



Welaka Gazette

May 2023

From The Mayor's Desk

As I am writing this month's "From The Mayor's Desk," Welaka's Chief of Police, Michael Porath, and I just returned from Tallahassee. We spent the last several days visiting with State Representatives and State Senators about the needs of Welaka in the coming legislative cycle starting this September. We continue to work to put the Town on firm ground for the future to ensure our Town can meet the needs of our residents, and to continue to have a safe and clean Town that everyone in our community can be proud to live in.

My goal as your Mayor is to keep you informed about what is happening in the Town and address concerns that our residents have. Recently some residents have expressed concerns about me talking about growth and how it will affect Welaka. Some have indicated that they don't want to see the Town grow and are okay with how it is. I do not wish to see the Town lose its charm. However, to not see any growth in the Town is impossible. First, if we do not have a certain amount of development and improvement to increase our tax base, then the Town's residents are forced to take on the added tax burden. We work hard to make sure our budget is both sound and responsible. We are cautious with every dollar we spend and ask ourselves if that is the best use of taxpayer dollars, although the reality is that even with a responsible budget, prices of goods and services increase annually. This year we have all felt that with record inflation and the pain we all feel at the gas pump and at the grocery store. If we don't make plans to ensure the Town grows responsibly, then as costs rise, the current residents will be forced to pay higher taxes to offset the costs. Only through controlled, responsible growth, can we ensure the tax base grows in a way that does not put all the tax burden on our current residents. I never want to see anyone move out of Town because they cannot afford to pay their taxes to live here.

The second reason we know that growth is coming and that we cannot stop it, has to do with the rate people are moving into Florida. As of last month, people are moving into the state at a rate of 1,218 people per day. The interesting part is with the overcrowding occurring in South Florida; there are as many people moving from the southern part of the state to our area, as people are moving in from other states. I know what you are thinking "Mayor, that is precisely what we don't want to happen to us, to end up like South Florida." The good news is, we won't if we act now to put Land Development Codes in place to ensure our community grows and improves but does not get out of control. Anyone who travels through Clay or St. Johns County sees the massive explosion of growth occurring in those counties. Both counties are closing in our Putnam County, and the growth has already spilled into Putnam. With the small-town charm of Welaka, our low crime-rate, and our location on the St. Johns River, it's easy to see why our beautiful Town is so attractive to people.

My responsibility as a community leader is to ensure that the water, sewer, streets, government services, and police protection are ready so that when growth happens, we meet the needs of the residents of the Town and not fail you because we failed to make plans for the future. As I said before, we also want to make sure we are deciding how our Town will grow. Some had accused me of trying to attract growth into Welaka, but the reality is, that the train left the train station long before I was your Mayor.

Going to Tallahassee to seek funding for projects in our Town, and inviting Congressmen, State Representatives, and even state agencies to tour Welaka, are all critical steps to ensure we get the grants to fund the large projects we need, such as our new Wastewater Treatment Plant or our Police Department. I appreciate Chief Porath and others who take the time to travel to Tallahassee and help advocate for the Town. It also ensures that those who govern us in Tallahassee know that the Welaka Town Leaders are watching and

giving them feedback about potential laws that could harm the Town. As I said, we have some massive and vital projects in Welaka, and as the ole saying goes, "How do you eat an Elephant? One bite at a time!" We have taken some mighty big bites out of those projects these past two years.

I appreciate the confidence and trust you have placed in me to serve you as Mayor, and that trust is never taken for granted. We have an amazing team of well-talented and well-educated people working for the Town to serve you, the residents, and to constantly improve our community. We will continue working together to move Welaka forward and ensure that our little Town is here to serve as a home for many generations to come. I hope you have a great month of May, and I look forward to talking to you again next month.

Very Best Regards,

Handwritten signature of Jamie D. Watts, Mayor. The signature is in cursive and includes the name "Jamie D. Watts" followed by "MAYOR" in small capital letters.

