

# City Commission WorkShop Meeting Minutes

December 10, 2021

(APPROVED)

12/10/2021 - Minutes

## 1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL

**Members Present:** Mayor Eugene Fultz, Robin Gibson, Jack Hilligoss, Daniel Williams, Terry Howell

**Staff Present:** James Slaton, City Manager; Jennifer Nanek, City Clerk; Albert C. Galloway, City Attorney

Mayor Fultz called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

## 2. City Manager Comments

James Slaton, City Manager, reviewed the planned format for the meeting. The primary purpose is to talk about growth management and the processes. Several speakers will talk about the development process. He thanked the speakers for attending.

Mr. Slaton said that Autumn Cochella, Development Services Manager, will start with the 8 steps of the Land Development process. Then Mark Bennett, Development Services Director, will discuss urban sprawl. After Mark is complete then Jack Brandon will further talk about urban sprawl from a legal perspective. David Hitchcock, Realtor, will talk about market trends. Then Ellis Hunt will discuss agriculture and citrus and concerns related to development.

He asked that all questions be held to the end.

## 3. Land Development Process

### Presentation - Land Development Process

Autumn Cochella, Development Services Manager, reviewed the 8 steps of the Land Development process starting with annexation. Annexation is done at the City level. These can be voluntary or involuntary. Usually these are voluntary where the land owner is petitioning to annex. Step 2 is the Future Land Use Map Amendment a very general high level visionary tool for development. This can regulate density. This is reviewed by the DEO and the regional planning council. Next is Step 3 the Zoning Map Amendment. She explained the differences between this map and the land use map. The zoning map is more specific to development or construction. Ms. Cochella then described the Site Development Plan Review and permit process. Consideration is given to the character of an area and the availability of public facilities to ensure compatibility and coordination of land uses within a given geographic area. Every development goes to the Development Review Committee which is made up of representatives from various departments in the City. The next step is the site plan which involves detailed engineering for things like utilities, drainage, streets, sidewalks, permits and more. Next step is site construction or moving dirt. The last step is going vertical with construction after final approval.

James Slaton, City Manager, asked Ms. Cochella to review the time line for the Commission. Ms. Cochella explained that the whole process can take 2 years or more as the State or DEO will review these projects. Some projects like Leoma's Landing have been in process since 2014. Mark Bennett, Development

Services Director, explained what the DEO reviews and what their concerns usually are.

#### 4. Presentation - Urban Sprawl

##### Presentation - Urban Sprawl

Mark Bennett discussed the definition of Urban Sprawl and what it looks like. He shared some of the indicators of Urban sprawl from Florida Statutes and said that urban sprawl needs to be determined on a case by case basis. He shared slides showing examples of urban sprawl such as Lake Pierce Ranchettes and strip commercial development. Mr. Bennett then shared strategies on how to avoid urban sprawl such as planning for growth, using the indicators as a guide, land development regulations, incentives, infrastructure based policies, land acquisition and conservation easements and education programs. Mr. Bennett said there are some considerations to keep in mind such as the need for housing, that revitalization and new development can occur at the same time, and private property rights. He said one factor should not deter a project and not all developments need mixed housing. Mr. Bennett then shared examples of incompatible developments. Do the developments fit together? We need to create pockets where we do want urban development. He said that Lake Wales can be a pocket of strategic density as we have urban services available here that are not available in the county. Growth and Development should be in cities not county areas.

#### 5. Growth Management - Jack Brandon

##### Growth Management Presentation

Jack Brandon, long time area resident reviewed his background and the history of growth management in Polk County and when cities were required at some point to have comprehensive plans and planning departments. Lake Wales should accommodate growth and be sure we can provide services. Each development should be evaluated. Mr. Brandon said that Cities should review utilities, transportation, fire and police as we grow. Central Florida is growing and what role should Lake Wales play? Many recognize the benefits of living in this area. Lake Wales is ideally situated. We have good schools and a good quality of life. Mr. Brandon said that Lake Wales should evaluate its services to be sure we can handle any growth. We want connectivity. We want recreation and walkability. We need to expand services using impact fees. Development can help revitalize our downtown. Lake Wales and other nearby cities should be proactive concerning growth. We want more people coming to our downtown. We need to create the atmosphere and environment to demand quality from developers. The leadership comes from the Commission. An abandoned citrus grove that won't be replanted is a great opportunity.

