

TOWN OF WELAKA TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
February 13, 2024, 6:00 PM
Honorable Willie Washington, Jr. Council Room
400 4th Ave., Welaka FL 32193

MINUTES

(This meeting was broadcasted for view only on the Town of Welaka's Facebook page)

1. Mayor called Meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

2. Everyone stood and said the pledge of allegiance and Washington gave the invocation.

3. **ROLL CALL** taken by Town Clerk, Meghan Allmon.

Mayor Jamie Watts - present, Council President Jessica Finch - present, Councilwoman Kimberly Dugger - present, Councilwoman Kathy Washington - present, Councilwoman Tonya Long - present, and Town Attorney Patrick Kennedy - present. Five council members are present. We have a quorum.

4. **ADOPTION OF PREVIOUS MINUTES from 1/23/2024 MEETING**

Corrections – None.

Motion to adopt 1/23/2024 Town Council Meeting Minutes made by Finch and seconded by Washington. Passed 5/0.

5. **APPROVAL OF CURRENT AGENDA**

Correction – Watts moved the 13.1. and 2. Items from the original Agenda down to #14. as Non-Consent Agenda Items. The items moved were:

1. Bid review and selection of contractor for forced main sewer repair
2. Preliminary Boundaries for the Finding of Necessity

Motion for approval to accept current 2/13/2024 Town Council Meeting Agenda made by Finch and seconded by Long. Passed 5/0.

6. **RECOGNITIONS** – None.

7. **PRESENTATIONS / REPORTS TO TOWN COUNCIL**

1. Diane Kelley - Mobile Spay and Neuter Program

She met with the surrounding Mayors about the animal spay/neuter service in the county. A new location is trying to be established and she supports this. She handed out copies of her presentation to the Council Members. Animal Rescue Konsortium has been around since 2007. The rescue facility is in Crescent City as the Crescent City Kennel. Animals in distress are helped there. Ginny, the owner, wants to evolve ARC. We do not have a low cost spay/neuter facility. Shelters have major capacity issues.

She'd like Welaka to establish a partnership with the Town.

Animal overpopulation is a big issue. Most dog bites and killings come from un-neutered male dogs.

They're working on a grant to get a spay/neuter trailer with actual vets to perform the surgeries. A grant would fund 75% of the estimated range from \$125,000 - \$200,000 for a trailer.

Her and Ginny would also like to have the building modified for the ability to help more animals. This would be around \$42,000.

Putnam County approved \$25,000 as a donation towards their goals and grant funding. She documented their

commitment to them. They're left with \$15,000 or so that they need. She says it's not a donation, it's an investment. Would Welaka be open to contribute? They'll also be meeting with Crescent City again and Pomona Park and the city of Palatka. The ARC pays for all the medication.

Watts – his dog was neutered a few months ago and it cost almost \$400. Asked Diane if the mobile trailer would be coming to Welaka?

Diane - said she'd talk to Ginny and was sure she'd happily approve of this, and they could give vouchers and big discounts. Sometimes she would do it for free if someone cannot afford it in a critical situation. A few key locations here can be added. Ginny agreed up to 70 cats/dog quarterly (280 per year) with charging a good-faith-fee of \$45 per dog and \$35 for a cat. They also offer discounted vaccination shots.

Watts – would like to bring this back to the Council for a one-time investment.

Finch – her goal is 100 per year since 2018. A lot of cats are dropped off here. Wants to see a list of the county's request sheet. How many can you spay/neuter in 1 day?

Diane – It's like an assembly line and around 20-30 animals per day and she can send a summary.

Finch – cost?

Diane - \$80-90 for the biggest dog and she'll get his in writing after speaking with Ginny and send it to Finch.

Finch – 2 dates per month? Would that expand?

Diane – that's for the clinic in Crescent City. Once demand is reached, they can schedule more visits here. They have 2 vets available. Ginny wants to evolve this for the main service in Putnam County.

Finch – would like more information and this would help her service for spay/neutering here in Welaka.

Washington – on call vet in case something happens after the surgery?

Dinae – not sure. Could be a number for the ER. They're not down to that level of detail.

Washington – some vets don't want to touch another dog after a different vet.

Watts – if she sends us some info, we can discuss this ORD with the Council again next month and hopefully have an updated map by then. It will not be a second reading.

2. Events Committee – None.

3. Citizens Advisory Committee – None.

8. **PROCLAMATIONS** – None.

