

MINUTES
 City Commission
 Town Hall Meeting
 February 3, 2011
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The City Commission of the City of Fernandina Beach, Florida, met in a Town Hall Meeting on Thursday, February 3, 2011 at 6:00 pm in the Fernandina Beach Middle School Auditorium. Present were Mayor Susan Steger presiding, Vice-Mayor Tim Poynter, Commissioners Jeffrey Bunch, Eric Childers, and Arlene Filkoff. Also present were City Manager Michael Czymbor, City Attorney Tammi Bach, and City Clerk Mary Mercer.

Mayor Steger called the meeting to order and dispensed with normal formalities. She welcomed everyone to the Town Hall Meeting and gave a special thanks to the Nassau County School District to use the auditorium.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS RELATED TO:

- What is your vision for revitalizing downtown, the waterfront, 8th Street and surrounding neighborhoods?
- What do you think the priorities should be to accomplish that vision?
- How do you think these priorities should be funded?

Mayor Steger commented that there has been a focus on the need for action to revitalize our downtown and historic districts. She noted that concerns range from aesthetics to economic. She explained that citizens want to move forward to formulate plans and timelines to respond to concerns over an uncompleted riverfront, concerns for our downtown library, concerns for our post office, and concerns over stormwater drainage issues. She noted that we need to invest in our City as a means to attract more private investment and look to prioritize projects to make the most efficient use of limited resources. She explained that the purpose of this meeting is to seek input of citizens and how citizens would suggest paying for these ideas. She pointed out that the City was pleased to partner with the Amelia Island Restoration Foundation in a strategic initiative called "Forward Fernandina" otherwise known as "F2". She explained that this group will provide additional opportunities to provide input on these important issues as well as seeking input through their short survey. She acknowledged members of the Restoration Foundation and stated that in the spring they would present the City with the information that they've gathered. She pointed out that then the City Commission will determine how to develop a strategic plan to prioritize and fund the key objectives that have been identified.

Mr. Pranab Daas, 534 Santa Maria Drive, stated that the City should maintain a strong focus on the cleanliness of City streets and bathrooms. He commented that there is a strong focus on 8th Street, but the worst part of 8th Street is the unoccupied gravel plant. He suggested the City look at acquiring that property and turning it into an enclosed park. He referred to the structures along the railroad and commented that there should be a program to improve them for various types of businesses to help support tourism. He stated that the City should identify each historic property separately and create an individualized plan for each of how they would like to enhance their conditions. He suggested maintaining the Post Office and giving it some paint and using the building for weddings, parties, etc.

Ms. Helen Tufaro explained that she came from Bethesda Maryland and they put in parking meters. She noted that the City was looking for sources of revenue, but she recommended visiting a city that has installed parking meters on every street. She requested the City consider not using parking meters in downtown Fernandina Beach.

Mr. Lynn Williams, 1899 South Fletcher, commented that if the City were to come up with a large expenditure or bond issue of some sort it would be very difficult to pass because many locals resent the idea of redoing the City for tourists. He suggested contacting the two mills to bring in plantings at a very low cost. He pointed out that in Chicago as their plantings took root the residents and other people made their buildings look better.

Mr. Bill Flynn explained that he was still trying to move the library to a better place. He commented that it was time for the City to move forward. He pointed out that there are many people in this community that still need libraries for technical things. He provided further comments in support of the library.

Mr. Max Wohlfarth, 31 North 2nd Street, proprietor of a downtown business and President of the Downtown Business Association, commented that if tourists stay away we don't have a downtown. He stated that right now downtown businesses are struggling. He noted that the Tourist Development Council (TDC) does a great job attracting tourists, but the City needs to continue to grow downtown to make it a better place for tourists and locals. He pointed out that the Downtown Merchants have been working with Representative Adkins on a landscaping plan for 8th Street that has been approved

by the State. He encouraged the City to work with Representative Adkins' office. He expressed his support of improvements to the waterfronts and the City moving forward.

Ms. Adrienne Robertson agreed with the lady that spoke about parking meters and briefly related her experience from a community that put them in. She commented that meters discourage casual shoppers from just stopping by a store.

Mr. Michael Harrison, 820 Someruelus Street, expressed his opinion that Fernandina's future is as a tourist destination. He suggested finding out from tourists why they come here and for those that don't come here what would make them come here. He also suggested looking deeply into our history and building events around our history (Preserve America Grants). He referred to the City David Yulee platted and commented that he would love to see Central Park restored to a real Central Park and greenway.

