

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

City Commission Workshop Meeting  
May 24 2006

The City Commission met in a workshop session Wednesday, May 24 2006, at 9:30 a.m. in the de Aviles Room at City Hall. The meeting was called to order by Mayor George Gardner, and the following were present:

**1. Roll Call:**

George Gardner, Mayor/City Commissioner  
Joe Boles, City Commissioner  
Donald A. Crichlow, City Commissioner  
Errol D. Jones, City Commissioner

Absent: Susan Burk, Vice Mayor/City Commissioner (Excused)

Staff: William B. Harriss, City Manager  
Martha V. (Nell) Porter, City Clerk  
James P. Wilson, City Attorney  
Mark Litzinger, City Comptroller  
John Regan, Chief Operations Officer  
Paul K. Williamson, Director, Public Affairs  
Dr. William Adams, Director, Heritage Tourism  
Karen Rogers Recording Secretary

**2. Discussion regarding a Business Plan for the Colonial Spanish Quarter Museum.**

Commissioner Boles summarized that they were meeting to discuss the 33 properties the City leased from the State of Florida, which began approximately 8-9 years earlier. He said that originally the state funded approximately \$750,000 for the properties annually. He clarified that the Spanish Quarter was one matter and the rest of the rental properties were another, and the City continued to rent properties to generate revenues just as the state had. He said that the Spanish Quarter was profitable, but the Spanish Quarter Museum proved to be a drain. He said that during the time the City had control over the properties they had decreased the amount of supplement funding for the properties to approximately \$150,000; he clarified that he was referring to the City shortfall.

Dr. William Adams, Director, Heritage Tourism, clarified that the City was breaking even, but they were subsidizing the Spanish

Quarter by deferring maintenance and professional quality staffing.

Commissioner Boles said that the City had cut back on staff and deferred maintenance to save money. He questioned whether the City was reimbursed for the maintenance costs.

Mr. Harriss stated that staff had acquired 2-3 grants for maintenance of the properties.

Commissioner Boles stated that their goal was to increase revenues from the Spanish Quarter to get past the breaking point or to increase staff and maintenance.

Dr. Adams said they could increase museum store sales. He said the principal sources of income were rentals, museum stores and the museum entrance fee.

Commissioner Boles pointed out that the City should be proud that they were not spending \$750,000 as the state had, which indicated that the City was managing the properties better.

A brief discussion indicated that the Spanish Quarter was operating efficiently considering the ratio of interpreters for the number of visitors, which was a deficiency, as they should have more interpretive employees.

Commissioner Jones pointed out that the amount the City was designating to the Spanish Quarter was not enough to make the attraction what they envisioned in terms of interpreters or maintenance. He emphasized that they were managing with less and providing less.

Commissioner Boles stated that the City had the identical staff as historic Pensacola, more visitors than Pensacola, but Pensacola was receiving \$1.3 million from the legislature in addition to the funds they generated. He said that if the City received equal funding from the legislature they could provide more interpreters and improve the visitor experience. He suggested deciding whether they were going to solve problems or expand the positives. He added that they could not fix the things they wanted without more money.

Timothy A. Burchfield, Chief Administrative Officer, reported that the Commission had directed staff to acquire a consultant to review the function of the Spanish Quarter and Museum for ideas on how to increase revenues or cut expenses and improve the visitor experience and to provide comparisons to support their report. He said they had hired a consultant and after a four month process they provided a report.

Commissioner Jones read the last paragraph in the report recommending that the museum required leadership to actively decide whether to take the attraction off life support or invest in it to survive.

Mayor Gardner said that initially he had supported hiring the consultant if the de Masa House use would be considered as a revenue generator. And, he said a consultant

who experienced the Alamo and Santee Fee etc. to share their thoughts for potential uses of the numbers of historic properties. He pointed out that they had kept the leases short and leased for heritage related businesses in the Casa Del Hidalgo, because they were not certain they were doing the right thing. He said that they had funded coquina paved streets off St. George Street to expand the pedestrian experience and increase tax values, as visitation would increase. He added that they had discussed a preservation fee targeted at visitors, which required county and state cooperation; however, he questioned what other cities did. He continued that the state buildings automatic renewal option leases were a situation that staff was working on. He said that there were so many good ideas, and he was disappointed with the report because it did not tell them anything that they did not already know.

Mr. Burchfield pointed out that the study was one the City could afford, but an expansive study would cost more than \$100,000. He said that the existing report could be expanded on when they had the money.

Mayor Gardner questioned whether they could ask the consultant to provide a shorter version of the expanded version for a lower price, and the response was that they could ask.

