



Welaka Gazette

December 2023

From The Mayor's Desk

The month of December is upon us and it seems like we just started the new year. As we close out the last month of 2023, I'd like to focus on gratitude and all the great things happening in our community. Oftentimes, something can happen, and we become so focused on that one event to the point where we cannot see all of the really great things we are fortunate to have. I'd like to start off by talking about all the wonderful events we have happening in Welaka to celebrate Christmas time. Our annual Christmas Parade will be December 9th starting at 12 PM, as always, going down CR 309. The parade will end at the corner of County Roads 309 and 308-B, adjacent to Downtown Park. Craft vendors and food trucks will start at Downtown Park at 10 AM and go until 4 PM. At 5 PM, we're having a Tree Lighting Ceremony at the Welaka Town Hall. To finish off the evening, we'll have our annual Lighted Boat Parade at 6 PM on the beautiful St. Johns River. I am so proud of all those in our community who have worked together to bring about such positive change to our Christmas event. Just 3 years ago, during COVID, the Town wasn't able to have a Christmas parade. Now, we're able to have events all day to celebrate Christmas! We are very fortunate to be able to bring these events to our community. We are one of only 4 cities in Putnam County where residents can go be a part of and attend both a Christmas parade and Christmas celebration. Be sure to mark your calendars and come out on December 9th starting at 10 AM and join us for a magical day in Welaka!

On a Town front, I'd like to take a few minutes to update you of all the significant projects currently in the works for the Town of Welaka. In the past 2 1/2 years we have been blessed to receive over \$16 million Dollars in grant funds to improve our economic resilience and infrastructure. Starting with our Wastewater Treatment Plant, the engineers currently have 60% of the design completed for the plant. We anticipate the design to be completed by the end of January and will be breaking ground on the new plant somewhere around the end of February or March. We are very blessed to have received \$13.5 Million Dollars from the state of FL to build this new Wastewater Treatment Plant. The FL DEP has already determined that the plant needed to be replaced. If we had not received the grant funds from the state, the Town would have been forced to borrow \$13.5 Million Dollars, placing the repayment of the loan on the residents of the Town of Welaka.

I'd also like to give you an update on our auto-read meter project. It's taken a significant amount of time for the FL Dept. of Commerce to finalize our grant agreement. This agreement has been signed and the \$600,000 has been allocated to the Town by the state of FL to fund the project. The engineering firm has been hired and we are currently looking at various systems to determine which one will be the most feasible for the Town. Regardless of the system(s) we choose, it will have leak detection and notification which will allow us that you may have a leak or issue on your side of the water meter which could save you from a massive water bill. We anticipate having a system selected by the end of February and our goal is to have the system completely installed by the Fall of 2024.

We are also excited to be working on our Flood Plain & Resiliency Study and will expect to have Public Meetings starting sometime in the month of January. An announcement will be made in the January Newsletter of the dates and times. The purpose of this study is to identify the vulnerable areas in the Town susceptible to flooding so that we can get grant funding to deal with these areas. The Town was fortunate to be awarded over \$100,000 from the state to carry out this important study. From a grant-funding perspective, the benefits of this study will have positive effects on the Town for many years to come.

I am also excited that the Town of Welaka has taken delivery of 2 new police trucks. The cost of these two trucks was just over \$124,000 and I'm excited to announce that the state of FL reimbursed us \$100,000 for the cost of these vehicles. You may be asking yourself why the Town purchased these 2 new vehicles, the answer is that several of our police cruisers were starting to get aged and our goal was to swap out these vehicles with new vehicles with a full manufacturer warranty.

I also want to talk about a couple projects that we are requesting funding for right now. The first one is the pavement and drainage for 2nd Avenue, which is the Jim King Trail. This project will cost approximately \$1 Million Dollars and I will be traveling to Tallahassee in mid-December to ask our State Senator and State Representative to appropriate the funds for this project. We are also requesting funds from the state of FL to build a new Town Hall with police, fire and 24-hour EMS services. That project will cost approximately \$32 Million Dollars. Our State Representative and State Senator have expressed interest in supporting this project which would be funded in 3 parts over a 3-year period. If this project gets funded, the Town will receive a new governmental complex with little to no cost to the Town residents. I realize that this is a big goal, but you must be willing to ask for and believe that it can happen. We also requested \$11.8 Million Dollars through a FL DEP grant to update our Wastewater Collection System. This is the same grant that we were rewarded back in 2021 for \$10 Million Dollars to help fund the new Wastewater Treatment Plant.

