locally has had a major impact on the collective community's pocketbook, Arnold said the rollback was a direct result of a cooperative effort. "I think its a testimony to great management," he noted. "I would applaud the city council for their cooperation and their support that they give management. "It has taken a team of pro's to do these things. This is the fifth or sixth year we've done this and I'm very, very pleased. "We owe every obligation to the citizens to examine both sides of the equation. That includes expenditures as well as trying to raise new revenues. "We have a strong belief we should approach the expenditure side of the equation and not rely totally on finding ways to increase additional revenue for the taxpayers."

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
August 3, 2005

City plans to lower taxes
Council seeks two percent decrease in property taxes
Author: Sarah Morgan

Thomaston residents can expect their property taxes to decrease, thanks to a proposal made at Tuesday night's meeting. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** recommended a two percent decrease in the property tax millage rate to 3.83 mills. The millage rate last year was 3.92.

"I just want to thank our city manager for doing a diligent job, allowing us to make this proposal," said Thomaston Mayor Hays Arnold. "He does a great job going over the budget and seeking out expense items. "It's refreshing to know that he looks at both columns and finds ways to make it balance out," said Arnold.

Council Member Ed Bell said that he is pleased that the city has been able to lower the rates two years in a row. "This shows the diligent effort made by the city to address the needs of our community," said Bell. "Each year, we are improving and that is a good thing." A public hearing will be held August 25 at noon to discuss the lowering of the millage rate. One mill is one-tenth of one percent of assessed property value.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
April 16, 2004

No Discrimination
With new job in sight, Lang to drop complaint
Author: Billy Vaughn

Thomaston Police Chief Frank Lang said this morning he is dropping a complaint he filed last October with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and admitted he now believes he was not discriminated against by the city manager as he alleged earlier. Lang, who has accepted a job as police chief in Moultrie, resigned at the end of the business day April 8, informing City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** his last day will be April 21. **Comiskey** said Thursday the city could begin advertising for a new police chief as soon as Monday.

The chief said he loves Thomaston and does not want to leave, but that friction between him and his superiors at City Hall made the decision inevitable. When asked about his EEOC complaint, the chief was reluctant to discuss details, but said, "I think I can say that it's over." "Actually (resigning) wasn't something that I wanted to do. I have come to a point of just loving Thomaston. It's one of the greatest small towns you could ever go to, visit or live in. In my mind, this is home. Certainly it is not something I was looking forward to doing, but in the end, I figured it would be best." "More than anything else, it was a career opportunity. I'm sure that the friction probably had something to do with it also. In life, everybody's not going to agree so therefore there will probably be friction wherever I go. The important thing is how we deal with it."

Asked directly if he was racially discriminated against by **Comiskey**, the chief admitted he "rushed to judgement" when filing the legal action. "There are often times that as managers, we're going to feel that a decision that could have an effect on a career, we might rush to judgement. Certainly at the time that I filed the complaint, it was my opinion that I was not being treated fairly. I now respect the city manager's decision to give me the letter of reprimand. It was his choice and I respect that."

Lang came to Thomaston to serve as assistant police chief in March 2000 and was promoted to chief 13 months later. **Comiskey** said the process for finding a replacement is moving forward. "We're in the process of preparing the advertisement and should have it ready within the next few days," the city manager said. **Comiskey** would not say how much the new police chief will be paid and said he and Mayor Hays Arnold are working to nail down a figure. "There will be a lot of factors that will have to be considered such as education and experience," **Comiskey** said. "We're hoping the job generates some interest and we'll say more about pay later when we decide that issue."

The city also has an opening for a police officer, utility lineman, firefighter and director of the city's Main Street director. About 15 people applied for the firefighter job before the application period closed last week. Applications for that job are being reviewed by Fire Chief Eddie Lifsey,

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who over the next several days will put applicants through what is being called the "Combat Challenge." "It involves climbing and endurance tests," **Comiskey** said. "There is a lot involved, but I do know they will have to load and unload a hose and drag weight from one point to another." Lifsey was reportedly taking a vacation day yesterday, but was said to have spent much of the day in the South Green Street area painting fire hydrants.