9. **RESOLUTIONS** – None.

10. **PUBLIC HEARINGS**

1. **ORDINANCE 2024-01 – Welaka No Wake Zone (First Reading)**

Advisory Committee asked about this, so he put this ORD together last month. It provides for a maximum distance of 500 feet from the shoreline. The GIS is helping him to fine-tune the mapping.

Long – not comfortable with this at all. She wants to speak to people and it's not at her level to make this decision.

Washington – when we have the bass tournaments, and we have a lot of people who are flying down the river.

Will this effect that, or no?

Kennedy – may not affect them if they're in the channel.

Washington – who will enforce this? Do we call the police for boats speeding?

Kennedy – you would have to ask Chief and a boat speeding would have to be seen to be pulled over. He did not include a summary paragraph and he will fix that.

Porath – mutual aid agreement, not sure if the County or FWC will enforce a Town Ordinance. We would need a mutual aid agreement that defines this. Both agencies would like to add more patrol on the river. Even if we had

a boat, and someone called in to report a crime, they would have to address the operator if they could find them. Not sure if the County would adopt our ORD to enforce it.

Kennedy – the FWC rep said that if our ORD is good enough, they would enforce it.

Porath – they will refer to state law and he agrees with the Council, we can have laws, but if we don't enforce the law, then take it off the books.

Washington – spoke with a few boaters and if there's a wake, then they said they just wait for the waves to go by. There's not a problem.

Watts – our floating dock was not maintained properly, and it cost \$17,000 in repairs. He's not comfortable moving forward with this until we get the boundaries.

Turnbull – FWC required that we get an ORD in order to move forward with this.

Finch – just because it's not going to be enforced at all times, we should still put out what we want to see. It would give boaters notice. We're just talking about a few hundred feet from the boat ramps, not out into the channel. Common courtesy is out there and sometimes not. This will bring awareness to hurting our docks and boat ramp issues.

Dugger – agrees with Finch. Thinks a good ORD and it's a good start. Just the existence of this ORD and for our waterfront property owners, they will appreciate this. How can this hurt us? It will be a good thing to have.

Finch – people would mostly only be speeding by in the channel. Wouldn't want the dock repairs to come back 2 years from now when we're out of ARPA funds.

Watts – asked Kennedy to flush this ORD out and move it to next month.

Washington – is it verified that the dock needed repair from the wakes or just wear and tear because nothing lasts forever?

Watts – the wakes hitting the dock and the steel rods worked their way out and it was poor maintenance. Bellingham Marine showed us how to tighten it down.

Watts – postpone this ORD and update the map.

Washington – bass tournaments have an exception?

Kenneth Pagano – as far as the bass tournament, if the Elite Team that comes to town in April, if it's sanctioned and they fly through a no-wake zone, they're disqualified. South Lake George has no wake and then idle and so on. There're rules all the way down to Deland. If you create a No Wake zone, there's no complaints on the water as he's on his boat a lot. FWC pulls a lot of people over. Whether you're driving or speeding, it creates the same size wakes. Some creeks and canals you must go idle speed. If this ORD cannot extend all the way across the river, wakes will still affect you the same. The rubber on the dock is not too good and it will destroy your gel coat. Big boats going 10 MPH still put off a 2' wake.

Felicia Stalder – who owns the boat ramp?

Watts – we found the records and Welaka owns the boat ramp.

Stalder – is the boat ramp road going to be repaired?

Watts – not yet, we must generate the funds to do so.

11. CORRESPONDENCES

1. Mayor Watts - Memo to Council on 2/7/24 - Utility Billing Issue

Watts – takes full responsibility for this overcharge and he should have gone through the bills first before sending them out.

Washington – how will this be handled for the next couple months?

Watts – the Utility Clerk will round each bill down manually.

Dugger – same with in-city and out-of-city people?

Watts – correct. Our software program, Logics, said that we cannot pro-rate the gallons, but we can pro-rate the days. Makes no sense.

Long – can we go in and set the gallons at 3,000 possibly? This will take away all the people that use no more than 3,000 gallons.

Watts – she can possibly do this but the credits that she is manually doing now will be more accurate.

Washington – some people's bills doubled and are there leaks or something?

Watts – if anyone suspects a utility issue, call us to schedule our utility crew to go check it. In the future, the auto-read meters will monitor the flow, and it will automatically alert the system telling us of continued flow meaning a leak. We can do a bucket test and they can read the meter and will put 5 gallons in the bucket to see if the meter is reading properly showing 5 gallons used. You are not charged for that 5 gallons either.