I am also excited to say that this funding opportunity to upgrade the sewer system in Sportsman Harbor has opened up. The state of FL has announced that it will allocate \$500 Million Dollars in grant funds to assist cities whose infrastructure was damaged by Hurricane Ian. After several discussions with the DEP, they feel that the Sportsman Harbor project would be a good fit for the grant program. We will be applying for approx. \$5 Million Dollars in January of 2024. I will be requesting letters of support from residents in Sportsman Harbor to help give us the best chance of receiving the grant funds. The Town has also applied for Two \$200,000 FRDAP (Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program) grants. One to fund a new pickleball complex located at the Field of Dreams Park, which is soon to be renamed Veterans Memorial Park, and the other grant is for upgrades to the Jefferson Smith Park. In total, the Town is requesting over \$50 Million Dollars from the state of Florida for infrastructure, parks, roads, and governmental facilities. We are very fortunate to have representatives in Tallahassee who are willing to support us in these massive projects.

I hope this update can put into perspective how hard we are working to improve your Town and community. As we close out the month of December, let us take stock in how blessed we are to live in the United States of America where we are free to live our lives and pursue our dreams. We are also fortunate to live in the Town of Welaka which I believe is one of the most beautiful small communities in the state of Florida.

Until next time, I hope this finds you well and you and your family are blessed this Holiday Season. I look forward to speaking to you again next month.

Very Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie D. Watts" with "MAYOR" written in small capital letters below the name.

From The Council President

For the last 2 ½ years our Town Council appointed Charter Review Committee has been working on creating a new Charter for the Town of Welaka. The Charter would be comparable to our Constitution as it outlines how our local government operates. You may wonder why we needed a new Charter to begin with. Please consider the fact that our Charter has not been meaningfully updated in over 76 years. There were many clauses that are outdated, and some are even illegal. For example, the 1947 Charter required Council Members to be property owners in the Town. That has since been deemed illegal. Another outdated clause required the Town to collect its own share of ad

valorem taxes. Thankfully, we now have a county Tax Collector that does that for us!

In October, the Charter Review Committee held an informational workshop to present the new Charter and address all the changes and updates that were made over the past 2 years. Since most of the current Charter was deemed unusable, they started from scratch using a government approved template. The workshop was sparsely attended. At the last Town Council Meeting in November, the Council approved the first reading to allow the proposed new Charter to be on the ballot in March of 2024. The Council did not vote to approve the new Charter, only to move the proposed Charter forward so that our residents have a chance to vote on it. This is such an important decision and gives the power to whom it belongs, to you, the residents of the Town. We will have a second reading of the ordinance at our December Council Meeting, once again, to decide whether to have the proposed new Charter on the ballot in March so that it can be voted upon.

A second workshop with the Charter Review Committee was held on Wednesday, November 29th. I've encouraged all residents who have questions to attend. Chairman, David Jelts, has also indicated that he is willing to hold additional informational meetings so that residents can be better informed before they cast their vote in March.

Please take a moment to look at the proposed new Charter as well as the current Charter to compare. You can find them both on the front page of our Town website. You can also pick up copies of each at the Town Hall.

In Your Service,

Jessica Finch, Welaka Town Council President



Need A Meeting With Your Mayor?

To schedule a meeting with your Mayor, please go to
www.MayorWatts.com



Do You Have News for the Town of Welaka? Publish it here!

Please email the digital image to TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov



If you would like to recognize a Town of Welaka resident for something, please email the info to
TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov



Eyeglass Recycling

Drop your unused glasses by the Welaka Town for the South Putnam Lion Club to pick up.



Need To Report An Issue or Make A Town Code Violation Complaint?

Street or Park issue? Report online at www.TellTownHall.com
Code Enforcement Complaint? Email codes@welaka-fl.gov



Helping Hands of Welaka Toy Drive

Collecting toys to give out to the children who attend the Welaka Christmas Parade & Festival in December. Please contact Harriet at (631) 764 - 2308



Sponsor an Event

The Events Committee is seeking sponsors as they plan new events for the future. If you know anyone who would like to sponsor any of our events, please reach out to our Events Committee at events@welaka-fl.gov.



