

**CITY OF LABELLE
REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING
NOVEMBER 9, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER, INVOCATION, PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mayor Wilkins called the regular commission meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Commissioner Vargas spoke the invocation. Commissioner Ratica led the Pledge of Allegiance. A roll call was taken. Members present were Commissioner Hugo Vargas, Commissioner Bobbie Spratt, Mayor Julie Wilkins, Commissioner Jackie Ratica, and Commissioner Daniel Akin.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

FINAL READING OF PROPOSED ORD. 2023-22 BECK PUD

Attorney Derek Rooney read Ordinance 2023-22 title into the record.

Alexis Crepsio, consultant planner for the City of LaBelle explained to the Commission that the ordinance involved the rezoning of approximately half an acre north of Oklahoma Avenue and east of Hall Street from the Residential R1 category to a Planned Unit Development (PUD) zoning district. The presentation covered the applicant's intention for six dwelling units within three buildings, architectural compatibility with the comprehensive plan, detailed conditions for the property's aesthetic enhancements, and on-site parking solutions. There were discussions on the proposed architectural features and dimensions of certain elements like trellises and porches to maintain neighborhood character.

Commissioner Vargas motioned to approve the Beck PUD, Ordinance 2023-22 as outlined in the staff report along with the changes of a 5-foot porch, shutters on the secondary floor, and a minimum 4 foot wide trellis.

*Commissioner Ratica seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.*

**FIRST READING OF PROPOSED ORD. 2023-18 BEN MOORE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN, AND
PROPOSED ORDINANCE 2023-19 BEN MOORE PUD REZONE**

Attorney Rooney read Ordinance 2023-18 title into the record.

There was no comment by the Commissioners or by the public.

FIRST READING OF PROPOSED ORD. 2023-20 BOAT & TRAILER CODE AMENDMENT

Attorney Rooney read Ordinance 2023-20 title into the record.

The first reading of the Boat & Trailer Code Amendment was discussed in the context of storage limitations of accessory, recreational vehicles and trailers to ensure city aesthetics and safety without overbearing regulations on residents. There was no public comment.

FIRST READING OF PROPOSED ORD. 2023-21 HELMS ROAD OVERLAY

Attorney Rooney read Ordinance 2023-21 title into the record. There was no major discussion or public comment on this agenda item.

NON-PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

OHANA TREE REMOVAL REQUEST

Josephine Medina, consultant planner for the City of LaBelle explained the request for the removal of one significant tree as part of a plan for two commercial buildings at 75 Davis Street. The application was

reviewed and a replacement of the tree was discussed in order to maintain the landscape and environmental considerations in accordance with the land development code.

Commissioner Ratica made a motion to approve the proposed tree removal permit, subject to the replanting of 24 inches of live oak trees on-site, meeting the minimum size specifications of the Land Development Code.

Commissioner Akin seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

BARRON LIBRARY DISCUSSION

There was an extensive discussion regarding certain books displayed at the Barron Library, with specific mention of drastic themes in some of the books and concerns over the appropriateness of this content for children. The discussion also addressed the library's affiliation with the American Library Association which Paul Meador, President of the Library Board clarified that they were not members of, censorship, the role of parents in monitoring children's reading material, and the City's role in funding the library. After the debate and addressing the incident with the library display, the Commission stressed the importance of safeguarding against children's access to explicit adult materials and affirmed that inappropriate materials should not be supported with taxpayer funds or accessible to underage readers. While it was noted that the library had removed the controversial display, the discussion underlined a commitment to preserving the innocence of children without affecting the library's essential operations or diversity in literature offerings.

Mr. Meador addressed the board to summarize the updates the library was undergoing to help monitor the checking out of books. He noted that the library had never had prior complaints and that there was a formal process for complaints. He then gave an overview of the history of the Barron Library, as well as a summary of how the library was currently operating.

The following members of the public spoke about their concern with the books, the need for parents to be aware of what their children are looking at, and the library's operations; Donna McAvoy, David Rodriguez, Natasha Hays, Pastor Alonzo McKenzie, Stephanie Busin, Pastor James Hunt, and Robert Roper.

Commissioner Vargas stated that his desire was for the children of LaBelle to be protected from obscene materials.

Commissioner Spratt commended the library staff for their quick response to the complaint.

