

Commission Meeting Minutes
March 19, 2024
5:30 pm

Mayor Roberts said before we begin the official meeting of the City of Starke Commission, there'll be a time for voluntary prayer and pledge of allegiance. Those willing to do so are asked to stand and Commissioner Smith will lead us in a prayer and the pledge.

Mayor Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:31 pm.

This was the second regular meeting of the month. Members in attendance included Mayor Scott Roberts, Commissioner Janice D. Mortimer, Commissioner Danny Nugent, Commissioner Andy Redding and Commissioner Shannon Smith. Also present were Executive Assistant Cathy Bradley, Zoning & Planning Office Manager Lance Campbell, Interim Fire Chief Jason Clemons, Deputy Clerk Lisa Heeder, Finance Director James Hughes, Police Chief Jeff Johnson, Captain Kevin Mueller, City Manager Drew Mullins, Building and Zoning Official Kevin Powell, Sheriff Gordon Smith and Attorney Scott Walker.

Mayor Roberts asked for any agenda changes, additions or deletions. Commissioner Mortimer requested that item 4.B. be moved to the City Manager's Report as item D and that item E on the City manager's Report be added to the agenda with the subject of pay increase for the manager due to the increased duties. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to accept the agenda with the changes. Commissioner Redding made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Mortimer. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the consent agenda. Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve the consent agenda. It was seconded by Commissioner Nugent. The motion passed 5-0.

There was no old business.

There were no emergency items.

Mayor Roberts read the statement for citizens requests the city of Starke welcomes you to this meeting. This is a time set aside for our citizens and general public to address the city commission. This is not a question or answer time. It is not a public political forum, nor is it a time for personal accusations or derogatory remarks to or about city personnel. If you would like to address the commission, please complete a form, come to the podium when you're called, speak into the microphone and state your name and address for the record. Please limit your comments to not more than three minutes. Your participation is welcome. There was no citizens participation.

There were no public hearings.

Mayor Roberts asked for quasi-judicial hearings. Attorney Walker read Ordinance Number 2024-02 by title only. This is Ordinance Number 2024-02, an ordinance of the City of Starke, Florida, amending the future land use plan map of the City of Starke Comprehensive Plan, as amended, relating to an amendment of more than 50 acres of land, pursuant to an application, R230511A, by the property owner of said acreage, under the amendment procedures established in sections 163.3161 through 163.3248 of the Florida Statutes, as amended; providing for a change in the land use classification from county residential, low density (less than or equal to 2 dwelling units per acre) to city high density residential (more than 8 less than 20 units per acre) and city commercial on certain lands within the corporate limits of the City of Starke, Florida; providing for severability; repealing all ordinances in conflict; and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion if you decide will be to pass Ordinance Number 2024-02 upon first reading by title only. Now to determine if there's any ex parte communications on either of the two items coming up on the agenda.

Commissioner Nugent said no. Commissioner Smith said no. Commissioner Mortimer said no. Commissioner Redding said no. Mayor Roberts said no. Attorney Walker said if you plan to testify stand up raise your right hand. Do you swear or affirm to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Mr. Powell and Gerry Dedenbach said yes. Mr. Powell said we are bringing back to you the second reading for the Osceola Land & Timber property. The state has approved this project so that's the only change we have from the previous reading of this ordinance. There has been no additional information. He asked for any questions from the board. There were none. Attorney Walker said at this time the applicant has an opportunity to present this case. Mr. Dedenbach introduced himself representing CHW Professional Consultants. We'd like to just enter all the evidence that was previously put in the form of the application, the staff report, the Regional Planning Council's report, and of course the State's Department of Commerce report. We're pleased that their expedited review saw no comments on this and we hope that you will, therefore, adopt this amendment as requested. Thank you. Attorney Walker said if there's no cross examination the board can call for a vote then we will need citizen comments. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve Ordinance Number 2024-02. Commissioner Nugent made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. Attorney Walker asked if anyone in the audience wishes to comment on anything that's presented or wants to comment on this particular ordinance. No one responded. The motion passed 5-0.