For police officer, applications are being accepted until April 22 and as of yesterday afternoon, 22 people have applied for the job. The job pays \$11.78 an hour for a certified police officer and \$10.20 for someone who has not yet been to the police academy. Only six people so far have applied for the lineman's job, which offers a starting pay of \$17 an hour, but city officials say they will be accepting applications until June 17 for that job. Those interested in the Main Street director's job have until May 6 to have their applications turned in to the City Manager's office.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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The Thomaston Times
February 9, 2004

City workers get pay raise; property owners won't see hike in taxes

Author: Billy Vaughn

Thomaston City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** last week unveiled a \$19.8 million budget for 2004 that not only calls for no tax increases, but includes new cars for the police department, a new building for the water and sewer department and a pay raise for city workers. **Comiskey** sat down with city council members in a 5:30 p.m. Feb. 5 work session to present his budget proposal - and won praise from Mayor Hays Arnold and council members for a job well done.

"The proposed budget for 2004 suggests no increase for property tax rates," **Comiskey** wrote in an executive summary. "The recommended budget allows for each city worker to receive a \$416 pay raise as calculated on a yearly basis. "The proposed budget does not identify an increase in garbage fees, electric rates or sewer rates. The only fee increase recommended is a modest 6-cent increase" per 1000 gallons of water.

According to the summary, the city experienced a drop in General Fund tax revenues again this year - a decrease of about \$250,000. "The City Council took aggressive steps in the second half of 2002 and in the year 2003 to reduce personnel costs," **Comiskey** wrote in his summary. "The council's aggressive action to cut costs reduced the personnel costs by more than \$500,000. The cost disparity would have risen to \$1 million had no action been taken."

Actual budget numbers have yet to be released as council members say the document is still in draft form. Council members say they will review the city manager's proposal, possibly suggest and approve amendments, and hold public hearings before the final document is approved.

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Thomaston Times
January 2, 2004

Officer says firing unfair

Author: Billy Vaughn

A white Thomaston police officer fired from his job last summer after flushing marijuana down a toilet at the police station claims in a U.S. District court lawsuit that African-American officers who committed "similar or more grievous conduct" remained on the job. Benjamin Thiel, who was employed at the local department from April 4, 2002 until July 16, 2003, is demanding his job back along with legal fees, back pay and punitive damages. Thiel filed a discrimination complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission nine days after being fired. The EEOC issued a "Right to Sue" letter shortly thereafter and on Nov. 25, Thiel filed suit in U.S. District Court. The city has yet to respond formally to Thiel's lawsuit and a trial date has yet to be set.

Thiel's firing centers around events of May 11 in what started out as a "routine traffic stop." According to the lawsuit, Thiel was dispatched to a call "in reference to people possibly throwing objects from a van." Thiel spotted and stopped the van, which contained six white males. Thiel "called patrolman Charlie Canady to provide backup support for the stop and subsequently obtained permission to search the suspects' van from the driver of the vehicle. The search yielded a small quantity of a leafy green substance, suspected to be marijuana. "Unable to determine who was in actual possession of the suspected contraband," Thiel "exercised his discretion and released the subjects with a verbal warning." Thiel "retained the suspected contraband and returned to the police station to seek guidance on the matter from his supervisor, Sgt. Paul Walker. According to the suit, Sgt. Walker instructed Thiel "to make his own decision regarding the handling of the evidence."

Thiel said he was told by Sgt. Walker that "small amounts of contraband seized in cases where no charges are brought should be destroyed" and claims he was "unaware of any published departmental policy regarding the handling of such evidence." With Officer Canady serving as a witness and with Walker just outside of the bathroom door, Thiel flushed the suspected marijuana. The matter was brought to the attention of Thomaston Police Chief Frank Lang who prompted the department's Office of Professional Standards (Internal Affairs) to begin an investigation into the incident. "The investigation resulted in the issuance of a termination notice ... citing departmental violations for neglect of duty, submission of reports, handling money and property, processing property and evidence and willful violation of departmental procedures and directives regarding the incident of May 11."

Thiel appealed the decision to City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** who, on July 3, upheld Lang's decision. In his lawsuit, Thiel claims that "prior to the appeal hearing ... Lang hired an African-American female" and assigned her Thiel's badge number. Furthermore, Thiel claims Chief Lang contacted the Georgia Peace Officers Standards and Training Council "seeking to have (Thiel's) ... peace officer certification revoked," which he claims was unfair retaliation.

