

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Workshop Meeting
February 5, 2003

The City Commission met in a workshop session Wednesday, February 5, 2003, at 2:30 p.m. in The Alcazar Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Gardner, and the following were present:

1. Roll Call:

George Gardner, Mayor/City Commissioner
William Lennon, City Commissioner
Errol D. Jones, City Commissioner
Donald A. Crichlow, City Commissioner

Absent: Susan Burk, City Commissioner

William B. Harriss, City Manager
Jack E. Cubbedge, Assistant City Manager
James P. Wilson, City Attorney
Martha V. (Nell) Porter, City Clerk
Karen Rogers, Recording Secretary

2. Discussion on the evaluation of the City of St. Augustine Commission priorities.

Mayor Gardner apologized to the Commissioners for an article in the newspaper the previous Sunday stating that the City Commission was to create a village. He noted that the Commission had not taken a vote on the issue, and he apologized if he had suggested that they had.

Mayor Gardner noted that Commissioner Burk was unable to attend the meeting; however, she had submitted a list. He recommended that the Commissioners state their priorities without going into detail. He suggested that as they offered their priorities the Commission create an A and B list and then address the two lists.

William B. Harriss, City Manager, explained that when approaching a project he considered three things:

1. Political
2. Technical
3. Economic

Mr. Harriss said that he was concerned about all three aspects, as without all three components a project could be doomed. He listed the items that staff considered priorities as follows:

- Parking and Traffic Improvement including:
 1. Garages
 2. Reconstruction of Lightner parking lot
 3. Decal parking system
 4. Shuttle transit system
 5. Entrance corridor program
 6. Signage

7. Utility policy and concerns

Mr. Harriss said that regarding utilities the City had assumed a larger utility service area in agreement with St. Johns County three years earlier. He said that the City made money on utilities, but as in any business it required capital. He said they had come to the point that the water plant needed to be expanded to provide additional capacity, and to have the necessary redundancy for protection in the event of equipment failure. He stated that the City had one reactor clarifier that performed an operation to raw water to render it palatable, which had been built in 1927. He said that when the reactor clarifier required cleaning they could not shut the system down for more than 12-18 hours, because they needed to make more water. He said that with the expansion of water service the City needed to build another reactor clarifier system for additional capacity and provide for the existing system. He noted that the system was a two million dollar operation, which could be paid for out of existing and future utility fees, therefore it would not require advalorem taxes. He noted that without another reactor clarifier they would have to stop accepting future utility customers, or worse have to shut the water down entirely.

Mr. Harriss stated that the logical place to build the reactor clarifier was at the existing water plant, which had been renovated and would not necessitate moving. He said that the City garage on Palmer Street needed modernizing; therefore he would like to move it elsewhere and use the location for expanding the water plant. He explained that a reactor clarifier was a large tank that required quite a bit of room, and the location would allow for a second reactor clarifier in the future.

Mr. Harriss said they intended on moving the garage across the street on City land, and other land could be purchased. He said that buying the land and building the garage would cost \$1.5 million dollars.

Commissioner Crichlow questioned whether the Oyster Creek facility could be used.

Mr. Harriss stated that they had used the Oyster Creek facility for additional utility capabilities. He said that currently there were too many people wondering around the water plant, and for security purposes he was not comfortable with the situation. Therefore, he said they would like to take the land between King Street and Oyster Creek and secure the area. He said those were the two items on his list that would cost money, and the reactor clarifier would be funded by a 20-year bond payable by utilities fees, but the garage would be part of the general fund and utility fees would provide a portion of the revenue to pay for it.

Mr. Harriss said the other items with potential cost were as follows:

- St. George Street
- San Marco parking lot
- Francis Field redevelopment
- San Sebastian project
- Bridge of Lions approaches
- Seawall construction
- Maria Sanchez Lake modification
- Heritage Tourism
- Horse Carriage routes
- Carriage stand location
- Dinghy mooring & storage

Commissioner Crichlow questioned the situation with the utility deposit.

Mr. Harriss noted that currently residents made a deposit for utilities, for which the interest was paid but it was not refunded until the citizen discontinued service. He said that Mayor Gardner had appointed a citizen to work with staff to formulate a proposal for the Commission whereby the deposit would be refunded, as the matter would have to be amended by ordinance.

Mayor Gardner questioned how the priorities would be paid for.

Mr. Harriss replied that a method of payment had to be determined. He said some projects had accessible methods and others required research. He noted that the taxpayers were the last method.