Attorney Walker said I'll read the title of the next ordinance, which is the same property we just did land use planning on and now we're going to do the zoning in keeping with the land use plan. This is ordinance number 2024-03, an ordinance of the City of Starke, Florida, amending the zoning map of the City of Starke Land Development Code, as amended; relating to the rezoning of 10 or more contiguous acres of land pursuant to an application, Z 23-03, by the property owner of said acreage; providing for rezoning from county rural,

residential (RR) to city multi-family, high density residential (R-2B) and City Highway Commercial District (B-3) of certain lands within the corporate limits of the City of Starke, Florida; repealing all ordinances in conflict; providing for severability; and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass Ordinance Number 2024-03 upon its reading by title only at the appropriate time and I assume all of the statements about ex parte pertain to this ordinance as well. Everybody's shaking their head yes, so that's the case. The witnesses, I believe, have been duly sworn previously, so that holds over to this ordinance. Mr. Powell said again this is our second reading. Staff has no new evidence or information on this property pending any questions from the board regarding this staff would recommend approval. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-03. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve Ordinance 2024-03. It was seconded by Commissioner Mortimer. Mayor Roberts asked for any public comments. There were no public comments. The motion passed 5-0.

Mayor Roberts said before we go into the city manager's report, I'd like to read something that I received from the Police Chief, Jeff Johnson. I want to read it into the record. It's addressed to me Scott Roberts, Mayor of the City of Starke dated March 18, 2024. After much thought and prayer, it is with great pride that submitting my irrevocable resignation of the Office of the Chief of Police and will retire effective May 1, 2024. I am requesting to be put on the agenda on April 2, 2024 to formally thank the citizens and friends that have been a vital part of my career. Commissioner Nugent said seeing how you got that letter the Ordinance 2024-07 I think we really can table that because the position has been phased out. Mayor Roberts said no, that's addressing two different things.

Mr. Mullins said so the first thing is the FMPA Restoring Communities Award. This award is given out to communities that assist others in aid when a hurricane comes through to help them restore power. We got this award last year for Hurricane Idalia. We actually went out and assisted two co-ops. This is the first time the City of Starke has done something major for another community. So, I'd like to ask Mr. Warren if he has anything to add. Mr. Warren said we should help other people because more people will be willing to come help us if we do have a major problem. Mayor Roberts said when you go out like that you represent us in a very good way and we appreciate what all of you do. Commissioner Mortimer said you guys are out in the field and we don't always get an opportunity to share our appreciation but your job is daunting and it's very important so thank you for keeping the lights on in the city and for helping our sister cities. Commissioner Smith said thank you. Commissioner Nugent said I appreciate you and your job is dangerous. Thank you.

Mr. Mullins said the next item on the agenda is the law enforcement report. Captain Kevin Mueller said we have a report that we completed for two weeks and please let us know how often you want the report. All the numbers that you see here are within the city limits of Starke regardless of the topic that we're looking at. He presented the report. Commissioner Smith suggested doing the

report once a month. Captain Mueller said he will bring the report on the first meeting of the month.

Sheriff Smith said our guys have been working on something from four years ago. There was a young man killed in Starke by the name of Demetri Blount. Over the last few weeks, we did come up with some new leads. Our team has been looking at it. Katie Jeffries from First Coast News is doing a story on it. If you will, please remember our community for a local family. A triple homicide, which definitely was tragic to our community shocked everybody they were a local Starke family, most of their life. The funeral will be Saturday so please keep the family in your thoughts and your prayers.

