



**TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES
TOWN COUNCIL COMMUNITY OPEN DISCUSSION WORKSHOP
MEETING MINUTES
TOWN HALL COUNCIL CHAMBERS – 155 F. Road, Loxahatchee Groves, FL 33470
Tuesday, August 6, 2024**

CALL TO ORDER:

Mayor Kane called the meeting to order at 6:15 P.M.

ROLL CALL:

Mayor Anita Kane, Vice Mayor Margaret Herzog, Councilmember Laura Danowski, Councilmember Phillis Maniglia (ABSENT), Councilmember Robert Shorr, Public Works Director Richard Gallant, Town Manager Francine Ramaglia, Town Attorney Tanya Earley, and Town Clerk Valerie Oakes were present.

OPEN DISCUSSION:

Virginia Standish addressed the Council regarding concerns about building height regulations. She referenced a recent Planning and Zoning (P&Z) meeting, where it was stated that there is a 35-foot or three-story height limit for all commercial buildings. She expressed concern that this represented a significant change in the town development policy and formally requested that the Town Council and staff provide a documented paper trail showing the initial public notice of this change. Ms. Standish emphasized that she is not looking for evidence of a first reading for an unrelated item that might have been altered during a second reading. Instead, she asked for a clear and specific record that shows when and how the public was first notified of an official change or approval regarding the increase in allowable building height. She stated that this information is important to both the public and local landowners.

Cassie Suchy began by stating she wanted to elaborate on the remarks made earlier by Virginia Standish regarding the height of buildings in the town. She noted that she had already emailed council members with her findings. She explained that the issue dates back to a Planning and Zoning (P&Z) meeting on February 4, 2021, where the topic of a self-storage facility was discussed. At the time, the height restriction was 35 feet National Geodetic Vertical Datum of 1929 (NVGD) - (a surveyor's term), and she admitted she wasn't a builder and was unfamiliar with how height was technically measured. According to her understanding, NVGD starts calculating height at 10 feet above grade, meaning a two-story building might be measured as taller. Ms. Suchy explained that the storage facility developers were seeking an exemption due to this height calculation. The matter then moved to the April 6, 2021, meeting where Ordinance 2021-02 was reviewed. At that time, Councilmember Robert Shorr was Mayor, and he and the Council were very specific in stating that the exemption was to be *site-specific* for that project only. The planner confirmed this during the meeting. Though there was confusion over the height definition, the Council moved forward, suggesting they fix the language during the meeting rather than sending it back to the ULC. Ms. Suchy emphasized that, without staff support clearly explaining the implications, the Council ended up passing a town-wide height increase to 35 feet. She argued that it was likely not the Council's original intent, based on her review of the April and May 2021 meeting discussions. She requested that the Council revisit this topic in future meetings by confirming when the first and second readings were held for this policy. If such readings do not exist, she urged them to revise the definitions to correct the height standard. She continued discussing the Business Tax Receipts (BTRs). She said she had submitted a list of 2024 code cases and was surprised at how many residents involved in Bonafide agricultural and equestrian industries were being taxed. She pointed out that nurseries are exempt from BTRs and questioned why horse farms with valid agricultural designations should be required to pay for them. She concluded by stating that the town is unique and does not need to follow other municipalities.

Paul Coleman stated he is acknowledged that he's often accused of being negative when he speaks, but he wanted to start on a positive note. He expressed appreciation to the Public Works team, whom he still refers to as the Water Control District, for their efforts in maintaining drainage. He stated that despite the recent rain, water was flowing properly and he no longer felt like he was stepping in mud puddles across his property, and he sincerely thanked them for that improvement. He then turned his attention to the proposed development, clarifying that he didn't mean to pile on criticism but hoped the Council was listening to the community. He reiterated that there were several parts of the project—such as traffic and security concerns—that simply didn't make sense or align with the character of the area. While he acknowledged that there were residents who might financially benefit from the development, he emphasized that the project wasn't a good fit for the

town, regardless of how it was zoned. He stressed that it remained a commercial enterprise, which, in his view, should be located south of Tangerine. Mr. Coleman referenced other recent development projects like the Brier property and Solar Sport, suggesting that those too had pushed commercial uses into inappropriate areas. He described the proposed RV park as having too much concrete and pavement, lacking in natural canopy. In contrast, he pointed to Fort Wilderness as a campground example he liked—it had trees, shade, and a more natural feel. He concluded by referencing Cassie Suchy’s earlier comments, stating that he was at the same meeting she mentioned and agreed completely with her recollection. The height variance approved at that time was meant to be site-specific, not a town-wide increase. He recalled that several attendees had voiced concerns at that meeting about the possibility of the change becoming a blanket policy, and those concerns now seemed validated. He closed by again thanking the Council for their time and thanking Public Works for keeping the water flowing.