Dr. Adams stated that it was a good report, because it was good to have all the information in one place. He recommended that the next step focus on the museum to see how they could change the business model that had not worked for years.

Commissioner Boles said that there was one department of the enterprise that was losing money, and he recommended hiring museum design consultants. He pointed out that they had not hunted for the consultants they hired as they had local connections, but he would prefer non-local consulting that had fresh eyes to look at the City's operation. Therefore, he recommended a consultant

from outside the area with museum design experience.

Mayor Gardner said that although the current consultants had local connection they came from California; therefore, they had a new perspective. He questioned whether Curt Bowman could be considered a layout designer of museums and orientation centers.

Mr. Burchfield replied that he was familiar with orientation center design but not museums.

Commissioner Boles said that he agreed with utilizing local talent, but it would not give a fresh set of eyes on the matter. He pointed out that the consultant study may have taken four months; however, they had only been in the City for four days, which was all that was necessary for the assessment. He reiterated his suggestion and recommended researching the matter.

Dr. Adams suggested that if they were going to spend that much money why not hire a museum curator to look at other models. <sup>1</sup>

Commissioner Boles agreed that would be a good idea if they were not trying to procure state support. He said that using a consultant and their recommendation could provide additional grounds of parity for the legislature as to why the state should continue to fund the City with a specific amount of money. He said that they needed someone to look at the product and provide assistance from a different perspective. He agreed that a curator would be great, but they needed an overview of the situation, as they were not bound by the state model and could be competitive about the situation.

Mayor Gardner said obtaining state funding was in progress, and they believed that it would result in the funds to hire a planning consultant to develop a planning team. He referred to the University of Florida as a part

of the planned development that would mimic Pensacola where the state funding went into the university budget. He said that, in the event of succeeding with the current plan, UF would take over the historic properties, so to speak, and partner with the City.

Dr. Adams pointed out that many museums did not make money, as they were subsidized through government and contributions. He said that they could continue with the inefficient model, but they had to try to make it function economically more efficient.

Commissioner Boles stated that he was excited about the parity between Pensacola and St. Augustine and their potential success for obtaining state funding, but at best it would take 3-4 years. He referred to a small grant that amounted to \$15,000-\$30,000 that would help put together a plan with UF, because the university had been clear that it would not lose any money in the endeavor. He said he was not concerned about what entity controlled the state funds as long as the City had a good product. He said that they had two more years on the current lease with the state, and if they did not have funding they would probably get another 5-year lease unless they worked something out. He recommended finding a way to continue to improve the product and said he felt they needed outside help. He suggested trying to find a firm, if there was such a thing, to carry out his recommendation.

Dr. Adams suggested that they would incur double the cost.

Commissioner Boles pointed out they had to spend money to make money, and without long term abilities they could not curry anyone to endow the project as it could be out of their hands in 2008, making the City temporary stewards of the project.

Commissioner Crichlow referred to the consultants report and suggested that they could exert some control over St. George Street to have a more Spanish influence through the music that the businesses played.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Litzinger arrived at 10:02 p.m.

Commissioner Boles agreed that the report regarding the Spanish Quarter pointed out that there was too much other-world intrusion into the experience.

Commissioner Crichlow suggested holding authentic Spanish weddings in the Spanish Quarter or having other such enactments scheduled throughout the day to attract visitors and improve their experience. He continued that there were things in the report that could be addressed to improve the Spanish Quarter without further consulting. He recommended addressing signage downtown.

Mayor Gardner pointed out that the City Manager was working on getting more control of the leases for the historic properties in order to influence what the commercial would consist of.

Commissioner Jones recommended that the consultants that created the report make a presentation to the Commission.

Commissioner Boles pointed out that living history was fun to observe, but it was not fun to live.

Dr. Adams agreed that it was difficult to control the quality of the interpreter experience.

After discussion it was determined that the Commission would have another workshop for the consultants to deliver a presentation and answer their questions.

Mayor Gardner offered to hear public comment and some of the comments were as follows:

- Phil McDaniel, 51 Water Street, the consultants were good and it was a good idea for them to make a presentation
- Robert Hall, 42 Spanish Street, businesses of the City did not support the history of the City, add a tax to attractions for revenue

- Maureen Boles, 35 Mulberry Street, use extensive volunteers to work in the historical attractions
- Ed Salvin, P.O. 3084, add a court house to Spanish Quarter for reenacting justice daily

Commissioner Crichlow agreed that some type of vignette reenacted daily could attract visitors.