Mayor Wilkins recessed the meeting at 6:45 p.m.
Mayor Wilkins reconvened the meeting at 6:51 p.m.

FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK REVIEW

There was a discussion on the garbage pick up in Barron Park over the weekends.

Mitchell Wills, Superintendent of Public Works addressed the Commission with findings indicating successful operational results and well-being benefits for staff. The modified schedule had resulted in less time off taken by employees, improved focus on business and doctor appointments during their given day off and prevented potential burnout.

There was also discussion on the restrooms in Barron Park being locked at night and on the weekends. Mr. Wills explained that the restrooms were being vandalized and damage had been done to them during the nighttime and weekend hours.

Commissioner Vargas motioned to continue the 4-day work week for the maintenance staff with a review in six months.

Commissioner Spratt seconded the motion.

The motion passed unanimously.

APPROVAL TO PUBLISH REQUESTS FOR QUALIFICATIONS FOR LIBRARY ENGINEERING SERVICES AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Attorney Rooney explained the item up for discussion was to ensure that the upcoming septic to sewer projects be completed on time. He explained that the desire was to develop a library of vendors. The suggestion was to put out a request for qualifications (RFQs) for library engineering services and a separate RFQ for capital improvement projects, especially related to utilities. This was aimed at addressing concerns over timely project completion and maintaining grant funding deadlines.

Laura Constantino with Four Waters Engineering, currently tasked with several projects, expressed Four Waters' commitment and readiness to assist, stressing the importance of timely action to leverage and not lose grant funding.

There was then discussion on upcoming scheduled construction and prioritizing the phases of the projects.

Commissioner Vargas motioned to authorize Four Waters to move forward with zones C, D, E, G, H, and I with the caveat that the City could utilize other engineers if there was concern about meeting project timelines and that the RFQs be issued.

Commissioner Spratt seconded the motion.

After further discussion, the motion passed unanimously.

A PROCLAMATION DECLARING NOVEMBER 25, 2023 SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

Jessi Zubaty, Deputy City Clerk read the proclamation into the record which encouraged residents to support small businesses and contribute to the local economy.

Motioned by Commissioner Spratt to approve the Small Business Proclamation and seconded by Commissioner Vargas.

The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

There were no comments of non-agenda items.

CONSENT AGENDA

The consent agenda items were approved as listed, excluding items D (Interlocal School Currency Agreement) and F (Vulnerability Assessment Planning Grant Agreement), which were slated for individual discussion and action.

Commissioner Ratica motioned to accept the remainder of the consent agenda.

Seconded by Commissioner Akin.

The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion was had on Item D. Ryan Alexander, Director of Community Development and Planning for Hendry County explained that the Interlocal School Currency Agreement was needed to coordinate cooperation between the County, and both Cities within the County.

*Commissioner Akin motioned to adopt the Interlocal for School Concurrency.
Commissioner Spratt seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.*

Discussion was then had on the Vulnerability Assessment Planning Grant Agreement, a critical step in securing federal funding and ensuring the resilience of crucial City infrastructure against possible threats.

*Commissioner Ratica approved the Vulnerability Assessment Planning Grant Agreement.
Commissioner Vargas seconded the motion.
The motion passed unanimously.*

Mayor Wilkins recessed the Commission meeting at 7:32 p.m. to convene the Local Planning Agency meeting.

Mayor Wilkins reconvened the regular Commission meeting at 7:58 p.m.

BUSINESS BY COMMISSIONERS

The Commissioners asked the Superintendent for updates on certain projects, prayers were requested for Israel as well as our County.

Newly City appointed Deputy John Keith, and the new Maintenance Supervisor Jeremiah Elio introduced themselves to the Commission.

*Commissioner Spratt motioned to adjourn the meeting.
Commissioner Ratica seconded the motion.
The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.*

Mayor Wilkins reopened the meeting at 8:10 p.m. for discussion on City Hall lobby hours. It was decided to change the hours of operation for City Hall with sufficient notice to the public.

*Commissioner Spratt motioned to do a ninety-day trial of lobby hours of 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.
Commissioner Ratica seconded the motion.
The motion carried 5-0.*

*Commissioner Spratt motioned to adjourn.
Seconded by Commissioner Ratica.
The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.*

APPROVED:

Julie C. Wilkins, Mayor

Attest:

Tijauna Warner, BAS, MMC
Deputy City Clerk