Mayor Gardner noted that advalorem taxes, the bed tax, tax returns from visitor, and sales tax helped to pay for things, although he did not suspect that the City could count on money from the state for 2003. He said that the Commission would have to keep in mind that advalorem taxes supporting their priorities was a consideration.

Mr. Harriss stated that the City was limited by Florida Statutes in terms of taxes. He said that user fees, such as water and sewer were a way to keep the burden off the tax payer. He used the example of the fire assessment that was paid by all including churches, schools, and government. He said another example was the stormwater utility where the revenue was used solely for that purpose.

Mayor Gardner read Commissioner Burk's list of priorities as follows:

- City sales tax – lower property tax and exempt necessities
- Refund utility deposits

- Parking decal system
- Limit street parking
- Horse Carriages
- Limit boards to residents
- Demolition of old building – longer than one year
- San Sebastian property
- Street entertainers
- Use of the Plaza
- City Marina – moorings & dinghies
- Outdoor dining
- Ghost tours – franchise & regulate
- Taxi cabs
- Tree Ordinance – more protection
- Leases for offsite parking

Mr. Harriss explained that the last item referred to businesses applying for exception for parking requirements if they leased offsite parking within so many hundred feet. He said that Commissioner Burk's concern was whether the business was using the offsite parking and whether the lease was continued, because the situation could be used as a method of subterfuge.

Mr. Wilson said there was a required form involved that could be easily monitored to make sure the lease was renewed.

Commissioner Crichlow's priorities were as follows:

- Parking and traffic – all elements
- Flagler College expansion
- Street performers ordinance
- Neighborhood Council Office

Mayor Gardner introduced Becky Greenberg who was organizing the steering committee and developing the program and facility for the Neighborhood Council Office.

Commissioner Crichlow's list continued:

- Reinstatement of the long version of the Comprehensive Plan
- Historic Preservation plan
- Entrance Corridor Guidelines
- Heritage Tourism signage
- San Sebastian Harbor project
- FSDB expansion
- Seawall project
- Neighborhood infrastructure improvements
- Utility policies and concerns
- DOT road issues
- Bridge of Lions approach
- Maria Sanchez Lake modifications
- St. George Street beautification and maintenance
- Historical Restoration tax incentives
- Orientation for Citizen Boards

Mayor Gardner said he had asked Lyn Gilchrist to organize a committee for that purpose.

Commissioner Crichlow's continued list:

- Acquisition revolving fund to save historical structures
- Plaza vendors
- Residency of City officials including department directors
- Special Events Field modifications
- Underground power lines
- Re-bricking streets

Commissioner Lennon stated that he did not realize the City had been run so poorly. He said that he had five items as follows:

- Water Plant
- San Sebastian Project
- Parking Garage at the VIC
- Tear down old Fire Station to increase parking behind Lightner Museum
- Architectural Review Board for the entire City of St. Augustine

Commissioner Crichlow agreed that an Architectural Review Board for the entire City was a good idea; however, they would have to be careful, as there would be a great deal of opposition.

Commissioner Lennon suggested that there might not be that much opposition.

Mayor Gardner said that the suggestion went hand-in-hand with reinstating the whole Comp Plan, which referred to height, mass, and scale throughout the City.

Commissioner Lennon suggested that when they put the RFP out for bid on the San Sebastian project that it be stipulated there would be a small convention center, as the City needed one with the Ponce Hotel being torn down. It was agreed that the Ponce Hotel would be a real loss for the City.

Commissioner Jones delivered his priorities as follows:

- Reconfigure the Lightner parking lot by tearing the old fire station down
- Heritage Tourism signage
- Water treatment plant
- Consolidate and relocate the warehouse

Mr. Harriss noted that the cost of a new water treatment plant was unbelievable.

Commissioner Jones continued:

- San Sebastian Harbor Project with convention center and parking garage
- Utility connection fee
- Utility deposits
- Entrance Corridor Guidelines
- Transit system
- Bridge of Lions approaches

Mr. Harriss noted that DOT would report to the City within 30-days as to whether they would support the roundabout configuration and determine whether it would necessitate a delay in the project. He said they might have a meeting with the DOT to address all issues at one time.

Commissioner Jones continued: ¹

- Affordable housing
- San Marco parking lot and St. Francis Field
- VIC and horse drawn carriage stand relocation
- St. George Street beautification and the street entertainers
- Tighten the building code to regulate manufactured housing
- Upgrade Aviles Street

Commissioner Jones stated that he would rather have townhouses for the San Sebastian project than condominiums, which would appear more community oriented. He said that in the redesign of the St. Francis field he would like to consider expanding the greenspace, including a gazebo to provide shade and perhaps picnic tables. He said that beautification and lighting on Aviles was necessary, and perhaps making it a walking street to attract visitors.