Mr. Mullins said at the last commission meeting, you all asked the attorney about bringing back an ordinance concerning the Chief of Police. Attorney Walker said there is an existing ordinance and this would amend the ordinance. You see the strike through and underline. The new provision would be that the position of the Chief of Police will be ceremonial in nature. The Chief of Police will not have the authority to make any arrests or write citations, will conduct himself in such a manner so as to represent his ability to enforce the laws in the state of Florida, and the Chief of Police will immediately convey all information and criminal activity to the Bradford County Sheriff for further action. The Chief of Police will not have the authority to bind the city contractually or obligate the city to a third-party in any manner. All property owned by the city in custody of the Chief of Police will be provided to the city and the city shall be custodian of the property henceforth. The Chief of Police's salary is ceremonial in nature, so his or her salary shall be \$1.00 per year. The rest of the provisions in the ordinance are standard. Mayor Roberts asked if there are any questions. Commissioner Nugent said since the Police Chief resigned and the sheriff has already taken control of the documents. I don't think we really need to do this. We can just table it. Mayor Roberts said we had the attorney address that but what we're doing is taking care of the position and getting the ordinance where it's more in line with what we're doing rather than us just doing it without correcting the ordinance. Commissioner Smith asked could we make this ordinance effective May 1. Attorney Walker said you certainly can. Commissioner Smith said that would be what I would like. Commissioner Mortimer said I very much agree with Mayor Roberts, this is not about an individual. This is about what we need to do to get our policies and procedures in order and as far as the effective date, since we already know what Mr. Johnson is going to do, I think making it effective now would be appropriate. Mayor Roberts said so, this will be the first reading. Attorney Walker said yes sir. If you'd like me to do that now. Mayor Roberts said we are going to have the attorney do the first reading, then I'll call for a motion. Attorney Walker said this is an ordinance of the City of Starke, Florida, Ordinance Number 2024-07 an ordinance of the City Commission of the City of Starke, Florida relating to Chapter 62, Article II, Divisions 1 and 2, Sections 62-31 and 62-51 through 62-53, providing for an amendment to the duties and the salary of the Chief of Police in the City of Starke Florida; amending the duties, custody of city property and salary of the Police Chief within the City of Starke; providing

direction for codification of this ordinance; repealing all ordinances in conflict; providing for severability; and providing for an effective date. My understanding based upon the comments is you wish to have the effective date as of May 1, 2024. Commissioner Mortimer said no, I don't. Attorney Walker said so whoever makes the motion needs to. Commissioner Mortimer said I'll make a motion that Ordinance Number 2024-07 be approved on first reading as presented. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. Mayor Roberts said I have a motion and a second for the first reading effective immediately. Mayor Roberts asked if there is any further discussion. Commissioner Smith said I was all for it, it was just the effective day. Commissioner Nugent said I was against this. The motion passed 3-2. Commissioner Nugent and Commissioner Smith opposed the motion.

Mr. Mullins said next up will be the early retirement and Scott Baur with the Resource Centers plans to do a brief presentation. Mr. Baur said you should have before you the material that I wish to present this evening and I'd like to begin by thanking the City Commission for allowing me to address you this evening on behalf of the Firefighters Board of Trustees who have proposed to the city an early retirement incentive to retire immediately the three most senior members of the fire department. To do so will result in a pension cost and a payroll savings. If you take the three most senior members of the department and they are the highest paid members of your department in general, then you can replace or not replace them at a lower payroll expense to let them leave sooner than the plan anticipated and does incur a pension cost. So, in very simple terms, if you turn to the second page, what is an early retirement incentive. It's a means for the city to go ahead and create some immediate savings for the city as it relates to the payroll expense in the fire department. Now there is a trade off. If you go to the third slide, you will see a slide that is titled pension cost compared to payroll savings. The cost to the pension plan to ask your three most senior firefighters to retire early is really a cost that is an extended cost over a period of time. The cost was determined to be \$22,966.00 a year for the next 30 years or a total cost that comes out to about \$688,980.00. In a present value, that's about \$277,000.00. So, if you were to eliminate those three positions, what you really need to do in a consideration of this kind is take a balanced look at what those positions represent compared to what obligation the city would incur on the pension side and that really determines how well this works. If the city were to eliminate positions in the fire department or replace current positions with new hires that are less expensive, that will create an immediate savings for the city as it relates to payroll and that savings on payroll over time can be greater than the extended cost of the pension when you reduce it back to today's dollars. So, if you look at slide four, which is type of a balanced look, really to make something of this kind work requires a balance between those two things. The original projection that I had done, if you look over to slide five, which includes a graph, really shows what the difference is between keeping three senior members of the