Dr. Adams pointed out that in order to have more reenactments they would have to hire more personnel and they could not afford the personnel that currently worked in the Spanish Quarter. He added that they no longer had a historian to do research to develop those types of programs, nor did they have a curator to maintain quality or train the re-enactors.

Commissioner Boles added that they also did not have a volunteer coordinator to work with volunteers throughout the county.

Dr. Adams said that he had a new marketing and events coordinator in the department that was in charge of recreating the volunteer program; however, it would involve training, costuming and a support staff. He stated that he was the support staff in addition to running the budget and everything else.

Mr. Harriss said they also had to find the money to develop the suggestion. He agreed that the idea would attract people, but that type of program would have to be funded, including a support staff because it would have to be well done.

Mimi Pujalsml, 72 Sanford Street, more Spanish music on St. George Street, enact a 15-minute portion of a day in the Life of Pedro Menendez and volunteers could be found

Dr. Adams stated that he would like to improve the quality of the enactment program and museum; however, they still had to get the visitors into the Spanish Quarter and museum. He said part of the confusion for

visitors was that upon entering St. George Street through the City gates visitors assumed they were already in the Colonial Spanish Quarter. He pointed out that they had improved signage, but the trailer train delivery and ticket sales had dropped significantly.

Karen Harvey, 6 Flamingo Drive, things could be done without money and the Historic Preservation Advisory Committee could be helpful with ideas that would not require expensive studies

Commissioner Crichlow suggested further discussion at a later date regarding controlling the confusion of the visitor experience on St. George Street.

Commissioner Boles pointed out that the commercial businesses might agree to a cooperative effort.

### **3. Discussion regarding the interior layout of the Visitor Information Center.**

Mayor Gardner stated that the VIC would not be ready to open for the fourth of July; however, it was time for the Commissioners to offer their input regarding the interior design.

John Regan, Chief Operations Officer delivered an overview and history of the project, and some of the highlights were as follows:

- There had been between 25-30 public meetings
- The community wanted the parking structure integrated into the strategic vision of Heritage Tourism
- The University of Florida 2002 and the 2003 National Trust for Historic Preservation studies had been key in the internal architectural design for the VIC
- The VIC would be designed to invite visitors when they exited the garage

The Commission reviewed the site plan with Mr. Regan.

- They had studied the orientation center in Charleston, South Carolina
- Authored and presented a mission statement to the City Manager and City Commission
- The structure would cost \$18.5 million
- The purpose of the VIC was to provide a well organized facility to orient visitors to the history, sites, attractions and amenities within the area in a pressure free environment that contributed to the visitor experience
- Emphasis of the VIC was for staff to provide general information on a one-to-one basis, display exhibits featuring artifact, photographs and cultural history and the adaptive reuse of a historic building

Mr. Regan and the Commission reviewed and discussed the architecture rendering of the simple interior featuring an open area with a centrally located information desk (originally staff had position the information desk to one side), restroom facilities, artwork, banners, trolley and horse carriage desks located to the rear, brochure and informational racks, theater, gift/snack shop, small tables with seating and wood carved informational/directional signs.

- There were three months of construction remaining for the interior
- They planned to hire an interior design team to help

Mr. Burchfield said that he had taken over the interior project but the rest of the team had remained the same, and he reported as follows:

- Originally they were not certain how much money they had to work with and they had been directed to open by the time the garage was complete
- They determined to cut the project into phases
- Engaged Kurt Bowman Design to develop the conceptual Plan
- Future phases included additional exhibits for artifact display, Kiosks for

advertisement of sites etc., and expansion of the brochure and informational racks

- Displays for other areas in the county including Ponte Vedra, World Golf Village and the beaches were required by the TDC contract in order to receive the \$200,000 funding

Mr. Regan distributed photographs of the Charleston, South Carolina orientation center, and Mr. Burchfield continued to describe the interior design.

- They had considered eliminating the 45 minute movie from the project; however, it was a primary attraction for school groups, which they would not show as often but they would include orientation videos

Mr. Burchfield reported possible future elements as follows:

- Lodging, restaurant and attraction assistance, expand refreshment element, informational video stations, music enhancements, archaeological dig in progress and printed maps and timelines of the area
- They were working on a display indicating the outline of City Limits and the County that included overlays dating back to the first Spanish period in St. Augustine <sup>2</sup>

Mr. Regan said after research it was determined that it would be best to have the trolleys, trains and horse and carriage ticket sales in the VIC. He opened the floor for discussion.