Mayor Gardner delivered his list of priorities as follows:

- Parking and traffic
- Signage
- VIC garage
- Transit system
- Parking meters
- Neighborhood Council Office
- Historic area street activity

¹ End of audio tape one

- Code tightening
- Reinstitution of the full Comp Plan
- Historic Preservation

Commissioner Crichlow noted that he had not included items such as the Ponce Hotel and Fort Mose in his priority list; however, the Commission would want to be involved and support them.

Mayor Gardner requested the Commission's permission to allow the members of the public to speak for one minute regarding the priority list. The comments were as follows:

- Toughen the tree ordinance
- Pedestrian walkover on San Marco Avenue
- Uniformed system of announcing all board and committee meetings
- Make St. Augustine a pedestrian City
- Availability of board and committee meeting minutes

Commissioner Crichlow stated that the baseball field at St. Francis field was no longer needed; therefore the lights would be removed, and it would be reconfigured for expanded use.

Mr. Harriss pointed out that they were considering moving the bus parking on the west end of St. Francis field to the parking facility at the VIC. He noted that the DOT had done an improvement study on San Marco Avenue, and the team had designed teardrop islands and pedestrian crossings, but he had not heard anything further on the matter in some time.

Commissioner Lennon noted that there had been a plan to move A1A out to US 1 directing the traffic to SR 312, because motor homes using San Marco Avenue would get tied up in traffic and turn into the neighborhoods. He said that the

merchants had not agreed with the plan; therefore the DOT had dropped it.

Mayor Gardner noted that the developer of the Ponce Hotel location had been approached by Wal Mart to construct a super center on the property.

Mr. Harriss pointed out that minutes of all City Commission and board meetings were available on the City web site.

Mayor Gardner questioned the availability of City Commission minutes before they were approved by the Commission. He suggested that a speedier communication could help the public.

A discussion ensued regarding how to consolidate the Commissioner's list into one priority list. It was determined that Mr. Harriss would combine the lists to allow the Commissioners to prioritize the list at a future date.

Commissioner Lennon noted that the Florida League of Cities was fighting to stop the Governor, House, and Senate from cutting funds to the cities of Florida. He said they had to consider financing for any of the projects on the priority list, as they would not receive state funding; therefore they might have to wait until the following year. It was agreed that some of the items on the list would not incur a cost.

Mr. Harriss stated that the priority list would provide a philosophy to post for staff consideration as funding was made available. He said the philosophy would also help volunteers focus how they could serve the City. He said the staff would examine the effort, time and cost that each item would demand, but they could not attach a dollar figure to some items until they had begun.

Commissioner Lennon recommended that as a whole the focus should be on the water plant.

Mr. Harriss said that the list would be a useful tool for visioning the future of the City. He pointed out that 200-300 citizens had participated in the vision plan created in the 90's. He added that the Commission could only have so many workshops before it became too many.

Mayor Gardner stated that the St. Johns County Vision Committee wanted the City to get involved with their plans. He said that it was his understanding they wanted to meet with officials and department heads to outline their plan and enlist the cooperation of the City. He said that it was his understanding the City had not embraced participation in the past.

Commissioner Lennon replied that the Mayor would discover that the county was seeking funding when the City already paid county taxes.

Mr. Harriss stated that the county had not made a presentation to date, but the City would be interested in hearing it.

Mayor Gardner offered to ask Mr. Sutton to make a brief presentation at one the of the City Commissioner meetings, after which the Commission could decide whether they wanted to participate.

Mr. Wilson pointed out that if the Commission met with the County, by law they would have to meet within City limits. He said a presentation was a good idea, and if they decided to participate they could have one Commissioner participate and report to the Commission to avoid violating the Sunshine Laws.

Mayor Gardner suggested that if the Commission participation could have some affect on development it would be good; however, he was not certain that the City and county should be vision partners.

Mr. Harriss questioned whether St. Johns County was at a point that the City could have affect on their plan.

Mayor Gardner stated that it was his understanding that the county was at a critical juncture.

Commissioner Crichlow suggested that an avenue of communication would be to the Commissions advantage.

Commissioner Lennon noted that the City and county had a relationship where they worked hand-in-hand.

3. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m. ²

MAYOR

CITY CLERK

² Transcribed by Karen Rogers, Recording Secretary