

## Special City Commission Strategic Planning Workshop

**December 9, 2020**

Click [here](#) to download the audio recording of the meeting.

All City Commissioners and Mayor Owen were present. City Staff present: City Manager, Assistant City Manager, City Clerk, City Attorney, and City Police Chief.

### **Public Participation:**

City residents spoke on the following:

- NSB must preserve its historic legacy. 70% of voters approved the City Charter which includes Language preserving the special character of our city and its historic legacy. We must work together to review and amend city ordinances to ensure compliance with the new Charter intent and language.
- NSB should address the derelict, abandoned boat situation. It was felt that some who are living on a few of the abandoned vessels are not the owners and may be homeless.
- Affordable housing is getting harder to find in NSB. "Cost drivers" are increasing, mainly due to fees and permits as well as the time it takes to obtain approvals build here - "time is money". Two local builders are concerned about this as they want to help make NSB an affordable place to live, but they cannot when they are struggling financially.
- The City needs to address local homelessness, especially around City Hall and Downtown Canal Street. The City might want to review what Sarasota is doing about it.

### Strategic Planning Prioritization:

Michelle Vallance, Capital Improvements Manager who created the Strategic Planning report, led this section. She first stated that there will be a mobile phone app that will detail the Strategic Plan and the tracking of it that will be free to everyone once it is totally set up. Right now, it is only for City Staff. She quickly reviewed the five metrics of the current plan and noted that each has subtopics that were ranked when the plan was completed:

1. Communication & Trust,
2. Quality of Life Measures,
3. Growth Management,
4. Environmental Resiliency and
5. Transportation & Circulation

A discussion ensued about the ranking process. Commissioner McGuirk commented that the list is two years old and priorities have naturally changed. Some are unmanageable at this time, and the list cannot be "everything to everyone" so there will have to be compromise.

The Commissioners agreed to reorder the priorities by the end of the week, not only narrowing it down to the top three subtopics in each section, but also looking at "quick kills" beyond those three. There will be another workshop in January to discuss the results of the tally where a strategic plan will be made from the list that will show a balanced workload, preparation for next year's budget needs, to illustrate a more focused approach toward achieving the goals set.

### Homelessness:

Homelessness in NSB has been growing and needs an immediate solution. The City needs to partner with non-profit and religious groups to address the problem. Mayor Owen wanted to be clear that the problem is not due to a lack of affordable housing, but due to mainly societal issues such as drug/alcohol addiction and mental illness.

Police Commissioner Coffin began by stating that the police are frustrated as they cannot "arrest [their] way out of homelessness". Homelessness is a complex problem. Typical law enforcement techniques are ineffective and temporary, at best. The police are caught between legal process and civil rights and what residents want. Homeless camps cannot be destroyed nor relocated, and personal property cannot be confiscated (there is no place to store it.) According to City Attorney,

Carrie Avallone, "it's not a crime to be homeless". Citing to a 1989 class-action suit in Miami called the Pottinger Agreement, the city must look at alternatives.

One of the alternatives is The Bridge shelter which opened on September 7, 2020. Mike Forrester, the shelter's Director explained that the 7,125 sq. ft. shelter is a collective effort among local churches, businesses, and the City, itself. It can house up to 100 people (30 crisis beds) with the end goal of moving them into permanent housing within 30 to 90 days. It also offers a day program with mental and physical health programs as well as job counseling. Mayor Owen asked if he felt it was helping and Commissioner Sachs asked if there had been a decrease in crime and vagrancy. Mike replied that it was too early to tell, but it is helping the 30 in crisis. The hardcore homeless need permanent support.

