

Commission Meeting Minutes
May 7, 2024
5:30 pm

Mayor Roberts said before we begin the official meeting of the City of Starke Commission, there will be a time of voluntary prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance. Those willing to do so are asked to stand and I will lead us in a prayer followed by the pledge.

Mayor Roberts called the meeting to order at 5:32 pm.

This was the first regular meeting of the month. Members in attendance included Mayor Scott Roberts, Commissioner Andy Redding and Commissioner Shannon Smith. Also present were Executive Assistant Cathy Bradley, Zoning & Planning Office Manager Lance Campbell, Deputy Clerk Lisa Heeder, Captain Kevin Mueller, City Manager Drew Mullins, Building and Zoning Official Kevin Powell, Sheriff Gordon Smith, Attorney Scott Walker and Code Enforcement Officer Rick Ward. Commissioner Janice D. Mortimer and Commission Danny Nugent were absent.

Mayor Roberts asked for any agenda changes. Mr. Mullins said we have some resolutions to add for the USDA loan closing Resolution 2024-33, Resolution 1780-27 and Resolution RD1942-8. Mayor Roberts asked if there are any other additions or deletions. There were none. He entertained a motion to approve the agenda with the changes. Commissioner Redding made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 3-0.

Mayor Roberts said we have two commissioners that are out but we still have a quorum. Commissioner Nugent and Commissioner Mortimer are out. He said if you filled out something to speak to the zoning issue come up at that time when the attorney is going through the quasi-judicial hearings.

Mayor Roberts asked the commissioners to look over the consent agenda. He entertained a motion. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve the consent agenda. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 3-0.

Mayor Roberts said there is no old business or emergency items at this time.

Mayor Roberts said the City of Starke welcomes you to this meeting. This time is 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 political forum, nor is it a time for personal accusation 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 are called, speak into the microphone state your name and address for the record. Please also limit your comments to not more than three minutes. There was no citizen participation.

Mayor Roberts said there are no public hearings.

Mayor Roberts said we will move on to the quasi-judicial hearings and turn it over to the attorney. Attorney Walker asked anyone who intends to testify this evening if you'll stand

up raise your right hand. He administered the oath to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. He said all witnesses have been sworn. Attorney Walker said the city will present the application for the amendment first to the future land use plan map. He asked if there are there any ex parte communications that need to be disclosed. Commissioner Smith said no. Commissioner Redding said no and Mayor Roberts said no. Attorney Walker read Ordinance 2024-09 by title only. He said this is 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 50 or less acres of land, pursuant to an application S240328A, by the city commission, under the amendment procedures established in sections 163.3161 through 163.3248 of the Florida Statutes, as amended; providing for a change in land use classification from public to high density, residential (more than 8 and less than 20 units per acre) on certain lands within the corporate limits of the City of Starke, Florida; providing severability, repealing all ordinances in conflict; and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion at this time is to pass Ordinance Number 2024-09 as read by title only. Mr. Powell said this application that we're bringing before you tonight is actually a city application. This is to take the little over one acre parcel of land that is currently the Veterans Memorial from public to high density. By going to high density, it has the potential for going into a PUD to develop the area. This was brought before your Planning and Zoning Board who voted to deny the application. It does meet the intent of the land development code and pending any further comments or questions on this, I have no other comments. Mayor Roberts asked for anyone who has been sworn in to speak in reference to Ordinance 2024-09 on first reading. Amber Shepherd said she works with the Northeast Florida Economic Development Corporation and had an opportunity to speak with Dwight Hewett about this project and they took the time to look over the drawings of the property and the intended use of the property and I have to say I'm highly impressed with what his organization has come up with and personally and professionally I do see a significant value for Starke if we can move forward with this project so I think it was a wonderful project and I love the fact that he is incorporating sustainability and resilience in his development so thank you. Dawn Strickland said I own several businesses and I'm in support of this condo. I am also a member of the Downtown Merchants and our goal has been for as long as I've been with them about four years now, is to bring economic development into the city to have some foot traffic to bring businesses in and that is exactly what these 45 units will do. In conjunction with Mr. Crosby's vision of the Jarman building, I think it'll increase foot traffic, it will increase economic development, it'll be a win for everyone. Chrissy Thompson said I'm the President of the Downtown Merchants and also the owner of the Downtown Grill and on behalf of myself and a vast majority of the downtown merchants, we would like to ask you to please vote yes for this. It definitely will bring foot traffic and economic development to downtown. We really need this project to move forward. Pam Whittle said I'm the President and CEO of the North Florida Regional Chamber of Commerce. I'm also a Downtown Merchant member and I just want to say that I've been a part of this project planning with Mr. Hewett for about a year and it's a target market that we need in our area. This will help us eliminate a problem that we've all got and that is nurses, police officers, fire and rescue, the military these are people that are coming into our community, but they're living in Alachua or Clay County. After a few years, they're like, why am I driving and we lose these professionals that we have trained and I see this as a massive opportunity for the school system and a lot of other businesses that have been looking for somewhere to house

their workers. This is not section eight it is not subsidized. Also, I want us to keep in mind that Mr. Hewett is doing this because he grew up here and he wants to do this.