Ms. Jennifer Harrison, 820 Someruelus Street, commented that revitalization is breeding new life, new energy into the areas that tourists are attracted. She pointed out that what is good for the tourist is also good for those of us that live here full-time. She suggested looking at our existing assets to make sure we are using them to the fullest (i.e. The Little Theater). She also suggested the idea of having people come for specific events related to our history or in conjunction with other events that the City has going on. She referred to the boardwalk at Main Beach and commented that there is a beautiful river on the opposite side of the island that has the most magnificent sunsets. She suggested looking at opportunities for areas that are currently being underutilized.

Mr. Mike Clemens, Amelia Park, representing the Island Art Association, agreed that a lot of businesses have closed their doors. He pointed out that the association has made a significant financial commitment to put up a new educational facility to try to attract more people downtown. He noted that Vice-Mayor Poynter has made significant improvements to his facility and Amelia Community Theater has made significant commitments. He stated that the City can build upon those items. He commented that the Post Office building could be converted into a series of offices for lawyers, which could help preserve that facility.

Mr. Jesse Duke, 207 Seawood Drive, commented that he would like to see citywide allowing and encouraging the use of golf carts and electric cars to travel around town where the speed limit is 35 mph or less. He suggested having designated parking spots for small electric vehicles downtown. He provided additional comments about these ideas.

Ms. Donna Paz Kaufman, Amelia Park resident and owner of a small business, explained that tourists love coming here because our downtown has character. She thanked the City Commission for having this forum and talking about having a strategic plan to prioritize what it is the City wants to accomplish. She encouraged the City Commission to not let the fear of money get in the way, because where there is a will there is a way.

Mr. Bruce Malcolm, 521 Tarpon Avenue, pointed out that the City is one of the top ten in historic preservation based on the Department of Interior standards. He explained that there are three anchor buildings downtown (the train depot, the courthouse, and the Post Office). He stated that the Post Office is a copy of a palace in Florence Italy and is an architectural gem that needs to be preserved. He expressed his opinion that downtown merchants need some kind of tax relief. He pointed out that people come to see our historic district and our beaches.

Mr. Lou Goldman, 20 South 6th Street, explained that his top items include the riverfront park, Front Street, and 2nd Street north of Alachua. He stated that other items were having a new library, a new City Hall, a parking garage, and converting the Post Office into a cultural center like what Fort Myers has done. He reminded the City Commission that the City has a CRA, but it needed to be restructured. He pointed out that it was time for the City Commission to meet about the CRA.

Mr. Paul Griffin, resident of the Historic District, commented that most of the problems with 8th Street are cleanliness and some are on City property. He suggested the City send a letter to the Post Office to tell them to clean up their flower beds and trim up their trees. He agreed with the idea of opening up the waterfront to be a park area behind the monument, but the City would have to find more parking places. He pointed out that for 8th Street a plan has to be created that includes exterior siding materials, sizes, locations, fence types, etc. He referred to funding and expressed his opinion that the City does not need a bond referendum. He suggested funding it by giving rebates on property taxes to those that give the City direct plans that are approved with certified contractors.

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Ms. Lavinia Williams, 1016 Cedar Street, commented that her priority would be 8th Street because that is the first place you see when you come in. She requested the City to do something because it needs to be improved. She stated that if the City acquires the Post Office don't move the Post Office, because we need the downtown Post Office. She commented that they might not need all the space they are using, but it still needs to be downtown.

Mr. Charles Burns pointed out you always invest in the future and the Post Office is the future of Fernandina Beach along with the rest of the historic district. He commented that in the next few years grants will be available. He explained that as the economy continues to mend at the Federal and State level tax revenues will start to go up and then those grants would be available.

Mr. Thomas Morris, 1204 Fir Street, pointed out that we shouldn't forget surrounding neighborhoods and doing something for the young people, because now parks are fenced up and locked up. He suggested beautifying the surrounding neighborhoods, take care of the parks, and open them up for the young people during the summer.

Ms. Judy Tipton, 424 North Fletcher, explained that her husband and she put together the Pelican Palms center on 8th Street and made it look like downtown with plantings of palm trees. She suggested lining 8th Street with palm trees like you see on Atlantic Avenue. She pointed out that students need to have community hours to get a Bright Futures Scholarship money. She explained that she would use students and other volunteers as manpower for community service projects. She briefly explained that the school's auditorium would be renovated from funds that were earmarked in 1996 and those funds have been drawing interest ever since. She stated that this auditorium will be a cultural asset to the community and it needs to be used for other events that can be brought to the City.

Mr. Dale Dees commented that he thought the City Commission was doing a great job. He thanked the City Commission and everyone that has come out for this meeting.

Ms. Eileen Moore, 208 South 7th Street, owner of a shop on Centre Street, commented that the City doesn't have a sign like the Ritz and the Plantation does as you arrive on the island. She suggested having a nice sign that says "Welcome to Fernandina Beach" or "Fernandina Beach Straight Ahead". She pointed out that by the round-about by Harris Teeter there are no signs directing you to downtown Fernandina Beach.