fire department on payroll or eliminating them and hiring one person that's less expensive. Now I understand that you did lay off two members of the fire department last month and you reduced the fire department staffing accordingly

to six people, two on each shift. Ultimately, what I was doing initially was comparing the cost of eliminating the three most senior people and keeping those two with one additional new hire and so over time, you can see that the total savings to the city amounts to about \$800,000.00 in the first 10 years. The reason why you will see that line plateau is that if the three most senior department members continue to work, they will continue to have pay increases that will cost the city, and ultimately they will retire out just not right now. So, if I anticipate that they had continued to work, if they should leave early ultimately the savings will stop at the point really when they would otherwise have retired because you're going to hire more people. If you keep the department over time by creating the savings on the front end, it does create some opportunity for the city. If you go over to this next slide, which is titled Early Retirement Incentive, the savings do plateau at the point where these three people that we would propose to buy out using the pension would otherwise have left. The payroll for a new firefighter begins at about \$42,000.00. This isn't including any kind of incidental benefits or other city benefits that the city provides to the full-time employees in the fire department. The actual cost of doing this is \$22,966.00 for 30 years and then the present value that is \$277,973.00. So, what you're going to do is create a substantial savings on the payroll in the earliest years. You're going to spread the cost of those savings over the 30-year period, because when you reduce it back to today's dollars, then your payroll savings need to exceed the \$277,000.00 that you're going to save over the lifetime of doing. So, what could go wrong when you're doing an early retirement incentive and in what situations might this not work. Because I've been doing this for 30 years and have gone through cycles in different places. Ultimately, if you go over to the next slide, where it talks about the early retirement incentive, I've mentioned some of those things already but to the second to last slide for what can go wrong. Ultimately, the city may change their hiring decisions over time, and the savings that you create in doing something like this are permanent, meaning that you will realize the savings but if you hire additional firefighters the department expands, the department changes down the road, you eliminate the department, then the savings are short. That's what we have found in some of the other places where they have given a retirement incentive. You know, in future administrations, they see that they have a pension cost, but don't recall that the city saved money for that period of time by eliminating the highest paid members of the department, because that cost extends past the point where these people will long be gone. The savings are real. They do work. They work in the situation where the savings on payroll, particularly exceed the present value cost of offering an incentive to these three people and it really then comes down to the personnel on hiring decisions of the city to keep true to that. If you were to eliminate three expensive people and hire three less expensive replacements, then the city will generate the savings immediately, so it will impact the city budget positively in the next several years. Go over to the next slide, what can change. Like I said, future hiring decisions in the fire department or by the City of Starke can change the metrics or at least the appearance of what you do now. It doesn't change ultimately the savings. It just changes what we remember sometimes and so with