This is 90 customers at a minimum to go to the movies, eat at the restaurants and shop at the stores. Not to mention the revenue that the city will receive from this tax base. It will bring in downtown foot traffic. He named it CityWalk. Mayor Roberts asked if there was anybody else. He asked if any commissioners had any questions. Commissioner Redding asked Mr. Powell what the basis was for the Planning and Zoning Board's denial. Mr. Powell said it had to do with the size of Veterans Park, foot traffic and the new turn off coming off of 100 and the side road. Commissioner Redding said where we have Veterans Park now is like four tenths of an acre. Mr. Hewett said .45 of an acre. Commissioner Redding said what we voted on as a board was to put it on the other side of that and it would be well over an acre, I think 1.4 acres. Mr. Hewett said the property that I'm trading to the city is bigger than the property I'm getting. It's not an acre. Commissioner Redding said with potentially incorporating the DOT property around that. Mr. Powell said that's what they're concerned about. The increased traffic. They exercise from the college up and down that road every day. I've never seen it but that's what one said. Those were their concerns that they expressed. Commissioner Redding thanked Mr. Powell. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion for Ordinance 2024-09. Commissioner Smith made a motion to adopt Ordinance Number 2024-09. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. The motion passed 3-0.

Attorney Walker said the next item is Ordinance Number 2024-10. 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 50 or less acres of land, pursuant to an application, S240328B, 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 land use classification from medium density residential (more than two and less than or equal to 8 units per acre) to high density residential (more than 8 and less than 20 units per acre) on certain lands within the corporate limits of the City of Starke, Florida; providing severability; repealing all ordinances in conflict; and providing an effective date. The appropriate motion would be to pass Ordinance Number 2024-10 upon its reading by title. Mr. Powell said this one is an application from Kingsley Development and the applicant is here to answer any questions on this parcel. This parcel is currently zoned medium density residential. The applicant is trying to turn it into a high density residential. This project would be consistent with the land across the street. This also went before your Planning and Zoning Board and they denied the project because they were talking about flooding issues. I explained to the board that it is in a flood zone. However, the applicant would have to mitigate those issues according to the FEMA guidelines. This is consistent with the surrounding area taking this to the high density residential and then go to the PUD with the surrounding project that the applicant is bringing before you. With that I have no additional information. Mayor Roberts asked if there were any questions of the applicant. Attorney Walker administered the oath to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth to Mr. Hewett. Mr. Hewett said I want to go on the public record, because there's been gossip and you know how it is in small towns, we get things backwards sometimes. In this case, the idea of subsidies has never been part of this project. If you will just bear with me for about four minutes, I'd like to put this in the public record. Thank you very much commissioners, Mayor, city staff and ladies and gentlemen, for bearing with me. I'm Dwight Hewett. I'm here on behalf of my partner, Chris Raley and myself to represent Kingsley Development the owner of the property that's contiguous and adjacent to the

Veterans Memorial. I started assembling this and rezoning this property in 2005 to develop a market rate apartment project with just over 90 units and four buildings. The