Ms. Cynthia Wilson requested the City Commission keep in mind sidewalks on the streets in the surrounding areas such as 9th, 10th, and 11th. She stated that her concerns were 8th Street and the Post Office.

Mr. Chuck Hall explained that his biggest concern is the residential areas surrounding the commercial areas downtown. He noted that everyone wants growth, jobs, and economic viability. He suggested that as developers want to change downtown that the City remembers the people that already live downtown. He commented that it becomes more difficult to enjoy their residences as more growth and traffic occurs downtown.

Ms. Sharon Garbarini stated that she is an advocate of downtown. She explained that she would like to see the Post Office, the old Baptist Church, or any other large empty building on the island turned into a marine sciences or biology university. She briefly described benefits of having a university including the creation of jobs and having a labor pool to pull from.

Ms. Lynne Anderson, 326 South 7th Street, suggested having the flags flown by the Shave Bridge on a daily basis like they do on Memorial Day. She commented that this is a great way to greet everyone coming onto the island. She requested that the City not put parking meters downtown or at the beach. She also requested the City Commission consider handicap people and those that have difficulty walking to keep the boardwalk at Main Beach where people can see the ocean.

Mr. George Sheffield, 28 South 7th Street, owner of business activities on Centre Street, noted that there are so many needs out there, so it is hard to prioritize them. He referred to the waterfront and commented that it has been a priority for many years that the waterfront needs attention. He stated that Beaufort South Carolina is a wonderful model for the City to look at, because their waterfront is their centerpiece of their historic district and it draws people downtown. He briefly explained his idea to have an area downtown where different venues could happen to draw people downtown. He referred to 8th Street and suggested the idea of partnering with property owners and having tax incentives for them to do things to their properties. He commented that more landscaping brings a great deal of pride in the community.

Ms. Lisa Jones, business owner downtown, commented that the town could thrive with the cultural aspects of having a public or private college downtown. She pointed out that the existing library could be used or expanded instead of making it a parking structure. She noted that the City has to plan for growth and have more parking, but she didn't believe it was a pressing issue. She suggested an idea to have two lanes by the railroad tracks for trucks only as a way to get truck traffic off of 8th Street. She also suggested looking at Centre Street from 4th Street to 8th Street being included in the City lighting and having flower beds. She agreed with the idea of using students as part of the labor pool and the students can also be proud of what they've contributed to the community.

Mr. Mark Kaufman briefly explained that there are four stages of group process and group development (forming, storming, norming, and performing). He commented that every time there is a change of commissioners you start the process all over again and the public sees it as a vicious circle, because you go back to square one. He pointed out that in the community there is duality with people who have been here for generations and then there are people that have been here for 10 years that have come from other places bringing the best of what they've experience elsewhere. He stated that there is also duality where some think the solution is to raise taxes to pay for the services we would benefit from while others would say no they want to cut spending. He suggested conducting a straw poll of the voters about the priorities, what the City needs to go forward, and how to best get there.

Mr. Tom Morrison, business owner on Centre Street, stated that a priority would be to fix up 8th Street with landscaping. He suggested having prisoners help clean up the areas. He commented that maybe the junior college could use the Post Office building. He expressed his hope to get some of these projects going.

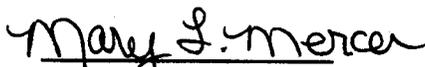
CLOSING COMMENTS BY AMELIA ISLAND-FERNANDINA RESTORATION FOUNDATION: Commissioner Filkoff extended her thanks for everyone that came out for this meeting and showing interest in what the City is trying to do. She pointed out that the City Commission needs to hear from the community of what they want in the City. Mayor Steger thanked Mr. Adam Kaufman, Ms. Suanne Thamm, Mr. Chuck Hall, and Ms. Susan Mowery for all their help with the Restoration Foundation. Mr. Adam Kaufman, Vice-President of the Restoration Foundation, thanked the City Commission for holding this meeting. He pointed out that this is the beginning of a conversation that the Restoration Foundation and Forward Fernandina wants to have with the community as a whole. He requested that everyone participate in the survey that would be published in the News Leader February 16th and 18th as well as being put online. He encouraged that the survey be shared with others.

Ms. Susan Alexander, 118 North 15th Street, reminded the community that the pulp wood mills employ 1,000 people with good paying jobs. She stated that they have a lot to offer this town.

Mayor Steger thanked everyone for coming out to talk about these very important topics for our City. She encouraged citizens to keep up with Forward Fernandina via the City website www.fbfl.us/f2 and the Restoration Foundation website www.ameliarestoration.org.

ADJOURNMENT: There being no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 7:26 pm.

ATTEST:


 MARY D. MERCER
 City Clerk


 SUSAN HARDEE STEGER
 Mayor-Commissioner