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In his lawsuit, Thiel claims the following:

-Thiel, "through the course of multiple investigations into his alleged transgressions, was able to discover evidence where similar or more grievous conduct committed by African-American employees ... were not subjected to the same treatment."

-Sgt. Walker was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on the day Thiel was fired "in spite of the fact that Walker signed the incident report ... documenting the events of May 11 regarding the alleged policy violations with the evidence seized from the van."

-"Another employee ... Chester Sledge, an African-American male corporal ... received oral and written discipline for actions similar to the actions" resulting in Thiel's termination, "but the discipline administered to Sledge was different."

-"Another employee, Ricky Acey, an African-American male and lieutenant with the Thomaston Police Department received oral and written discipline for his actions comparable to plaintiff's actions, but Acey's treatment by defendants was different."

The lawsuit also points out Acey was fired Aug. 11, 2000 for "falsification of time records," but hired back in June 2001 and promoted to a higher rank. "Defendants have treated other African-American police officers more favorably in terms of discipline and other terms and conditions of employment."

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

The Thomaston Times
December 29, 2003

**City responds to Lang's EEOC filing
Says 'no' to chief's claim of racial discrimination**

Author: Billy Vaughn

The city's official response to Thomaston Police Chief Frank Lang's discrimination complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission not only denies discrimination existed, but paints a picture of a poorly-managed police department riddled with problems. Lang filed an EEOC complaint Oct. 17 alleging City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** had been racially harassing him and micromanaging the police department. The city denied Lang's accusations in a Nov. 10 one-inch-thick response, but the EEOC has yet to make a ruling as to whether a "Right to Sue" letter will be issued. "Since the hiring of **Patrick Comiskey**, city manager, in 2002, I have been subjected to racial harassment by him," read Lang's complaint. "I have also be subjected to disparate terms and conditions of employment which include being micro-managed by Mr. **Comiskey**. "In August, 2003, I complained to him if felt I was being discriminated against due to my race. On Oct. 8, 2003, I was given a written reprimand."

The city's response, prepared by the law firm of Adams, Barfield, Evans & Miller, strongly denies Lang's claims. (Editor's note: In such legal filings as EEOC complaints and responses, only one side of the issue is represented. The Thomaston Times has contacted Chief Frank Lang regarding his view of the city's response filing. He has declined an interview.) Following is a summary of the issues addressed by the city in response to the police chief's complaint.

Racial Discrimination Issue Chief Lang asserts in his complaint he was "micro-managed" by the city manager because of his race. The chief maintained he was unfairly disciplined and that he was subjected to "disparate terms and conditions of employment." The city denies the accusation. "The city has eight departments. The department heads of four of the departments are black and four are white. Attached to this response are letters from all three of the other black department heads and the black assistant superintendent of the Electric Department that the city manager does not over manage or micro-manage them. "Common sense would dictate that if the city manager's management actions relative to the police department were motivated by race, the other three black department heads would have been likewise treated and they were not. In fact, none of them have even received a single reprimand."

The Money Issue

"According to city leaders, problems between city administrators and the police chief began to surface when the city's financial condition became tight. "The mayor and council and the city manager had no choice but to work hard to reduce expenses, with a major focus on reducing payroll," according to the response. "A comparison in the number of personnel in the police department with the number in departments in 30 other cities revealed that Thomaston's department was far overstaffed. The efforts to rectify this has caused some friction."

"Lang asked during the summer about adding more staff and indicated that two additional police officer positions had been budgeted, according to the response. The city manager "told him that a

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cursory review of the personnel line items for the police department indicated that the department was going to be over budget at year end if we added staff. "We ended the fiscal year with less than 46 people on the department staff and overspent on the salaries/wages and overtime line items by about \$12,382. The police department as a whole was over budget by approximately \$50,206." The city's response asserts that staffing in other departments had to be cut during the same time period. The response points out the Northside Fire Station had to be closed and the number of firefighters per shift had to be reduced from eight to six. **Comiskey** further said the staffing level of City Hall was reduced by two employees.