Watts – we were doing courtesy calls for prospective leaks.

Clemons – it shouldn't be referred to Emma, it should be sent to Tyler. He went from 3,000 to 11,000 gallons. He's not arguing about the water, but he would have been able to fix a leak if he knew about it with a courtesy call. Or do a door hanger if possible.

Watts – we're looking into this.

Clemons – will not argue, it's just a courtesy. This should flash red on the computer to let the utility meter reader know and they should notify that resident, Emma should not have to.

Watts – we're going to work on this and make sure our staff does not get cussed out for this.

Finch – the guys see that there is excessive usage and they can hang a door hanger on the residence.

Clemons – Emma just sees the numbers.

Watts – he's trying to rotate the books through.

12. PUBLIC COMMENTS

Greg Clemons – 601 Oak Street – addressed the water notice courtesy calls. He had a leak and wasn't notified. Watts said that we discontinued doing courtesy calls as people were not thankful but rather would attack the Utility Clerk and respond negatively.

Janet Smith – 60 Carefree Drive – addressed her concern about the water rate increase. The wake issue can be horrendous injuries on boats and down in the engine area. It's more than just properties.

The overage charges – this is meant to be cordial regarding the water charges. There are serious maintenance issues and yet the best government is fair to the residents. Raising base rates plus lowering the gallon limit all in one hike is problematic. The surcharges are more likely to be monthly applied to a much larger water bill.

Wasn't told the criteria about 2,000 gallons for a household. THE St. Johns River Water Management District report per capita use is 115 gallons per day, at the previous 3,000 threshold, it was over 400 gallons less. If local info used to gather the 2,000 minimal thresholds, was any hot season, love bugs, ash, pollen seasons a part of the low or high water/sewer months? Also, hurricane seasons create a sludge from the neighboring properties after the hurricanes. Requires more work and water after the floods. The automatic readers will be in the future, not known when. Please keep in mind that there's a lot of seniors on a fixed income here and it's difficult. Is the FL public service commission notified?

Watts – they do not have to be notified as we're a municipality.

Smith – if the issue is repairs, then everyone should be charged per gallon, and they're tied to surcharges.

There's no incentive to conserve if someone has not used their minimal 2,000 gallons. We should not continue with this arbitrary 2,000 minimal threshold. The limit is improper, and we should go back to the 3,000 gallons.

Watts – of the 724 customer, 399 did not exceed 2,000 gallons this past month. More than half.

Cynthia Washington – the summer when the storms come, when you're using the water, the rate goes up. She uses her water pump, and it helps some. When there's mildew on homes, can't clean them. Wants to increase back to 3,000 gallons.

Watts – hasn't been increased since 2012. The \$1.8 Million Dollars of repairs is needed. If we kept it at 3,000 gallons, we'd have to raise the rate higher. We are higher than St. Johns County because we have a small Town.

The cost of repairing our system keeps increasing.

Finch – if we raise it to 3,000, it would be the same minimal as it is now, but it would be the increased as well. It's not fair for the elderly or smaller home to pay the minimal of 3,000-gallon bill.

Lenore Toole – river park is 3,000 gallons and their bill is around \$68. We do not have the highest funds around. We are very reasonable rated.

Finch – the average was 2,000 gallons.

Watts – wanted to verify this before the rate increase was presented.

Clemons – a person with 2-4-4 kids, this number is 2,000-gallon number is too low for a family household.

Finch – we'd be subsidizing and the fair way would be a per gallon rate.

Washington – literally everybody's water bill basically doubled and some tripled. Even hers. Felt blind-sided. If she went 1 or 10 gallons over, now she went over, the old way of charging was per 200 and the credits are the main concern, and this isn't what we talked about.

Finch – asked people who called her if their usage dramatically changed. Now with the proration thing solved, this is helpful.

Zarka Wynn – people who are on the bulk rate, Lazy Days, and the condos.

Watts – they're being applied the new rate, and the minimal rates went up like everybody else. Their usage went down and once they cross a certain threshold, they will get billed additionally.

Watts – out of town residents pay 25% more as a surcharge. There's a bill in the House right now and if that goes away, we will have to charge the additional 25% and affect us.

Bob Trevor – if he uses 2,001 gallons how does it roll?