ANNUAL GOLF CART REGISTRATION STICKERS HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED

Please make sure to follow the regulations in ORD 2010-08.

Pending Town Council approval, refunds will be issued after December 12, 2023.

ANNUAL BUSINESS TAX LICENSE IS REQUIRED BY OCTOBER 1, 2023

Applications and the Fee Schedule ORD 2022-07 are located in the Welaka Town Hall foyer and on the front page of the www.welaka-fl.gov website.

You Must Provide: Insurance Certificate(s), Business License(s)

(Credit/Debit Card, Cash, Check or Money Order)





THANK YOU WELAKA!

From our family to yours, Outback Smoke Shack would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We also would like to personally thank each and every one of you for supporting us in our first few months of business. It goes without saying that we would not be here without your support. We ask for continued support so we can keep growing to better serve our community. We take pride in our customer service and product and hope you have had great experiences at "The Smoke Shack". With that being said, we will remain open 7 days a week through the holidays with the exception of Christmas day and New Years Day.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME, WELAKA!

Sincerely, A.J.

CHRISTMAS TREE DECORATING
 Calling All Residents,
 Families & Children!

THE TOWN OF WELAKA WILL BE HOLDING A CHRISTMAS TREE DECORATION EVENT ON SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2ND AT 9:00 AM AT THE WELAKA TOWN HALL. WE ENCOURANGE EVERYONE TO BRING HOMEMADE ORNAMENTS FOR THE TOWN CHRISTMAS TREE TO MAKE IT EVEN MORE SPECIAL!

THEN ON THE NEXT SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9TH, WE WILL HAVE THE TREE LIGHTING EVENT AT 5:00 PM, AFTER THE CHRISTMAS PARADE.

Please come and enjoy the season together!
 Let's show our unity for Welaka!

DECEMBER 2nd 9 AM & DECEMBER 9th 5 PM

TOWN OF WELAKA TREE

Attention Captains
WELAKA
 LIGHTED BOAT PARADE ON DECEMBER 9TH 6PM

PRIZES:
 1ST PLACE: \$250 & TROPHY
 2ND PLACE \$200 & TROPHY
 3RD PLAGE \$150 & TROPHY

REGISTRATION DEADLINE:
 DECEMBER 7TH. EMAIL
DIANAGONSALES@GMAIL.COM
 FOR DETAILS



GFWC WOMAN'S CLUB OF WELAKA

Saturday, December 9th

9:00AM - 2:00PM

Last Chance Craft Sale

- *hand painted lighted bottles,
- *vintage jewelry artwork,
- *handmade ornaments,
- and much more.

Special items perfect for gifts.

Got a sweet tooth?

BAKE SALE

Lots of goodies!



Lunch- Hot dogs with chips, drink.

Chili with chips and drink.

Parade parking available next door to Club

**JOIN US FOR A
CHRISTMAS PARADE!**

DECEMBER 9
MEET US AT NOON AT MILL STREET!

VENDOR MARKET: 10AM-4PM
FOOD TRUCKS: 10AM-4PM
BOAT PARADE: 6PM

SAVE THE DATE!

WHAT: "Never Too Old For Christmas!" Play

WHERE: FBC Church of Welaka

WHEN: Saturday, Dec. 16, 2023
At 6:30 PM

Sunday, Dec. 17, 2023
At 3:30 PM

REFRESHMENTS WILL FOLLOW

FREE ADMISSION

Welaka Event Center

A new Event Center has opened in the Town of Welaka!
Available for family reunions, club meetings, parties, holidays, etc.

According to owner, Charlie Chapman, the Event Center gives Welaka residents and visitors an optional venue that can accommodate 60+ people. It took a year to complete as he wanted it to be first class.

IT CERTAINLY DELIVERS!

The building boasts high ceilings, beautiful ambient lighting, comfortable seating and tables, a kitchen, and even a VIP room.

