

A workshop meeting of the City Commission was held on September 7, 2011 at 5:00 p.m. in the Commission Chambers at the Municipal Administration Building. The meeting was called to order by Mayor Michael S. Carter.

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT: Jonathan Thornhill; John Paul Rogers; Betty Wojcik; Terry Y. Howell; Mayor Michael S. Carter.

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT:

CITY REPRESENTATIVES PRESENT: Judith H. Delmar, City Manager; Clara VanBlargan, City Clerk; Jacquie Hawkins, Deputy City Clerk

Agenda Item 1. Discussion of a Possible Change in the Parade Route and After Parade Activity Location for the Lake Wales Mardi Gras Celebration and a Proposed Change in the Parade Route for the Christmas Parade

The full staff memo is incorporated into the minutes.

[Begin Agenda memo]

SYNOPSIS

Direction by the Commission would allow the Mardi Gras Committee and the Kiwanis Club to move forward with their plans for the events and submittal of a special event permit application to the City

The Lake Wales Mardi Gras Executive Committee had discussed a possible route change for the 2012 parade. The committee and each Krewe met on September 1, 2011 to discuss several proposals and voted to accept one of them to present to the commission for consideration. In addition to the route a request is being made to consider the use of Lake Wailes Park for the pre-parade and after parade activities. The Lake Wales Kiwanis Club has also considered a route change as well for the Christmas Parade

While not necessarily supporting the proposed routes, the Police Department and the Streets Department have long supported the idea of a different route for the parades that use the downtown area of Park and Stuart Avenues. In past years, concern has been expressed for the limited space on Park and Stuart Avenues for the floats during parades and the safety of parade watchers. With the large crowds that attend these events there are damages to public property that have to be addressed. Staff finds plants and flowers trampled, hedges and trees damaged, and irrigation heads broken. This repair and restoration work is performed at public expense.

Parade organizers are asking for commission direction so that they can proceed with plans for their events and be able to submit the special event permit application to the City in a timely manner.

Alternative route - Lake Wales Mardi Gras, February 18, 2012

The proposed parade route and after parade event location is as follows:

Line up at Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard on the east side of the City Administration Building, travel east on Central Avenue to Scenic Highway (SR17), turn east on Park Avenue, travel on park Avenue to Lakeshore Boulevard where the parade ends at Lake Wailes Park, hold pre-parade and after parade activities at Lake Wailes Park from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Original route:

Line up at Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard, east on Central Avenue to Scenic Highway, north on Scenic to Stuart Avenue, west on Stuart Avenue to First Street, First Street to Park Avenue, west

on Park Avenue to Third Street Pre-parade and after parade activities held in Stuart, Marketplace, portion of Market Street between Central and Stuart, and parking lot at SR17 and Stuart.

Alternative route- Christmas Parade December 10, 2011

The proposed route would be as follows;

Line up on North 5th Street and on Orange Avenue by Crystal Lake Park and the Methodist Church and on the Horseshoe drive in Lake Wailes Park, travel west on Park Avenue to Scenic Highway (SR17), turn south on Scenic Highway to Central Avenue, turn west on Central Avenue and travel to Martin Luther King Boulevard where the parade ends

Original route –

Line up on Park Avenue south of Scenic Highway, west on Park Avenue to Wetmore, south on Wetmore to Stuart Avenue, east on Stuart Avenue to Scenic Highway, south on Scenic to Central Avenue, west on Central to First Street

The FDOT road closing permit would still be required for any routes involving Scenic Highway (SR17). This permit would be applied for at the same time the organizers submit a special event permit application to the City.

OTHER OPTIONS

Keep the existing route and pre-parade and after parade activities location for the Lake Wales Mardi Gras and keep the existing route for the Christmas parade

FISCAL IMPACT

The parade route changes would reduce the number of officers required and city staff needed for clean up. The pre-parade and after parade activities at Lake Wailes Park would involve police officers and the cost for these services would be part of in-kind services to the Mardi Gras Committee.

[End Agenda Memo]

City Manager's Administrative Assistant Katie Kinloch reviewed Agenda Item 1.

Commissioner Howell asked if the two parades needed to be voted on separately and Ms. Delmar said yes, and that they also needed to be discussed separately. She explained that the organizational committees not only have to submit a special event permit application for Commission approval, but they also have to get approval from FDOT for road closures, which takes a while. Therefore, they need to know the route they will be taking tonight so they can get the process started. If there is a problem with the proposed route other arrangements will have to be made.

MARDI GRAS PARADE

Commissioner Rogers made the following comments about the proposed Park Avenue route:

- Commissioner Rogers had concerns about the possible property damage to the nine homeowners living on the south side of Park Avenue between the Presbyterian Church and Lake Shore Drive. He asked if yellow tape could be used to block off that section. Ms. Kinloch said that could be made part of the conditions. Commissioner Wojcik asked if that section could be barricaded to prevent access and used as an un-staging area, which would reduce the City's liability. People could then line up anywhere along the route, including at the Lake Wailes Park itself, but not within that un-staging area. Police Chief Velasquez said that barricades were pricey and no money had been allotted for that in the budget. He said anything was possible on paper

but in reality it may be difficult to keep people out. Ms. Delmar said doing so would remove half of the spectator's viewing area on a route that would be already shorter than the traditional route.

