



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



Published by the Department of Public Affairs, City of St. Augustine, Florida

September 15 2009

## Vending codes approved in 7-hour session

In a marathon seven-hour session dominated by four hours of public hearings, our City Commission Monday night approved four ordinances and advanced a fifth to readjust to court rulings the city's regulations on visual arts, vending, and parades.

As the clock passed the midnight hour, commissioners had also seriously considered filling in the skateboard area of Hamilton Upchurch Park and, as they endorsed an effort to establish an Amtrak station in the city, learned that the Airport Authority has a \$75,000 grant to study creation of a multimodal transportation center with a rail station off US 1 opposite the airport.



### *Old pews, new home*

Hastings' Mount Moriah Baptist Church upgrade is our Visitor Center's gain, as eleven 8-foot, 86-year-old pews have found a new home in our video orientation area.

The church, under Pastor Greg James, son of Lincolnville civic leader Linda James, has been undergoing extensive renovation for the past several years. The project was major, but perhaps not as extensive as the 1885 church's move in 1923 from Federal Point in Putnam County to Hastings.

Senior church member Minnie Hamilton recalls the congregation moving the structure plank by plank

### *Artists: we're not performers*

Semantics brought seething from visual artists on the ordinance restricting vending activities in the Plaza to twelve spaces in the market building.

Special City Counsel Michael Kahn, a First Amendment attorney, had recommended "First Amendment expressive" be changed to "Street Performer" activity, lumping visual artists with singing, dancing, and other street entertainment.

"I'm a painter and sculptor," Richard Childs raged at commissioners. "I don't sing and dance while I'm painting and sculpting!"

Kahn argued the semantic change will make the new ordinance more defensible in court by linking it to the St. George Street performer ordinance, successfully defended in court nine years ago. But the change brought a new round of discussion that guitars, drums, and one-man bands will occupy half the market building, clashing with each other and creating a congestion of onlookers.

The \$75 a month fee for successful bidders for the twelve market building spaces was also challenged as commissioners noted clean-up costs for vagrants relieving themselves in the area during the night.

City Attorney Ron Brown said the daytime space winners can't be charged for vagrant actions, but City Manager Bill Harriss said shrubbery around the building will be removed to make it more visible and reduce such actions.

The remaining ordinances passed with little public comment - to prohibit vending along St. George Street and remove a previously added provision for parades on that street; to rescind the previous Plaza vending ordinance, and to prohibit food and beverage sales on public ways throughout the city. The new rules take effect September 24, with the first month of lottery-selected activity in the market building beginning in October.

the three miles to its present location - closer to most of the congregation's work on Hastings farms. The story's on our city [website](#).

The new ordinance, reinstating elsewhere in the code the St. George Street parade provision removed by one of the four ordinances, faces public hearing September 28. It would assure that annual events, including British Night Watch, Spanish Night Watch, and Drake's and Searle's raids, can continue along St. George Street.

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

[Previous Issues](#)

## Skateboard park future is shaky

"How much would it cost to fill it in and make a garden?" Mayor Joe Boles asked as City Chief Operations Officer John Regan updated commissioners on efforts to reduce noise levels from the skateboard area of Hamilton Upchurch Park.

"I want to register my disappointment," the mayor said. This has gone way past a little kids' skateboard area."

His comments came after impassioned pleas from homeowner Jon Hodgkin of neighboring Flamingo Drive. "Our quality of life has been damaged," he said. "This has been five months out of compliance with the city's noise ordinance, which calls for a cease and desist order, yet the city has chosen not to enforce it."

Regan said he'll get bids for a design/build 12-foot wall system to reduce noise impacting Flamingo Drive, and commissioners agreed to set skateboard park hours from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. But they also agreed the entire future of the park area will be revisited when Regan returns October 26 with greater detail on the wall system.

## *Amtrak station here, airport depot there?*

Commissioners agreed Monday to maintain the building and grounds if an Amtrak passenger train station in the city becomes reality, then learned that the Airport Authority is beginning a feasibility study for an multimodal transportation facility at the airport, with a train depot on the west side of US 1.

City Planning and Building Director Mark Knight said standard protocol for Amtrak when locating a station is to have the local government maintain the facility, while Amtrak operates the station. Amtrak and the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) plan to apply for stimulus funding to restore intercity passenger service on the FEC Corridor from Jacksonville to Miami.

Commissioner Nancy Sikes-Kline, our city's representative on the Northeast Florida Transportation Planning Organization (TPO), announced that organization has approved study funding for the airport location, one of three considered for an Amtrak location here. The others are an area off King Street and US 1, and the former Florida East Coast station at San Marco and US 1, most recently used by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

## *The True Spirit of St. Augustine*

Commissioners, restoration officials and merchants were arguing the merits of restoring the Old City Gates at a City Commission meeting in 1962. At issue was the question of halting of traffic through the gates onto St. George Street.

Suddenly a 17-year-old St. Augustine High School student asked to be recognized.

"St. Augustine would be a much nicer place for us to live if it were restored," she said. "So, it seems to me we could all give up a little to restore America's oldest city."

"Other cities not nearly as historically important as St. Augustine have been restored and we must do the same here because this is the most important part of our heritage. We shouldn't think how we are helping ourselves but how we are helping America."

*St. Augustine Record* columnist Hank Drane later reported, "Citizens say that for pure inspiration, none of them can match an impromptu appeal made by Nancy Calhoun, at a recent meeting of the city commission. Nancy, a vivacious 17-year-old, has been attending commission meetings as part of a course in government at St. Augustine High School," Drane reported.

"To the surprised spectators she explained she had lived in St. Augustine only 17 years so couldn't understand all the problems involved in restoration. But, she added, young people have an interest in the city for it would soon belong to them."

Nancy is known to most of us today as Nancy (Mrs. Ron) Birchall, who was inducted into the University of Florida Hall of Fame in recognition of her scholastic achievement and involvement in campus and community activities, and last year, as retired St. Johns County Tobacco Prevention Coordinator, received our school district's Learning Legacy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Nancy continues her community service today in numerous organizations and as a leader in the 450 Community Corps - epitomizing the True Spirit of St. Augustine.



Nancy in 1962 and today

## ***From pavement to paycheck***



Streets Team's Ramirez and Fitzgerald

Joel Ramirez' dad committed suicide, his mom's an addict, and his sister's boyfriend threw him out onto the street. John Fitzgerald lost his job and apartment through some bad financial decisions. They're years apart in age - 19 and 44 - but with the same goal: homelessness is not their choice.

Daytona City Commissioner Rick Shiver, whose mantra is, "if you just don't give up, you'll eliminate 99 percent of your competition for jobs," convinced the Salvation Army to try a Palo Alto, Calif., program, Downtown Streets Team - keeping downtown streets litter-free in exchange for a bed, a bike for transportation, and three meals a day.

Its first year has shown promise, says Joni Casillas, social services director for the Salvation Army. (Joni is also a board member of the Homeless Coalition of St. Johns County). Twelve of the 50 men who have gone through the program have found jobs and a few others have enrolled in local colleges or technical training schools.

The program's been blessed with funding. Private sources helped in the beginning, and The Salvation Army recently received a \$62,000 grant as well as a \$45,000 endowment, said Joni. The endowment will bring in an additional \$35,000 next year and \$20,000 the year after that, she said.

**The St. Augustine Report** is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The Report at [gardner@aug.com](mailto:gardner@aug.com)

Email Marketing by