The Morale Issue

City leaders, in their response, said they had been receiving complaints that morale among the officers became low and, under the direction of **Comiskey**, corrective measures were taken. "The manager requested that the chief meet with patrol leader on ways to improve communications and morale," according to the response. "The manager stressed the importance of having the shift leaders eliminate negative talk and how critical it is for shift leaders to redirect or channel negative discussions encountered into positive ones. "The manager also directed the chief to set up a one-day retreat with officers with approximately a year of service. The retreat would include a team building exercise at Camp Thunder on the COPE course. The idea was to provide a listening and team spirit building session for the officers most at risk of leaving in the near future. But, according to the city, concerns about morale continued. "Police Department employees state that the morale problems within the department are due to poor management and partiality shown to a small group of officers," according to the response. "The concerns are that promotions, pay and disciplinary actions are based upon your standing with Chief Lang, and not upon merit."

Problems With Discipline

Comiskey reported he was concerned about high turnover in the department and complaints came from within asserting some officers were violating policies, but were not being disciplined. One officer was identified as being held to a different standard than others on the force. In regard to the officer, the response says "... no disciplinary action is taken against her unless there is outside pressure to do so." Another discipline issue cited by the city involved patrol officers getting reprimanded for not carrying out bank deposit escorts during their scheduled time off.

The Blue Car

"During a council meeting, discussions were had between council members and Chief Lang about the new cars the chief wanted to purchase. (Councilmember Ed) Bell specifically asked the chief whether any of the new cars were for him and he publicly replied no. "He, in fact, had a relatively new car at the time anyway. In fact, the chief ordered one of the cars in a light blue with the plan that it be his. When the blue car arrived, the chief had the Ford dealer arrange to have the factory AM/FM tape player removed and an AM/FM/CD player installed, and had the Ford dealer put it on the original invoice at \$315 for the blue car for the city to pay without consent of anyone. "The blue car never had any of the patrol equipment installed nor signs painted on it, and within a short time, it became the chief's car though he had told council publicly that the car was not for him, and upon inquiry, Chief Lang told the city manager and the

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
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mayor that the CD player had been given to him by the Ford dealer, which in fact, was inaccurate."

Other Problems

There were complaints that officers were being asked to make non-emergency calls while off duty and allegations that officers "were playing softball rather than covering their zones." There were letters complaining that police failed to show for Neighborhood Crime Watch meetings in the community and officers were reprimanded for using their vehicles while off duty. "Affidavits of current and former officers," according to the response, "both black and white, including some of those who have resigned to accept other jobs, which demonstrate, among other things, that departures are the result of poor management of the police department." In the spring of 2002, city leaders say they became concerned about Lang's relationship with his patrol officers and the public.

The Public Image

"The city manager gave Chief Lang several directives in the spring of 2002. The first was to spend an afternoon each week on patrol with a different officer. The second was to spend an afternoon visiting with different business owners. The third was to establish an open office hour period, published in the paper, where any member of the public, city staff or police officer could stop in and see him without the need for an appointment. "These directives were tools to increase the chief's contact with patrol officers, business owners and the public. The chief was under regular criticism for maintaining his office time behind a locked door and not being accessible to the public or police officers. These measures were directed in order to increase the chief's visibility and popularity."

Lang wrote letters to the city manager "stating that his door is always open for his employees and the public," but that employees must respect a chain of command within the department. In another letter, Lang assured the city manager he "had ridden with most of the officers and had listened to their concerns, which he stated had to do with higher wages. "However, all of the officers interviewed stated that the hostile work environment and lack of leadership were their biggest concerns. Not one of the officers who gave affidavits even mentioned wages." Lang reported to **Comiskey** "he has implemented activities and programs to facilitate a closer working relationship among the officers and administration, and that he has made it possible for qualified personnel to compete for vacant positions. "A Sunshine Committee was formed to respond to medical developments and deaths involving employees and their families and that he has equipped the department with modern service weapons and communication devices to boost morale."

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PATRICK CONWAY COMISKEY
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

The Thomaston Times
December 8, 2003

City Budget Manager's goals:

Pay raises for employees, no insurance hike, no job layoffs

Author: Billy Vaughn

Thomaston City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** said though the city's fiscal year ends Dec. 31, it could be as late as February before a new municipal budget is approved. **Comiskey** also said while the city is strapped financially, his goal is to make sure the city's 115 or so employees get a pay raise next year. "I have three goals when it comes to the budget," the city manager said. "Those goals are to not lay anyone off, to keep insurance premiums stable while providing the same level of service and to help our employees get a little pay raise every year."