- Mayor Owen brought up Sarasota that has an Ordinance stating there is no sleeping outside as there are Pottinger Compliant options available.
- Commissioner McGuirk said that mental illness and addiction are major problems that need to be addressed. He thinks that the Commission need to find a place to take those with addiction and mental issues and that the Commission should appoint someone to focus on creating alliances with church groups and other organizations to find a solution. He further stated that Halifax Health and Stewart Marchman do need more money which could provide help in lieu of building a new facility.
- Commissioner Kolody felt that three areas were of importance in discussing this:
  - Identifying a location where a limited space, permanent shelter could be built
  - the well-being of city residents, not only for those living downtown but throughout the city
  - and a budget that would try and fix the problem, not only with a facility but also with trained social service workers
- Vice-Mayor Hartman felt that we should encourage a partnership with Edgewater and Oak Hill as well as NGOs, churches and businesses. He thinks we should ask the homeless what they think they need. Three steps to make this happen would be the buy in, plan, and location.
- Commissioner Sachs liked what he was hearing, but felt realistically, we can only help so many as all are different with different problems and that we need to help our residents as well.

Short-term goals:

- Determine why certain areas of the city (hot zones) have a higher concentration of homelessness/vagrancy. Is it because those people are aiding the homeless?
- Revisit panhandling to see if this is a problem
- Increase police presence in high concentration areas/hot zones.

Long-term goal:

- City Manager, Khalid Resheidat, will come up with a plan to host a workshops and discussions with organizations and businesses to come up with a cohesive strategy to fix this problem. Mayor Owen agreed this would be a good step, but a timeline would be needed. Vice-Mayor Hartman asked for him to find out what state and federal help might be available to us as we proceed with a plan.

All Commissioners agreed upon the goals.

### **Coastal Construction Setback Line (CCSL):**

Assistant City Manager, Brian Fields, presented this section.

Background: Coastal construction in New Smyrna Beach is regulated by two lines: the City's "Coastal Construction Setback Line" or CCSL, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection's Coastal Construction Control Line per 1991 ruling, or CCCL Both are intended to prevent adverse construction impacts to the coastal environment near dunes and beaches. In January 2018, the City hired Dredging & Marine Consultants (DMC) to compare the City's CCSL with the FDEP's CCCL, focusing on the section along North Atlantic Ave. between Crawford Rd. and Sapphire Rd. and make recommendations.

Mr. Fields stated that the existence of two lines and their different regulations and agencies, has caused problems for many of our residents and builders. Having two lines affects permitting. Mr. Fields asked the Commission if they wanted to consider using just the CCCL and/or changing how

we regulate activity allowed surrounding that line and/or allowing City Staff to grant permission for projects instead of requiring projects to get the approval of the Commission.

- Commissioner Kolody wanted to follow only the state line. He also felt project decisions should be made by the City Staff using our standards, which may, though, need to be looked at more closely to see if they need to be updated.
- Commissioner Sachs agreed with using the state line but with perhaps, Dr. Jason Evans from Stetson who is familiar with our coastline/beach, to agree that this is the better way. He was unsure about decisions made totally by staff.
- Commissioner McGuirk agreed with Commissioner Kolody but added that an appeal could be made to the CC if an applicant disagrees with the City Staff decision.
- Vice-Mayor Hartman agreed with using the state line and City Staff giving approval as we want to make the process as simple as possible.
- Mayor Owen agreed especially since the line is based on science and will be updated as our environment changes.

Mr. Fields stated that it would make the process simpler, but there would still be problems with some residents wanting to make hardscape improvements. The City Manager stated that these changes would solve 50% of our cases and permitting problems. We could also change our regulations to make up-grading easier to do for our residents

### **Vacant City Property:**

The Commissioners reviewed the inventory of existing city-owned property, including vacant and developed lands, and looked at options and opportunities related to those lands. A map of the properties is being updated and will be used in making the decision to divest or keep the various parcels. The parcels may be currently in use, sitting vacant or under-utilized. The major question raised for all or the properties centers on the future value in keeping the property vs. selling now in a record setting high real estate market.