concept was to make a community that was very close to downtown, which I remembered as being very vibrant when I was a kid in the 60s. So, this is why the project has always been named CityWalk and how I'll refer to it today. After a long period of land use and zoning meetings, along with our architectural and engineering planning, the economic catastrophe of 2008 shut most developers down and it shut down this development. There was no financing for anything like this kind of project at that time. You all remember 2008. I had another project in Gainesville at that time and I focused on that one finished it, stabilized it, it's called the Continuum. It's on University Avenue if anyone wants to see it. When I was done there, I came back to CityWalk and not long after refocusing, I received a DOT letter regarding eminent domain. So, I think everyone in the room knows about the State Road 100 project and where it turns north, split where it connects to Call Street, split my property in half. So, it took the buildings that I had planned and just really destroyed the project. So, I went back to the drawing board and then after that, the pandemic hit and that was another hurdle altogether. This is about the time when my partner and I, Chris also a developer, we got together and we're both driven to be responsible developers. We work in harmony with neighborhoods and try to be environmentally cognizant. During the pandemic downtime, my partner took the study of sustainability to another level and is now a subject matter expert in sustainability, speaking at conventions and seminars, along with his development activities. When we spoke, I suggested CityWalk and Starke as a perfect site for a sustainable project and we made a visit. Now we're in this process together. So today, CityWalk is a planned 45 unit, sustainably constructed pathway to home ownership where you can rent, rent to own, or just own. These units are two story, three bedroom, two bath townhomes. And they're about 1550 square feet with a garage. In the site plan, you probably have difficulty seeing it from the back, but there's number 5s all around. All these number 5s are storm mitigation rain gardens. They're specially designed. We work with the University of Florida and University of Miami to come up with this mitigation process. We know there are a lot of water problems on Redgrave and it flows in that direction towards the creek. There are also EV charging stations, electric vehicle. There's none in Starke currently, we would bring 4 and they would be available to everybody in our community and the greater community. There is in ground water capture for irrigation and a covered outdoor fitness area. Over on this parcel, number five on the right side is a linear neighborhood park that goes around the entire perimeter of the project and people who live in that neighborhood would likely walk their dog there and anybody in town could use it. So, you can see it's a contemporary and functional design. The vertical construction has no wood or concrete, which checks the box of sustainability. A standard home in the US has an insulation factor of 19. These units will be close to an R50, meaning that they're extremely heating and cooling efficient. The home will also be a smart home, meaning as an example, if you want to adjust your thermostat or unlock your door remotely, you can do it from a telephone app. These units will be resilient and able to withstand Cat5 winds, and the building systems have withstood over 245 mile an hour wind load in testing. They have garages, solar panels, decorative facades. We can either do a wood facing, it's not real wood, it just looks like wood, but wood or stone look. There's a solar array on the top. The engineers think that we will be able to be a net contributor to the Starke grid, so we will share, but we will give more than we take in terms of electricity. On the backside of the units, you'll see up top there's an outdoor open terrace, a garden terrace. Down below, you have covered patios, and then small backyards. These will have fences that separate the units, but everybody gets a

backyard. One thing I want to make clear in the public setting is that we made a promise at the American Legion, and we've said it to other people as well, that we want to first

offer these units to active and retired military personnel, teachers, medical professionals, first responders, and correctional staff. I talked to one of the sheriff's deputies who told me when he came over he had to live out of the county, and he said this is something that he would certainly be interested in, and I've spoken to the sheriff about recruitment. So, the takeaway is you need market rate housing. You need it for many reasons, but one of the main reasons, as I've seen, is for recruitment, for teachers especially, but for law enforcement and for anyone else, this is a unit that they can afford, especially on a two-income salary, is walkable to downtown, which makes it even more sustainable, and it provides additional property tax revenue for the city as much needed, and I think you would probably be happy to have it. I don't have anything else, any questions of me. Thank you guys, I appreciate your time. Mayor Roberts said we'll let the public speak and I'll ask the commission then if they have any questions. In reference to Ordinance Number 2024-10 would anyone like to speak that was sworn in. Mayor Roberts said I will open it up to the commission to see if they have any questions on this project or the ordinance. Commissioner Smith had no questions. Commissioner Redding said this is all obviously still part of the same project. I just want that to be out there if anybody had any confusion over it but personally, for me, we have to get people to reinvest in our community. I know that the zoning board voted against it but Mr. Hewett has a comprehensive plan to do everything in a systematic manner that is good for the environment and good for the community. We have to have tax revenues to continue to function as a city. This is a great plan and we have to recruit people to invest in our community. If we don't have the younger people and the people that are in our community, our community will fade away and we will not prosper and get ahead. So that's my opinion. Thank you, Kevin. Mayor Roberts said I have no questions. I will call for a motion to approve Ordinance Number 2024-10. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve Ordinance Number 2024-10 on first reading. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 3-0.

Mayor Roberts said moving on to the city manager's report. Mr. Mullins said I've got these documents for the USDA loan closing. Attorney Walker said the first is Resolution Number 2024-33, a resolution of the City of Starke, Florida agreeing to an annual audit as it relates to the USDA Rural Utilities direct loans and grants providing for conflicts, severability and an effective date. The appropriate motion is to pass Resolution 2024-33 as read by title only. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion. Commissioner Smith made a motion to approve Resolution Number 2024-33. It was seconded by Commissioner Redding. Commissioner Redding asked Mr. Mullins to elaborate on that for us as to what this process will do for us. Mr. Mullins said initially we took out interim financing and that was the \$10,676,000. This is to actually close and allow the USDA funds, the first part of our loan, to take care of the interim financing. Then we can actually go into the grant dollars themselves. Commissioner Redding said awesome. Thank you. Mayor Roberts called for a vote. The motion passed 3-0. Attorney Walker said the next item is the loan resolution. It's a resolution of the Board of Directors of the City of Starke authorizing and providing for the incurrence of indebtedness for the purpose of providing a portion of the cost of acquiring, constructing, enlarging, improving, and or extending its sewer services to its residents and the facility to serve an area lawfully within its jurisdiction to serve. As Mr. Mullins just said, it's a \$10,676,000 loan resolution that we're passing by virtue of this motion and vote. So, the appropriate motion would be to pass loan resolution of the board of directors of the City of Starke. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion on the loan