- Commissioner Rogers asked if the proposed route would make it easier or harder on the Police Department. Chief Velasquez said it would be easier for them to prepare if using the downtown route because they know from past experience what to prepare for whereas, if switched to the new route, there are a number of unknowns. He said there was discussion about standardizing the parade route, requiring all parades to go straight down Central Avenue to the lake, solving the problem of all the turns on the downtown route. But, he said that doing so would spread out the police department's responsibility, increasing the manpower and thus the cost. They can't pull officers from the rest of the City to cover the parade route because they still have to protect the rest of the City, including unprotected cars when participants leave them unattended to participate in the activities at the lake.
- Commissioner Rogers said his concern was with keeping pedestrians and participants safe, though he realized the police department has a manpower problem and is working on a tight budget. Chief Velasquez said safety was a consideration and he gave an example of a person who was killed in another town by a float in a parade. He said there was a greater chance for something like that happening in the Mardi Gras parade due to people running into the street to collect thrown beads.
- Commissioner Rogers suggested that using the Park Avenue route would lessen the overall cost considering all the damage downtown with people stomping on the flowers and breaking sprinkler heads, especially now when a lot of money was spent on the new landscaping.

Commissioner Thornhill made the following comments:

- He was also concerned about the new plants on the downtown route.
- He said he was a traditionalist and liked the downtown route and his own children always liked the fact that they could watch the parade on Central Avenue, then take a shortcut to Park Avenue to watch it again, then on to Stuart Avenue etc., which on the new route would be lost.
- He said he thought one of the purposes for having a parade was to bring business to downtown merchants. Ms. Kinloch said the Mardi Gras Committee provides the vendors and they are not usually downtown businesses. Commissioner Wojcik said that there are usually more people in town than the downtown businesses can handle and so most of them close up.
- Commissioner Thornhill asked City Attorney Chuck Galloway about the City's liability. Mr. Galloway said the organizations have to provide the City with proof of insurance.
- Commissioner Rogers asked if the Mardi Gras change had been proposed in order to reduce the in-kind portion they would have to pay. Ms. Delmar said the change was basically to make the event more profitable.
- Commissioner Rogers thought there would be more participation if the route went down Central Avenue to Lake Wailes instead of Park Avenue, though he did not think there would be a problem on Park Avenue because he didn't think many people would want to line up along the area in front of homes except maybe those who live there and he didn't think people would want to stand on the steep slope running down to Crystal Lake.
- Commissioner Rogers said he would go along with whatever would keep the event coming with the least amount of problems.

Charles William Ouellette Jr., President of the Executive Mardi Gras Committee, made the following comments:

- **The event has to be a money maker:** Their insurance cost is outrageous; there are not as many krewes as they had in the past and was therefore bringing in less money; and there are downtown taverns wanting to cut into their sales by selling beer, which is their primary money maker.
- **Using the traditional route:**
 - There is a problem with downtown merchants not wanting to move their cars on time.

- The Mardi Gras Committee would be willing to consider a different location for the beer tent if it was deemed a problem. Ms. Delmar suggested putting the food vendors in the parking lot location and the beer tent on Market Street where there was more space. Mr. Ouellette said they could look into that.
- They would be in favor of the traditional route if they could add Friday to the permit, giving them Friday afternoon for music and the selling of beer, increasing their ability to make money and making it easier for them to find vendors because they would be getting an additional day for their fee.
- **Using the proposed route:**
 - A route needed to be found that everyone could feel good about and would give them a shot at making enough money to continue having the event. They came up with the proposed Park Avenue route as a compromise hoping it would alleviate everyone's concerns with using Central Avenue.
 - He said he understood the concerns regarding personal property along the route and the liability problem with the steep slope going down to Crystal Lake.
 - They had thought that having the activities at the lake instead of downtown would solve the downtown landscaping problem.

Mayor Carter made the following comments:

- Mayor Carter said that any part of the parade going through residential areas would be a huge problem and a liability to the City that no amount of tape in the world would solve.
- The request for an additional day was being made so that the Mardi Gras organization could make more money by selling more beer, which introduces another set of problems with people driving home far from sober.
- The Committee has enough resources to clean up the lake afterwards but is asking the City to help clean up the downtown area.
- Extending the event for another day might need consideration if it will help the event survive.
- Staff needed to come up with a standard parade route for all organizations in the near future.
- He did not support changing the parade route from downtown.

Commissioner Howell made the following comments.

- The Mardi Gras Committee needed some direction. The Commission did not need to discuss what kind of changes need to be made to the route until there is Commission consensus that they want the route to change. So that should be the first step.
- The problem caused by floats having to make so many turns with the traditional route would be solved if the route went straight down Central Avenue to the lake.
- One of the unknowns is whether or not people would want to line up in the problem area on Park Avenue.