Comiskey said last week he has received budget proposals from "three or four" department heads, but said there is much work to be done before a draft of the budget is ready for review by Thomaston City Council members. He said once his budget draft is submitted to council, a series of work sessions will be held to hammer out the final numbers. "Once that process is complete, we'll have a better handle on where we stand," **Comiskey** said. "At this point, it's too early to really say what the new budget will look like."

Comiskey had hoped to be further along in the budget process and had originally planned to submit his proposal to City Council before the new fiscal year begins Jan. 1. "We've been dealing with some litigation for the last few weeks and that has put us behind insofar as the budget is concerned," said **Comiskey**. "We should be able to have the budget approved in about the same time frame as last year." Last year, the city's \$20 million budget was approved in February.

The litigation to which **Comiskey** refers is an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint filed last month by Thomaston Police Chief Frank Lang. Lang, in the complaint, asserted he was racially discriminated by **Comiskey** when the city manager unfairly micromanaged affairs of the police department. City officials in the last two weeks have been busy formulating a response to the police chief's complaint, which was submitted last week to the EEOC. City officials deny Lang's charges. The city manager said in the current fiscal year, taxes are expected to generate \$3,020,000, electricity sales are expected to bring in another \$9,465,000. Roughly \$3,220,000 is expected to come from water and sewer revenues.

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The Thomaston Times
September 3, 2003

City tightens fiscal belt
Manager proposes spending cuts
Author: Billy Vaughn

Sweeping cuts in the city's budget were approved by Thomaston City Council members Tuesday night, saving the taxpayers close to \$200,000. Council members, working to avoid a tax increase, slashed dozens of departmental expenses while, at the same time, making some additions for needed projects. Though the city's property tax rate will not be officially set until next week, council has published its projected tax levy - which shows no increase over 2002. Last night, council members, in a single unanimous vote preceded by no debate, cut \$197,741 from the budget.

"Revenue franchise fees are down and sales tax (collections) are down, but we can make this work," said City Manager **Patrick Comiskey**, who recommended the cuts. "These line-item adjustments should put us in the black at the end of the year. That's what's important." Increases reflected in the budget changes total \$101,431 while cuts come to \$299,172. City leaders say in the last year, savings have become top priority out of necessity. For example, there's the fire truck issue.

"The Fire Department is in need of a new ladder truck and they have been given the go-ahead to look for a good pre-owned ladder truck," the city manager said. "There was a \$190,000 allotment for that." The purchase of the ladder truck will save the city property owners money in fire insurance costs. City leaders said buying a new ladder truck from the showroom floor would cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000, and praised **Comiskey** for his belt-tightening work. Said Mayor Pro Tem Hays Arnold, "Mr. **Comiskey** has done an absolutely phenomenal job in taking steps in what can at best be described as a poor economy to reduce the size of the bureaucracy."

Cuts approved by council were non-discriminating and affected every city department. Included in the three-page list of savings were \$18,308 to reduce health insurance benefits for council members and \$1,200 to raise council salaries each by \$1,200 per year. This change, as reported in The Thomaston Times, puts local officials more in line with state averages. Though personnel costs for other city employees were cut by \$5,000 in salary expenses and \$4,000 in health insurance benefits, **Comiskey** said this was reflected in a reduction of the number of city employees he called for earlier in the year. The number of employees in his own office was cut by two.

The city manager said making tough decisions was not easy, took a lot of work and was time consuming. He said he believes the changes were needed and worth it. **Comiskey** said he has discussed the cuts with department heads and said though all aren't pleased, "They understand

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the city's financial situation." The budget cuts are just the latest effort from city leaders to hold expenses down as council members prepare to meet Sept. 11 to set the city's millage rate. Additions to the city budget include an allotment of \$16,000 for cemetery improvement and \$10,000 for elections. Projected revenues for the city's utilities amount to just more than \$13.5 million and account for more than half of the city's \$20 million budget, according to figures supplied by **Comiskey**.