Jane Harding shared her concerns about transparency and process. She stated that one of the main reasons she moved to the area was to get away from political agendas. She explained that she regularly attends the meetings, where residents engage in back-and-forth dialogue and seem to reach some form of consensus. However, she expressed deep concern upon discovering a 453-page draft document that did not reflect the discussions and agreements made during those meetings. Ms. Harding questioned how such discrepancies could occur, highlighting the disconnect between the public input she hears during meetings and what ends up written in formal drafts. She described this experience as disheartening and said it made her feel like she has no real voice or influence. Still, she emphasized her commitment to continuing to show up and speak out, even though it often feels futile. She admitted that it sometimes makes her want to give up, but her sense of duty keeps her returning. She concluded by asking pointed questions: How do such inconsistencies arise? Are there secret meetings? Are political agendas being pursued behind residents’ backs? She wondered whether someone with authority was altering things in writing after public feedback had been given, which forces residents to return repeatedly to re-fight the same issues. Ms. Harding ended her comment by reiterating her frustration and saying, “That’s all I have to say.”

Lisa El-Ramey stated she is in receipt of three separate requests for a Business Tax Receipt (BTR) from the town for her commercial equestrian use. She emphasized the importance of consistency in how the town treats agricultural uses. She argued that as an agricultural-based entity, the town should not divide agriculture into subcategories that result in differing tax obligations. Lisa asserted it should be either all agriculture is exempt or all agriculture must pay. She raised concerns about the time and resources being spent by staff on these issues and encouraged the Council to revisit its code enforcement priorities. Specifically, she suggested a stronger focus on commercial, industrial, institutional, lawn maintenance, and retail nursery operations, which she claimed are increasingly prevalent throughout the town. She also requested that the Council reexamine the town's approach to FEMA regulations. She explained that FEMA offers clearer and less stringent agricultural allowances than what the town currently enforces. Similarly, she noted that South Florida Water Management provides agricultural exemptions from some floodplain requirements that the town has nonetheless imposed. She urged the Council to review and reconsider these discrepancies. Concluding her comments by asking the Council to communicate with Florida Power & Light (FPL). She stated that since FPL appears to have abandoned underground electrical service, she requested that they at least trim the trees. She noted she had experienced two power outages already—before any storm had even arrived—underscoring the urgency of the issue.

Laura Cacioppo acknowledged that Paul had reminded her of one of her points, which was related to the proposed RV park. She expressed concern that the developers behind the RV park project did not even own the land yet. Ms. Cacioppo questioned how much money they had already invested, noting that hiring a wildlife specialist to inspect for gopher tortoises and other preparations was a costly undertaking. She implied that these expenditures ultimately come from the pockets of local residents and are used to benefit a developer. Although she clarified she had no agenda and did not know who owned the property, she emphasized her concern that this effort appeared to take resources away from the town unnecessarily. She referenced something that was said regarding Business Tax Receipts (BTRs). She emphasized that she did not mean to accuse any current or past council member, but she felt that residents are sometimes unintentionally offended by actions taken by the town. She stressed the importance of acknowledging when such mistakes are brought to light and urged that the town should aim to focus on unity, enjoyment, and a shared quality of life. She added that if there are rules and regulations in place, they should be followed. Conversely, if exemptions exist, those should be honored as well by saying that when mistakes are identified, the town should make efforts to correct them.

Ken Johnson referred to information he had submitted to the front desk concerning Business Tax Receipts (BTRs). He stated that he wanted to explain why he brought it up. According to Mr. Johnson, the organization he represents, has been registered with the State of Florida and noted that this registration is one of the conditions under which BTRs are issued or charged. However, he clarified that his organization has been registered as a nonprofit entity for approximately 10 to 12 years. Based on this status, he expressed his belief that the organization should not be grouped with others that are currently subject to BTR charges. Mr. Johnson concluded by stating that he believed the nonprofit should be exempt from those fees and closed his comment by thanking the Council.

ADJOURNMENT:

Mayor Kane adjourned the community meeting at 6:32 p.m.

**TOWN OF LOXAHATCHEE GROVES,
FLORIDA**

ATTEST:

Mayor Anita Kane, Seat 3

Town Clerk

Vice Mayor Margaret Herzog, Seat 5

Councilmember Phillis Maniglia, Seat 1

Councilmember Laura Danowski, Seat 2

Councilmember Robert Shorr, Seat 4