Commissioner Wojcik made the following comments:

- Mardi Gras is an event that people look forward to. It draws people into the community as well as bringing our people together.
- She said she would be in favor of changing the route if the liability issues could be addressed concerning the drop-off to Crystal Lake etc.
- The proposed route would go partially down Scenic Highway giving people the historic downtown flavor without having to make all those twists and turns.
- If the event did not go downtown, the businesses could stay open and people could shop and then drive down to the lake for the Mardi Gras event. She said she would not park downtown, walk all the way to the lake for the event, and then walk all the way back to get her car and she doubted other people would. She and they would just park at the lake.

Mayor Carter asked each Commissioner what route they were in favor of.

- Commissioner Howell said she was in favor of changing the route.

- Commissioner Rogers said he would go along with the others.
- Commissioner Thornhill wanted to keep the same route with an additional day.
- Commissioner Wojcik said she wanted to change the route and have it extended a day.
- Mayor Carter was in favor of keeping the same route with an additional day.

Mayor Carter said the consensus was tie two to two and that Commissioner Rogers would have to be the swing vote.

Mr. Ouellette suggested making only a few changes the first year to see if it fixes things. He suggested having everything take place downtown again, just for this year, but adding the extra day, trying to get cooperation from the businesses, and getting banners out so people driving on US 27 will know the event is taking place.

Commissioner Rogers asked to hear from the Streets and Parks Department about the impact it has on them. Beverly Pennington from Field Operations said it takes them about three weeks after Mardi Gras to remove damaged plants, trim broken tree branches that people climb up in, and replace the broken irrigation heads. She said that last year she saw people climbing onto the awnings and the business owners had to threaten them to get them to come down. She suggested having the route go down Sessoms on the other side of Crystal Lake instead of Park Avenue. Mayor Carter said he didn't want them in his back yard. Commissioner Howell said that going further on Scenic Highway would entail less turns. Ms. Delmar said she wasn't sure FDOT would approve closing a major road to that magnitude but she didn't think anyone had ever asked so it would be worth pursuing.

Commissioner Rogers said he was concerned about the damage downtown and also people not wanting the parade along their property. Because he saw no reasonable solution he said he hated to be the deciding factor. He asked Police Chief Velasquez what he thought the best and cheapest route would be. The Chief said it would be the current route with the extended day even though that would mean some unknowns and would increase their expenditures. He would try to cover the event as efficiently as possible making sure everyone is safe. The suggestion to standardize the route and straighten the curves was something he supported. Commissioner Rogers suggested trying the new route this year; having the Mardi Gras Parade go from City Hall to the lake and the Kiwanis Christmas Parade from the lake to City Hall.

Mr. Ouellette asked that they keep the traditional route for one more year but with the extra day. The Commissioners were asked again and the consensus was to do that. Commissioner Wojcik said that would give the Commission a chance to see if it works out. Commissioner Rogers suggested using the outdoor stage area next to the tennis courts as an alternate staging area.

CHRISTMAS PARADE

TJ McKeon from the Kiwanis Club said the Christmas Parade was coming up very soon and he could not begin to submit the paperwork until they were told which route was approved and where they will be lining up. He made the following comments:

- He said he submitted the paperwork to the City twice with different routes and each time there were problems.
- They have been lining up for the Christmas Parade on Park Avenue from Lake Shore to SR 17 for the last nine or ten years and have not had one complaint, even though there were hundreds to thousands of kids on that road, because they completely barricade the road, they make sure they leave room for residents to get to their homes, and don't block driveways.
- He was not opposed to the proposed new route because it had the following good points:
 - The staging area would be moved to the lake instead of Park Avenue, which he thought would work wonderfully well for them.
 - Having one unified route, whether the parade goes east or west, with one set detour would make it easier for the police, FDOT, and the Streets Department.

- Allowing people to park at the lake will provide a lot more parking space than is available downtown.
- It would make it easier for parents because they could drop-off and pick-up their children at the lake instead of having the drop-off on Park Avenue and pick-up at City Hall. He explained the problems they now have with the logistics of doing that.
- He said he would like the staging area to be at the horseshoe by the basketball courts at the lake, and on 5th street from the Methodist Church to Crystal Lake Park.
- He said the parade route did not matter to him, the choices being to:
 - Go straight up Central Avenue to City Hall, a cheaper and far safer way, take a right turn onto MLK Blvd., a right onto Sessoms Avenue, and then go straight to the lake.
 - Go up Park Avenue, take a left onto Scenic, a right onto Central Avenue to City Hall, a right onto MLK Blvd., and then a right onto Sessoms Avenue back to the lake.

The consensus was for the Christmas Parade to use the Park Ave. route.

Ms. Delmar asked if the walking units would have to walk back to the lake as well. Mr. McKeon said he would give them that option.

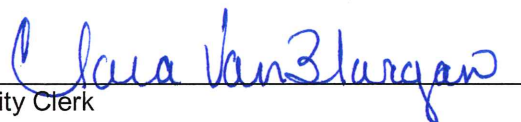
Mr. McKeon asked if they would be allowed to throw candy from the floats because Mardi Gras throws beads. Ms. Delmar said the rule was not to allow it for safety reasons as it increases the possibility of someone getting hurt.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.



Mayor/Commissioner

ATTEST:



City Clerk