Mayor Gardner distributed photographs of the Charleston, South Carolina orientation center, and said that he did not favor ticket sales inside the VIC. He suggested that they have stands or kiosks outside where the vehicles were located; moreover, he agreed with staff about putting the information desk to the side of the building. He explained that

if the information desk was centrally located it obstructed the view of the reproduction galleon at the rear of the building. He recommended flexibility of informational services as the central location would be a locked position that could not be expanded. He continued that if they put it to the side it would provide access to an office area.

Commissioner Crichlow agreed that they needed professional help with the interior design, and he stressed that the interior had to be coordinated. He questioned where the interior designer had placed the information desk, and he was informed that he had placed it centrally.

Commissioner Boles expressed concern about the central location of the information desk, because it disrupted the flow to the ship replica. He suggested that the visitors were smart enough to find the information desk in a side location.

A brief discussion regarding the number of manned kiosk operators that were in the Charleston orientation center and how the center operated.

Mayor Gardner questioned how they could refuse the ghost tours a kiosk in the VIC if the trolley, trains and horse carriages were inside. He said that 40% or more of the visitors were repeat visitors that would not require orientation.

Mr. Harriss stated that it was a philosophical decision, and staff had no problem either way. He said he imagined that the sightseeing tour companies would probably prefer to have ticket sales next to their vehicles.

Mayor Gardner questioned whether the idea of a staff member selling ticket for various attractions could be handled properly, but he suggested that it could be slightly dangerous.

Commissioner Boles suggested that they could be cautious and inform the public of all the availabilities in a static display with no

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<sup>2</sup> End of audio tape one

sales on site for anything other than City attractions and nonprofit enterprises; thereby not encouraging any commercial entity. He questioned whether the sightseeing trains, trolleys and horse and carriages were a revenue source for the City.

Mr. Harriss replied that the City charged them to sell tickets. He explained that the trailer trains paid the City \$60,000 annually to be in the VIC and the carriages paid significantly less.

Mr. Burchfield added that the City charged for rental space and the City also received a percentage of sales. He added that they would still charge them if they were outside of the VIC, as they would be selling tickets on City property.

Commissioner Crichlow suggested that a bunch of ticket sales in the VIC could be distracting and overwhelming to visitors.

Commissioner Jones agreed that there would be no problem having the ticket sales outside; therefore, it was the consensus of the Commission to do so.

A discussion regarding the information desk determined to keep it centrally located but open the top of the design to maintain visibility to the ship replica.<sup>3</sup>

Mr. Regan pointed out that there would also be retail and café sales in the VIC, as well as City sales. He said that they needed to write an objective statement addressing the sales issue.

A discussion regarding the trains and horse and carriages ensued, and it was determined that there would be static type sales in the VIC indicating that actual ticket sales were outside.

Mr. Harriss pointed out that the VIC would cost \$20,000,000, and they needed to pay for it some way. He questioned how they would

differentiate between who would pay to be inside the VIC and who would not. He questioned the Commissioner's desire.

A discussion determined not to charge TDC members for brochure racks, they would consider the situation regarding non-profit organization, they wanted to charge for-profit enterprises, and the Commission would consider the matter further.

Mr. Regan questioned whether they were meeting the mission statement with the design changes and whether they were living up to the standard of excellence for the long-term; Commission consensus was affirmative.

Commissioner Crichlow stated that he wanted to be certain to tie everything together with some theme.<sup>4</sup>

Phil McDaniel, 51 Water Street, spend some money to research what the visitors would like in the VIC, and the VIC was an excellent opportunity to demonstrate that St. Augustine was a powerful arts and cultural community

Mayor Gardner suggested that they should not expect the VIC to pay for itself.

Commissioner Jones pointed out that gender neutral advertisement, such as churches, would be easy for consideration.

Robert Hall, 42 Spanish Street, the information and interpretation effort should begin in the parking garage

Mr. Regan clarified that the current goal was to open the parking garage for the fourth of July along with the public restrooms and porches at the VIC, but landscaping and minor construction would be ongoing, and they planned to open the VIC in August.

Ed Slavin, P.O. Box 3084, use authentic Spanish guitar music in the VIC and the Spanish Quarter, as well as authentic

<sup>3</sup> Commissioner Boles departed at 11:30 a.m.

<sup>4</sup> Commissioner Crichlow departed at 11:50 a.m.

Spanish dancers and dinning in the colonial manner

Lewis Pujalsml, 72 Sanford Street, Spanish dancing could be performed on the stage in the Spanish Quarter

### **3. Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m. <sup>5</sup>

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MAYOR

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CITY CLERK

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<sup>5</sup>Transcribed by Karen Rogers, Recording Secretary