Watts – right now, if you use 2,900, it rolls down to 2,000.

Mr. Smith – to wash some cars or fill a pool or use water and not sewer, it's too expensive to pay the \$20 fee to have your meter read prior.

Patricia – rates continue to go up next year?

Watts – yes.

Long – as we grow, River Hill, 1st Street, etc. we'll have more residents here to help offset this. When she has a bigger event, she'll put a porta-potty out front to save money on the water/sewer fees.

Desouza – the event committee still has cupcakes/coffee/cocoa inside here.

Pam Washington – Long stated that we're going to grow and what if it doesn't? Will the rate still go up?

Long – after 24 months, we should do a rate study and we can hopefully apply for grants. If you have a visitor over Christmas, the new rates have made it so expensive.

Watts – the prices go up on all supplies/labor. This is why we need a Town Manager to assist with this.

Pam Washington – she was the first meter maid. Mr. Clemons understands the utility system and a door hanger would help.

13. CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

1. Bid review and selection of contractor for forced main sewer repair (Watts corrected and moved down to # 14.1.)

2. Preliminary Boundaries for the Finding of Necessity (Watts corrected and moved down to # 14.2.)

14. NON-CONSENT AGENDA ITEMS

1. TOWN MATTERS

1. Bid review and selection of contractor for forced main sewer repair - Watts corrected and moved down to # 14.

Watts – received 2 quotes for repairs of the underground pipes that exploded. We have approximately \$91,000 in ARPA left. He suggests we pull it from ARPA. Had a meeting with FEMA on Monday. We're receiving

\$87,023.50 in reimbursements from FEMA for Hurricane Ian damages. Trying to avoid damaged parts especially since storm season is coming. We must make the repairs and we can be reimbursed by ARPA. \$30,388 is needed for the needed repairs. We are creating the Asset Management Fund this month also from the rate increase to save money for repairs like this.

Watts – showed 8 photos on the TV screen of the manhole damages and flowing sewage onto the street from the 6” pipe going into a 2” pipe. A poor fix years ago to just get by.

Finch – what you said makes perfect sense.

Finch made a motion to approve the PBM Constructors Quote using ARPA Funds not to exceed \$54,000 and Dugger seconded. Passed 5/0.

Washington – warranty from this company?

Watts – yes, believes it’s 1 year and they’ll fix any repairs, and they stand behind their work. We’ve used PBM in the Sportsman Harbor area in the past. They’ve been in business for 40 years or more.

All Agreed. Passed 5/0.

Watts – these purchases are not going to be made, but I need the Council’s approval to approve up to the amount on the AIRVAC quote, up to \$30,383.20 amount.

Washington – is this the Harbor damage?

Watts – yes.

Finch – we will get reimbursed from FEMA.

Watts – correct.

Dugger made a motion to approve the Mayor to use up to \$30,383.20 for the Town’s utility repairs and Finch seconded. Passed 5/0.

2. Preliminary Boundaries for the Finding of Necessity - Watts corrected and moved down to # 14.

Kennedy – cannot do CRA outside the Town limits. This was explained in the Workshop also. The map highlights the CRA area in blue. It focuses on the business districts and commercial corridors, all of Shell Street and includes the condition of roadways.

Watts – asked Kennedy to explain what the CRA is.

Kennedy – it is designed for economic growth and funding for the Town areas that need help. We take a portion of the property taxes with increasing property values and save it to put into the CRA. Over time it generates a funding account. We don’t want to include too much or too little. The more commercial properties, the better.

These are the larger property tax base locations. The CRA is the core of our Town. This area supports the Finding of Necessity. It may take Kennedy 60-90 days to have the paperwork ready for review.

Washington – is it the blue area on the map?

Kennedy – yes.

Finch – we can recoup some of the County’s property tax portion also.

Watts – just to let everyone know, this does not increase your property taxes here.

3. Tree ORD Public Workshop - Feb 20, 2024, 6-8 PM

Pagano - It may be postponed but will let us know.

Dugger – Phillip Purcell is willing to donate 100 live oaks for 2nd Avenue, across Boston and across Mill St.

Dugger will send Kenny Philip’s info to chat.

Pagano – seems informal right now and will contact the utility department to see where trees can be planted on easements. Would like to add this to the Tree Board Meeting Agenda for 2/22/24.