Visitors will be pleasantly surprised at what awaits them beyond the metal facade.
Conveniently located in downtown Welaka at the corner of 4th Avenue and Palmetto Street.
To book the Event Center, please call (904) 669-7538
THANK YOU!



Welaka Children's
Christmas Party

Saturday December 23rd
10am-noon
Food & Fun ~Santa Gift Giveaway
Welaka Children Newborn-13
The Church Fellowship Hall
638 Third Avenue in Welaka



Register with Laurie by December 15th
561-267-7466 or mp1326@aol.com

Aside from our party, parents can register for toys online @ ToysForTots.org

presented by **Friends of Welaka**

Made with PosterMyWall.com



Thank you







Friends of Welaka would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to our sponsors for our First Annual Fundraising Gala.

Giving is not just about making a donation, it is about making a difference. Thank you again!


Made with PosterMyWall.com


**GIVE A GIFT
GET A GIFT**

DONATE BLOOD

Welaka Town Hall
Blood Drive
Thursday, December 28
10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
400 4th Ave., Welaka



Scan to book your appointment today! → 

All blood donors will get a T-shirt!

\$25 e-gift card for all donors
Additional \$20 e-gift card for plasma and double red cell donors

LIFESOUTH
Community Blood Centers

All donors will receive a recognition item & a free cholesterol screening. Donors must be 16 or older, weigh at least 110 lbs., & show photo I.D. 16-year-olds require written parental permission. Visit lifesouth.org for more info.



**TOWN COMMERCIAL
FIRE INSPECTIONS!** 



**FIRE INSPECTIONS WILL BE CONDUCTED DURING THE
FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY, 2024 BY CLU WRIGHT**

COST
\$125 INSPECTIONS
\$75 REINSPECTIONS
\$25 ADMINISTRATIVE FEE

TOWN OF WELAKA CONTACT LIST

WELAKA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Michael Porath - Police Chief

Direct Line: (386) 524-4015

(386) 467-9800 ext. 107

MPorath@welaka-fl.gov

AFTER HOURS: (386) 329-0801

EMERGENCY: 911

MAYOR'S OFFICE

Mayor Jamie Watts

(386) 467-9800 ext. 101

Direct: 386-524-4009

JWatts@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Meghan Allmon - Town Clerk

(386) 467-9800 ext. 102

TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov

Ellen Dickason - Assistant Town Clerk

(386) 467-9800 ext. 104

EDickason@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA UTILITY DEPARTMENT

Emma Sledge - Utility Clerk

(386) 467-9800 ext. 103

ESledge@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA AFTER HOURS

(386) 467-9800

WELAKA CODE DEPARTMENT

Pauline Kinney

(386) 530-0336

Codes@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Mark Criswell - Universal Building Inspector

(386) 467-9800 ext. 105 or Option 4

Building@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA TOWN COUNCIL

Council President Jessica Finch

(386) 467-9800, ext. 200

JFinch@welaka-fl.gov

Councilwoman Kimberly Dugger

(386) 467-9800, ext. 201

KDugger@welaka-fl.gov

Councilwoman Tonya Long

(386) 467-9800, ext. 202

TonyaLong@welaka-fl.gov

Councilwoman Kathy Washington

(386) 467-9800, ext. 203

KWashington@welaka-fl.gov

Town Attorney, Patrick Kennedy

TownAttorney@welaka-fl.gov

Events Committee: events@welaka-fl.gov

Waste Pro: (386) 328-5445

It is our pleasure to serve the Town of Welaka!



December



2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3	4 Trash & Recycling Pickup	5	6	7	8 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting 9:00 AM - Town Hall	9 Town Christmas Event Parade & Vendor Market Downtown Park 10 AM - 4 PM
10	11 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	12 Town Council Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	13	14	15 Meter-Reading Day	16 Town Hall Tree Lighting 5 PM Lighted Boat Parade 6 PM
17	18 Trash & Recycling Pickup	19	20	21 Zoning Board Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	22	23
24	25 Town Hall Closed (Christmas) 	26 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup Code Board Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	27	28 Blood Drive 10 AM - 5 PM - Town Hall Tree Board Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	29	30
31	1 Town Hall Closed (New Years Day) 					

PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR FULL ACCOUNT NUMBER IS ON YOUR PAYMENT

Thank you!