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The Thomaston Times
February 5, 2003

No tax increase built into city's budget

Author: Amanda Nicewander

Thomaston City Council, for the first time in years, won't be borrowing money to operate the city in 2003 - a significant accomplishment for a government that suffered the theft of some \$2 million in recent years. Council unanimously adopted a budget Tuesday which reduces spending, raises fees for water and sewage rates and protects the earnings of the electrical department so future needs can be met. City Manager **Patrick Comiskey** drew praise from council for his work on the budget - the first he has prepared for the city since being hired last April. It also was the most detailed budget council has been presented by a manager in recent history.

In addition to reducing spending in some key areas, the budget sets aside reserve funds to offset possible reductions in city revenue. "We hope to never spend as much as we budget," **Comiskey** said. "But we have to have enough to handle any unforeseen circumstances like a drop in sales tax. The good news for taxpayers is that we should be able to stick firm to our expectation of not raising property taxes in the fall."

Comiskey also said the savings will offset the city's need to transfer money from the electric fund into the general fund to cover costs, transfers which have added up to hundreds of thousands of dollars in previous years. "That's the biggest advantage to this year's budget," **Comiskey** said.

Protecting the earnings of the electric sales is important to the city. In the coming years Thomaston's share of construction of a new Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG) plant will rise to \$750,000. Setting profits aside now will help the city meet that responsibility without overburdening electric customers. As for borrowing money through tax anticipation notes, **Comiskey** said, "We want to get out of that cycle," **Comiskey** said, "so we don't have to pay fees and interest on those loans."

Highlights of the budget include:

• Council approved an ordinance raising water and sewer rates by 31 cents per thousand gallons, an increase which amounts to less than \$2 per month for the average household. City manager **Comiskey** said the increases were necessary in order to recover a deficit accrued by the water department each month. Last year the city transferred over \$100,000 from the electric fund to cover the debt. "We weren't recovering the costs for billing, collection and other necessary services," **Comiskey** said. "and those costs would have put us even further in debt this year. With the rate increase, the water fund can stand on its own and we won't have to subsidize it with electric funds."

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Mayor Sam Brewton agreed, saying, "All utilities should pay their own way. The water and sewer department shouldn't be subsidized by electric users or property tax." The rate increase will take effect next month. Budget highlights include:

-More than \$100,000 was cut from the annual legal fee budget - a figure that rises to more than \$200,000 when actual spending is considered.

-\$12,000 was added to the general fund for sidewalk improvements in the city.

-\$7,000 was approved to repair or replace facings on traffic signs throughout the community.

-The city will have to pay \$15,000 more per year for liability insurance as premiums were increased this year.

-Money was set aside that will enable the city to match any grant funding that may become available for city projects.

-\$1000 was budgeted for the recognition of city employees throughout the year.

-\$3000 was budgeted for conferences and training for the city's new administration department. Three existing city employees were transferred to set up the new department.

-Over \$7,000 in additional funds were allocated for unemployment claims against the city.

-More was budgeted to cover costs of city elections.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Patrick Comiskey** is listed below.]

Tampa Tribune, The (FL)
August 11, 1997

Applicants short on experience

Author: Bill Heery

SUMMARY: Applicants nationwide have applied for the assistant city manager job in Bartow, but few meet a key job requirement. Probably like many of the other applicants for the new post, advertised last month in state and national publications, the balmy Florida climate is part of the attraction.

Then there is **Patrick C. Comiskey** of Clarksburg, W.Va. A 1988 graduate of the University of Florida, **Comiskey** wants to be closer to his beloved Florida Gators.

Toland, administrator of the borough of Mountainside, N.J. -- population 6,600 -- and , manager of human resources and purchasing for the city of Clarksburg -- population 17,800, are among 33 people from 20 states who had applied for the job as of Friday. But like most of the other candidates, which carries a salary ranging from \$43,000 to \$48,000, they do not meet one of the primary requirements -- experience with a municipal electrical system.

Comiskey, 33, who was president of the Interfraternity Council at the University of Florida where he received a bachelor's degree before earning a master's degree in public administration from West Virginia University, said in a letter to DeLegge, "I am interested in continuing my career development under the leadership of a professional city manager. I am also a Gator interested in locating in Central Florida."

Comiskey, who has no experience in municipal utilities, said Friday that he did not know that DeLegge is an avid Gator fan.

Research Compiled by: Dallin Wassmer
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