resolution. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve the loan resolution. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 3-0. Attorney Walker said the

next item is United States Department of Agriculture rural development resolution of members or stockholders of the City of Starke, located at 209 North Thompson Street, Starke, Florida, 32091-3312 resolved the Governing Board of this association is hereby authorized and empowered to take all action necessary and appropriate to obtain for and on behalf of the association through the USDA or any other governmental agency a loan in a sum not to exceed \$10,676,000 and a grant in a sum not to exceed \$15,939,180 to be advanced by the lender or grantor under one or more advances at such time or times as may be agreed upon. In case of a loan or grant or both for the execution of such application or applications (including exhibits, amendments and/or supplements thereto) as may be required for the execution and delivery to the lender or grantor of all such written instruments as required in regard to or as evidence of such loan or grant; and in its judgment to carry out the terms of this resolution. And in case of a loan to obligate this association for the repayment of such loan at such rates of interest and on such terms and conditions as the Governing Board shall deem proper to pledge, hypothecate, mortgage, convey or assign property of this association of any kind and in any amount now owned or hereafter acquired, as security for any and all obligations (past, present and/or future) of this association and to such lender and from time to time to pay, extend or renew any such obligations. The appropriate motion is to pass the resolution as read in its entirety. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the resolution. Commissioner Smith made a motion. It was seconded by Andy Redding. The motion passed 3-0. Attorney Walker said our bond council asks that we just have a general motion to authorize yourself as mayor, our manager, clerk, and appropriate city officials to execute any documents necessary to effectuate the closing next Tuesday. Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to approve the mayor or any city officials to act as an approving signature at the bond closing. Commissioner Redding made a motion to approve. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith. The motion passed 3-0.

Mr. Mullins said the only other thing I've got is my manager's report will come at the next meeting.

Captain Mueller said good evening. As always, it is a privilege to come before you. With this still being a fairly new process, I would like to go over a couple of these categories again to make sure there's a clear understanding on what they represent and the significance of them. Unfortunately, we had a homicide that started at the hospital here in Starke a few weeks ago and I had a narcotic search warrant that was done today. I'd like to go down to suspicious incidents. Sometimes that's because someone called in a suspicious person or a suspicious vehicle. Probably more than half of those are when a deputy sees a suspicious person. I want to clarify these are things that happen within the city limits of Starke. None of this includes anything that's within the county outside the city limits. He asked if there were any questions. Commissioner Smith said summer is coming, kids are going to be out of school and the parks are a notorious spot for them to destroy. We've invested a good amount of money into these parks and I know we have some camera systems, but extra patrols would be very helpful. Captain Mueller said thank you for bringing that up and we will do extra patrols. Mayor Roberts said once again thank you for the report. Commissioner Redding said I have people ask me all the time about Pratt Street from Orange Street to 100, I always get complaints about those stop signs some education would be really good. Captain Mueller agreed. He said let me introduce you to Lieutenant Sweeney. He is over our investigative unit and he happens

to be our SWAT commander. Lieutenant Sweeney thanked Captain Mueller for the introduction. He said I am the division supervisor of our criminal investigations division,

which does house our criminal investigations unit along with our drug task force. A lot of the stuff is an ongoing investigation. We still have to do a lot of forensic work on cell phones, bank records, and so forth. On the 23rd of April we received a call of what came out as a cutting at HCA emergency room ultimately turned into a homicide. In less than 20 hours, investigators along with the assistance of patrol were able to locate five individuals and bring them into custody that participated in that. We executed five search warrants on five different properties all throughout the night. So, what started in the city ultimately went out to the county. Today you might have seen on social media or our new app. This is an app that keeps you completely up to date. Through undercover operations over the last month and a half we got a search warrant and we executed that at 1314 Grove Street today. Because it is an investigation, I don't want to comment too much on it, but they were trafficking large amounts of drugs including cocaine, fentanyl, along with other types of drugs. There will be more individuals that will be arrested from this investigation. However, we did arrest one today, and once I get done here, we will be going to find others that were involved as well. There was not one single individual that I came across that did not thank us for being there because they noticed what was going on. Are there any questions.

Mr. Mullins said I want to thank the sheriff for inviting me to go out on this search earlier today. They do amazing work.

Mayor Roberts thanked the Sheriff for all he does and for the good reports.

Mayor Roberts asked for the attorney report. Attorney Walker had nothing else.

Commissioner Smith had nothing else.

Commissioner Redding had nothing else.

Mayor Roberts said if there is no opposition I'd like to ask the attorney to review the ordinances and charter and look into the ability or not to move the finance department over to the city manager. Attorney Walker said he will look into it.

Mayor Roberts entertained a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Redding made a motion. It was seconded by Commissioner Smith and the meeting was adjourned at 6:24 pm.