Mayor Fultz said this was perfect. We need quality development.

#### 6. Real Estate Trends - David Hitchcock

##### Real Estate trends Presentation

Mark Bennett, Development Services Director, said this presentation was given to the planning board after some questions they had. David Hitchcock, a former Lake Wales resident and realtor, reviewed real estate trends in Lake Wales and nearby cities. Lot prices and house prices are going up. People today want smaller lots. Mr. Hitchcock reviewed the timeline for developing a subdivision which takes on average about 2 years. According to the 2020 Census this is one of the fastest growing areas in the US. Mr. Hitchcock reviewed the issue of lot sizes. Builders prefer smaller lots as they are most desired by buyers. Mr. Hitchcock addressed concerns that we might be in another bubble like in 2007 and 2008. He said there might be some cooling of home prices but this would not be like 2008. Lake Wales is no longer hidden. People are coming Lake Wales is no longer a secret.

#### 7. Agriculture /Citrus Industry - Ellis Hunt

##### Agriculture Presentation

Ellis Hunt, long time resident of the area, said that his family has been in the area for 6 generations. He served on the Polk County Planning board for many years. He learned that compromise is important when development is coming. He shared the history of groves and selling to developers. The Citrus industry is not doing so well as to turn developers down. Growth has been coming for awhile and it may finally be here. He said that Florida's Natural has invested about 42 million in new trees to keep juice coming. They are committed to the Citrus industry and are here to stay.

James Slaton, City Manager, explained that by annexing groves the city can possibly increase our water capacity. Development can bring in financial benefits including impact fees. Mr. Slaton reviewed the list of impact fees. Leoma's landing will bring in an estimated \$3 million in impact fees to the City. These funds can help improve the quality of life and improve amenities. We have \$4 million in repairs needed for current facilities. We are going through a Parks Master Planning process. If we want these new amenities we have to pay for them. Growth will benefit all our residents. These new homes will increase our revenue \$450,000 annually from one development. Our Streets resurfacing project is underfunded. All the money that comes in is reinvested in the community. We are redeveloping our core. New residents can help strengthen our downtown. Growth will support our local businesses and keep our millage rate down.

#### 8. Growth Management Discussion

Deputy Mayor Gibson said he is impressed with bringing in local experts who know us. We can choose the developers to work with. There are developers who are a class act that will develop a quality product. They can help achieve what we want.

Jack Brandon said developers will work with the City. They have a lot at risk. The key ingredient is being forthcoming. They want to bring what the City wants.

David Hitchcock said that they will bring in those that are qualified and they will work with the City. Deputy Mayor Gibson said we need high standards. Mr. Hitchcock said that some cities have standards that are too high.

Deputy Mayor Gibson asked how we can encourage infill in Lake Wales? Mark Bennett, Development Services Director, said that in the core areas impact fees are waived and higher density is allowed in urban areas. Deputy Mayor Gibson shared positive examples of growth. How do we pick good developers and still be fair? Mr. Bennett said his staff serves as gatekeepers to prevent bad development. There are some proposals that they say no to and some things they steer clear of. James Slaton, City Manager, said we have to set standards. Deputy Mayor Gibson said the standards require discipline.

Commissioner Howell asked about schools. All the new homes mean we need more schools. Mr. Bennett explained about how school concurrency works. Schools must be built where they will be at 90% capacity upon opening. Polk County Schools are aware of the growth and are planning for it. He anticipates that we will need 2 Elementary schools, a middle school and a high school in the next few years. Deputy Mayor Gibson said we have high school impact fees.

Mayor Fultz said that we are on the right track. We can help our downtown. We need to talk to the developers as they come in. We need to look at the mall situation as residents over there may leave. We need to have confidence in staff but still ask questions along the way. We need to keep eyes on the ball. He asked staff to not hide anything from the commission or they may lose confidence in staff. Mr. Slaton agreed.

Commissioner Williams thanked the speakers and said we need to be proactive. We need to plan, prepare and perform. This Commission is committed to Lake Wales.

Commissioner Hillgoss said most of the griping is about roads and this needs to be discussed further.

Mayor Fultz said we need to educate residents on these issues. Mr. Slaton said that our new marketing person begins Monday.

9. CITY COMMISSION AND MAYOR COMMENTS

10. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

Eugene L. Foster

Mayor

ATTEST:

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City Clerk