that, again, I had hoped to keep this very, very simple in terms of a conversation on what and how exactly an early retirement incentive plan works and I'd like to take a moment and answer any questions that you have. Commissioner Nugent asked is there any penalty for this early retirement. Mr. Baur said there is no penalty. What would be offered to these three members is essentially the retirement benefit at normal retirement. So, if these people plan to stay, and they do, at least in terms of what they have stated, they would stay until normal retirement and likely participate in something called the drop plan for five years and leave. This is going to cause them to have a normal retirement benefit sooner and that's where the cost on the pension side comes. So the three members have indicated a likelihood that if it were offered to them and they were offered the opportunity to leave with the retirement benefit that they had anticipated having by working a full career here that they would agree to go. If it came about that this were offered to these three people and only two out of three accepted the offer, then the savings would be there. It would just be the savings for two people instead of three people. Mayor Roberts asked are there any other questions on the presentation? Commissioner Redding said where we're at now, I think the current FTE is around \$100,000. With those three individuals potentially leaving, and then say you had three new rookie firefighters come in. Has anybody done the math on how that would average out the FTEs. Mr. Mullins said the one concern I have is getting qualified, good replacements for them. Commissioner Redding said I think the way I'm understanding is this is like a 30 year investment into the program. We've got some aspects we're looking at with the SAFER Grant and things like that. I'm just trying to make it all make sense with what we're being given right now. In my opinion, I think we need to workshop this potentially or give you guys the opportunity in house to crunch all the numbers and from that aspect do all of our homework on it that we really need to do. Mr. Baur asked if he can address it. Commissioner Redding said I'm not against it. Do you have the numbers on the FTEs and where that's at. I know you gave us some potential savings there. Mr. Baur said so I actually did two different comparisons. The one that you see on the graph that presents it in simple terms before your two layoffs on the fire department and it compared getting rid of the three senior members of the fire department not laying off those two members and having one new replacement. At that point I did an additional comparison that would look at bringing for instance if they were to extend an offer to bring those two people back. Now you're comparing a reduction in payroll for those three most senior members to somebody who was less senior which was not what I originally projected. So, it does create savings but by recalling two people who were laid off and making that our baseline the savings are less because you might replace an \$80,000 person with a \$60,000 person. So, the savings are there but they're not as pronounced and not as immediate. In that comparison you would take the three senior people still replace them with two less expensive people and one new hire. I used the current payroll at an entry level cost for a firefighter in the City of Starke in that comparison. So, there are the possibility of savings and it could be looked at in a number of different ways but the true baseline that you want to achieve is that present value of what does

it cost on what we're giving away in the pension versus what we're going to save on payroll. The savings are always front-loaded meaning that the city saves the most money no matter how you do it in the earliest years because that pension cost is spread over time and because of the difference in the time frames. The payroll savings are now. The pension is over-time then the savings are always most apparent in the earliest years and fade as the time passes. Commissioner Smith said I would like to see true numbers to bring our two employees that we laid off and bring back. I see how it works and it's a great idea but if we want to bring those folks back, we need to see those numbers. Mr. Baur said and I certainly could go ahead and produce that. Commissioner Smith said I'd like to get an opportunity to bring those folks back. Commissioner Mortimer said so a part of the packet that we received was a letter from the actuary, GRS, I guess you gave that to us. Mr. Baur said we gave that to you and that cost study by the actuary determines the required pension contribution resulting from retiring these three people early. So, that is in fact the source of the savings and the 30-year cost that would be required to make this happen. Commissioner Mortimer said in their letter, they mentioned possibly doing a risk assessment. Is that something that we can have done in a reasonable amount of time that will give us a little bit a lot more information. Mr. Baur said yes, there can be projections and different scenarios for the funding of the pension in the future. Based on what I would call current assumptions, what happens over time if we do a little bit better. What happens over time if we do a little bit worse because that gives the city a planning tool to know along the way what we could expect in terms of our obligation to keep the pension healthy. Mayor Roberts said thank you. Commissioner Nugent said like Mr. Smith said about trying to save the guys if they want to stay and bring one new one in but I also want to see the numbers from the new hire because they'll be paying into the system but you know I want to see what the long-term results and where we're going to be at on the positive or negative. Mr. Baur said yes, and I can tell you that the savings are immediate in the early years. If you were to use the current situation as baseline, and bring the two people back we will share those numbers. Then, ultimately, the cost is and the benefits are more level. What happens then is you're saving money in the early years and spreading that cost over time, but you're making them more equal because your savings on payroll now are less than what we would have anticipated. If we're taking three senior people and replacing them with two less senior people and a new hire, the gap between what they would make and what these three are making right now is less than just eliminating two positions outright, which you've already done, and then bringing one new hire on to keep your staffing at six. Mayor Roberts said I think what I'm hearing is we just need to digest this a little bit and get maybe some more information. I'll get with my city manager and kind of drill down on some of this stuff so that it all sounds good. We are making a 30-year commitment when we choose to do something like this. I just want to make sure before we do that we've looked at all the angles. That it's good for the employees and the city. Commissioner Mortimer said I did have one last question was there was there a proposed time timeline on your presentation or effective date or period on this proposal. Mr. Baur said no the original cost