An in-depth discussion followed which included some of the following comments/concerns:

- Vice-Mayor Hartman suggested that a 'land swap' might be a third option to selling or keeping a property with a consideration for partnering with charities such as Habitat to promote low-income housing. Some parcels may be of more value for the City in the future and swapping with owners might be a win-win for all concerned.
- Commissioner Kolody felt that a good move would be to sell the 2650 property on north US 1 as well as the Smith St. property (119 & 120).
- Commissioner Sachs felt pickleball courts on the Smith property could be an option. Commissioner McGuirk, however, did not feel that way as the sport has a long life and favors selling the Smith property.
- Mayor Owen suggested that a study is needed to identify unused vacant vs. used vacant properties before determinations can be made.

There was interest in proactively working with the Utilities Commission about acquiring land west of I-95 due to the fast growth in that area. A short conversation followed on the future of the Turnbull Creek project, and there was unanimous agreement that this land should be put into conservation easement with the City and a possible partnership with a non-profit for oversight like the Audubon Society or other ecologically focused groups. It was also agreed that the land should not be overly developed but have some trails for citizen access.

**AOB Site (162 N. Causeway) Improvement:** Background: Past discussions regarding the plans for the "AOB Site" have yielded various design and utilization approaches. This land has been a contentious parcel for many years and options to sell, lease or conserve have all been considered without any consensus for how to proceed.

Commissioner Kolody feels the site should be left "as is" but expand the trailer parking to the grassy areas and make improvements to the ramps. He supports partnering with North causeway Marina to build boat slips.

Vice-Mayor Hartman wants to add transient slips and expand trailer parking as both would create additional revenue for the City.

Commissioner McGuirk feels it should be marine use only and not for trailer parking nor transient slips, yet he supported Commissioner Sachs who wants more kayak launch areas for the public with walkways to enjoy the water.

The City Commissioners reached a consensus that the land should not be sold and that a plan for moderate use would be developed by Commissioner Kolody to be reviewed and approved in January. The plan will include improved paving, walking pathway around the perimeter, picnic tables and enhanced access to the water. A portion of the parcel (to be determined) will be used for trailer overflow from the boat ramp. City staff will explore as part two of this development, the feasibility of pursuing a marina either connected to City Marina or in a private/public partnership. There are also numerous unanswered questions about ecological protections and feasibility with depth and currents and financial implications that must be answered.

**Traffic Calming Manual:** Background: "Traffic Calming" is the term given to the various strategies for reducing the speed and volume of vehicles on streets and roadways using primarily physical measures.

This issue has come before the City Commission and the Neighborhood Council numerous times over the last five years. Requests from neighborhoods for stop signs raised the issue of how to best decide what works for controlling speed and providing safety to areas where changing demographics are bringing more children and increased traffic. The question of what strategies are most effective looms large in the debate.

The use standards that are set by the State for assessing need are often not met in NSB but pressure on Commissioners from residents and the complexity of City/County/State control over roadways seem to indicate a 'unique' response protocol for handling requests. It is unclear if the current rendition of the Parking Manual will assist but most agreed it is a base line to assist in decision making. The City will present a traffic manual in January for approval taking into considerations issues raised in this discussion. The Mayor asked that the manual and 'best practices' for traffic control be integrated in all new development projects so that the developer creates streets that are safer and do not need to be adapted later by the City.

#### **Commissioner Comments:**

- need for a traffic light at Fire Station 52 on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue
- need to reduce airplane noise (largely attributed to flight schools not abiding by voluntary scheduling and times)
- lack of timely use of CRA funds for much needed projects on US 1.
- Need to hire more planning department staff to follow up on requirements in PUDs
- a six-month review is needed for the new truck parking and truck route on Beachside to evaluate its effectiveness.
- The Commissioners focused on the mission of the Neighborhood Council. Questions have been raised about the viability of this Council as many of the goals such as increased transparency and citizen access have been accomplished. A more thorough discussion about the future of the Neighborhood Council will occur in January.
- The Mayor asked that all commissions and boards examine their mission, and that the CC should evaluate each, perhaps with quarterly reports from all the City boards to assist in these evaluations.
- the Mayor asked the City to consider initiating a supervisor/leadership education program for City staff.