4. Vulnerability Assessment Meeting to be Rescheduled.

Watts – waiting for Saltus to get with us to reschedule this. We could not have the meeting due to having no power that evening. If you have flooding issues, please come to this meeting with pictures to show and create an overall image of the total flooding area so we can create a plan.

2. ZONING RECOMMENDATIONS – None.

3. CODE ENFORCEMENT BOARD – None.

15. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

1. PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT REPORT – None.

2. UTILITY DEPARTMENT REPORT – None.

3. POLICE CHIEF MICHAEL PORATH REPORTS

Porath – 11/15/24, there was a complaint and he requested FPL to come out and there's a delay in the parts to get the light issue resolved. It has been escalated now and hoping to have this resolved by next month.

On Orange, Washington addressed a resident that possibly Porath can add the pole light to this request.

Watts – closing the parks at sunset, we don't want the parks completely dark due to vandalism, maybe we can scale all the lights back.

Porath – will work with Public Works to assist with the lights.

4. TOWN ATTORNEY PATRICK KENNEDY REPORTS

Kennedy – need to schedule a Special Meeting to present the Land Development Code from the Zoning Board. The goal is not to make too many changes, but some are necessary. There's been several changes since 1983 and they've reviewed and combined Ordinances. Accessories and structures are addressed. Wants the Council to understand the ORD.

Needs 2 weeks to properly public notice this.

Watts – all agreed to schedule a Special Called Town Council Meeting on 3/5/24 at 6 PM.

Kennedy – it should be 2 hours or so. Palatka Daily News will publish this also.

5. TOWN CLERK MEGHAN ALLMON REPORTS – None.

15. MAYOR & TOWN COUNCIL REPORTS

1. MAYOR WATTS – DEP Meeting in the morning. The Harbor system is very old and it does not properly convert to a new system currently. The repair for this is to put a new system in it. The price for this is \$4.96 Million Dollars. The DEP is willing to let Watts pitch this project to them.

Plastic pods would be inserted in the Harbor area and the system would be completely sealed up.

On a dry day, the WWTP processes 50,000 gallons per day and on a rainy day, it increases to 125,000 per day. It's a lot of rain/river water.

Washington – does the County help with any of this payment because they're down there too.

Watts – with everything, we'd be over \$19,000 in grants. We're working on the new WWTP designs will be at 90% in March on the drawings, Auto-Read Meters, Lift Station 6 rehab, 2 FRDAP grants. FL Budget was \$118 Billion last year, and the governor wants \$4 Billion cut off that. The Legislators funded everything last year.

2. COUNCIL PRESIDENT JESSICA FINCH – None.

3. COUNCILWOMAN TONYA LONG – None.

4. COUNCILWOMAN KATHY WASHINGTON – went to a leadership class for FLC. It was about 5 classes and she sat in on 1 class. She chose Emergencies for small Towns. What are the challenges that local officials deal with? Hurricanes, fires, and active shooters. She faced panic and communications. What about our elderly residents? She left home with the controlled burning and came home to a lot of ash. What procedure do we have here for an evacuation route? She was concerned that we don't have it in black and white. The Hawaii fires got out of control easily. Welaka will deal with fires more than hurricanes. She's going to be on the punch with this to have something in black and white to notify our residents and she will bring this back to the Council. Watts – good project for you. The Chief can assist you also. The County has the list of non-mobile residents. It's not a public record, but maybe you can look into this to help. There were fires in 1996 and they were getting too close. The controlled burns help with this. We do need some plans and communications for this. Please look to the Chief for some assistance.

5. COUNCILWOMAN KIMBERLY DUGGER – Annexation, it's a dirty word and nobody wants to talk about it. Welaka will continue to limp along. We're strapped for money. People say we can't annex, it's too long and expensive. Yes, we can, we can do it. Let's annex in Sportsman Harbor as we cannot continue to go on with our Town as inequitable as we are. We've got to fix this. She's going to devote herself to do these annexation steps with the county and residents. Watts – thank you for taking this project on.

Pamel Washington – worked for the county for 29 years. The residents did not want to annex in and it's up to the residents and not the Town. Start talking with the residents.

Dugger – she has and agrees that some do not want to annex in. The Legislature can passed a bill where it's required.

Pam Washington – Larry Pritchett doesn't want to do this, they do not want this, but go speak to them.

Finch – of course they like it, they get the benefits and don't have to pay for it.

Watts – we could suggest annexation for utility services.

Dugger – Melbourne and other areas require annexation.

16. ADJOURNED – 8:31 PM