study by the actuary was produced in the fall of 2023 and we had planned to come before you, either in February or March, to explain the benefits and to do this. The two layoffs during the month of February changed the baseline but it's not what I would call an now or immediate situation. Over time, the numbers will change in minor ways, just because each new valuation will be an update on what's already happened in the past. Commissioner Nugent said can we hear what the fire chief says. Mr. Clemons said I'm under the impression that it would be a voluntary commitment to retire early. It's all depending on the numbers and the longer we wait, they change a little bit and it's all according to if we hire three new hires or the two that were laid off. I can tell you according to the Union C ontract, we are to hire the two employees that were laid off. Mr. Mullins said and that's what they were doing. Mayor Roberts said we'll have it brought back. Thank you. Mr. Mullins said for the record this was actually brought on as a request from the pension board.

Mr. Mullins said the Jarmon property is next. Mayor Roberts said that is a piece of property we've already voted to move forward on and Commissioner Mortimer wanted to bring it out of the consent agenda. Commissioner Mortimer said the reason I wanted it off of the consent agenda is because I wanted to vote for the consent agenda and in previous meetings I did not vote for the Jarmon property and I don't intend to vote for it tonight so that's why I took it off so that I can have a clear vote. Mayor Roberts said I think at this point, we go ahead and approve the money. We need it on the record that the that it is tied to the ARPA funds. That's the reason it showed back up. We've already voted to go forward. Okay, we have that as the ARPA \$200,000 for the Jarmon property I would entertain a motion to go forward with that. Commissioner Nugent made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. The motion passed 3-2. Commissioner Mortimer and Commissioner Smith opposed the motion.

Mr. Mullins said I'm going to need just a little bit more time for the garbage situation so I'll bring that to the next meeting.

Mr. Mullins said The Planning and Zoning Board received just one application today so the 30-day window did close but we received one application today from Michael Heeder.

Mayor Roberts said moving on there was also added to the agenda a city manager increase in pay. Commissioner Mortimer said at the last meeting at the resignation of the clerk, we appointed the city manager as the acting clerk and with those additional duties I feel that that warrants a pay increase of 10% at least, because those duties are going to be added to his already full plate. So far he's doing a great job. So, I'd like to make a motion to that affect Mr. Mayor that effective last Tuesday, whatever date that was when we made the appointment that the city manager receive a 10% pay increase. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith for discussion. Commissioner Smith asked what is the long-term plan. Will he be acting clerk until the next election and then is his pay is going to go down back down. Are we going to be looking for a temporary clerk.

Mayor Roberts said as far as where the commission ends up going, I don't know but I can tell you that I know that there was talk at the last meeting to bring some charter changes and I think a lot of that's going to be shaken out when we start talking about the charter changes as far as putting it on the ballot and stuff like that.

Mayor Roberts asked for the City Attorney's Report. Attorney Walker had nothing further.

Mayor Roberts asked for the Commissioner's Reports.

Commissioner Nugent said the Northeast Florida League of Cities Dinner is Thursday night and I'm working on them making room for some more people.

Commissioner Smith said I know we have this great pickleball court. Can we get this grand opening. Have we heard anything back from Rotary to do a grand opening. I've had lots of calls about this pickleball court. Mr. Mullins said one thing we're also looking at is getting the camera system there. We met about getting the exact specification of the equipment we want. We're going to coordinate with sheriff's office to make sure they have the equipment done.

Commissioner Smith asked what's the process for making the acting chief the full chief or do we go out for applications. How does that process work with the fire department. Mr. Mullins said there are some discussions that we've had. I'll get with you.

Commissioner Mortimer had nothing further.

Commissioner Redding had nothing further.

Mayor Roberts thanked Commissioner Nugent for working with the Northeast Florida League of Cities.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Redding made a motion to adjourn. It was seconded by Commissioner Mortimer. The meeting was adjourned at 6:37 pm.