From The Council President

Recently, the Town Council passed the First Reading of Ordinance 2023-02, **AN ORDINANCE OF THE TOWN COUNCIL OF THE TOWN OF WELAKA, FLORIDA, REGARDING UNLISTED USES WITHIN THE LAND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS; PROHIBITS THE ESTABLISHMENT OF UNLISTED USES, EXCEPT PURSUANT TO FINDINGS, AS DESCRIBED HEREIN; SPECIFICALLY ADDRESSING THE PROHIBITION OF THE SALE OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA AND THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF MEDICAL MARIJUANA DISPENSING ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE TOWN OF WELAKA, FLORIDA; PROVIDING FOR APPLICABILITY; PROVIDING FOR DURATION; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; AND PROVIDING AN EFFECTIVE DATE.**

It has a long heading, but important information. I have received several questions from concerned residents:

Q: Why does this Ordinance specifically mention the prohibition of medical marijuana dispensaries?

A: According to our Town Attorney, state statutes require us to specifically address the use of such facilities if we are to enact an Ordinance to prohibit them.

Q: Why would you want to prohibit them in the first place?

A: This Ordinance is a stop-gap measure to prohibit any use that is not specifically mentioned in our current Zoning Uses, not just dispensaries, but as mentioned above, the ordinance must specifically address them.

Q: Why would you want to limit what is allowed in Zoning?

A: The current Zoning Uses were enacted many years ago. This Ordinance will give the Town breathing room to address and revisit these Zoning allowances.

For example, the Council that was in place when these Zoning classifications were enacted, could not have foreseen that a medical marijuana dispensary could be a legal use. Other things that are not specifically prohibited in our Ordinance at this point, are establishments such as adult entertainment/strip clubs and adult-oriented stores. Allowing us time to get feedback from residents is part of the process, and will allow residents to be in the driver's seat in how future development might look.

With all that said, we really don't have a commercial district in Welaka that doesn't abut residential land. I have yet to find someone who wants one of these potential businesses next to them!

Please reach out to me or any other Council Member with your feedback.

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 and select the date and time that works for you.



Do You Have News for the Town of Welaka? PUBLISH IT IN THE WELAKA GAZETTE!

For more information, please contact the **Welaka Town Clerk, Meghan Allmon**, at TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov



If you would like to recognize a Town of Welaka resident for dedicated community service to our Town, a local student with exceptional grades, or to nominate a Town resident who is celebrating a landmarked birthday such as turning 100 years old, please contact our **Welaka Town Clerk, Meghan Allmon**, at TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov. We will be happy to recognize them at our next Council Meeting by public recognition.



Eyeglass Recycling – How You Can Help

South Putnam Lion Club would like to remind you that you can drop your unused glasses by Welaka Town Hall in the drop-box in the main hallway. Donate glasses and change someone's life. Imagine if you could help a child read, an adult to succeed in their job, or a senior citizen maintaining their independence. Help to provide our community with more opportunities to grow and thrive.



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

Need to report a street or parks issue or make a Codes Enforcement Complaint?
Report online at www.TellTownHall.com



Helping Hands of Welaka Toy Drive

Helping Hands of Welaka is collecting toys to give out to the children who attend the Welaka Christmas Parade & Festival in December of this year. If you would like to donate, please contact **Harriet Vanslyke** at **(631) 764 - 2308**

Sponsor an Event

The Events Committee is seeking sponsors as they plan new events for the future. Some of the events include having a fireworks show at one of our events. Like all things, these things cost money. While the town sponsors these events, we do not have it in the budget to do everything we want to do. 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





TOWN OF WELAKA BOARD & COMMITTEE MEMBER VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS

If interested, please inquire with the Town Clerk or visit the Town's website main page to apply for the Welaka Code Board, Zoning Board, Charter, Events or the Citizens Advisory Committee.

Website: www.Welaka-fl.gov
E-Mail: TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov

A \$25 REGISTRATION STICKER IS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO DRIVE YOUR GOLF CART IN WELAKA

Valid Driver's License, Insurance (with golf cart listed) & \$25.00 (Cash, Check or Money Order)



The Welaka Town Hall is happy to announce that we now accept debit and credit cards in the office or over the telephone!



Help Save TIME & MONEY for the Town of Welaka

Please visit www.WelakaWater.com and sign up for e-billing. Your Invoice will be automatically e-mailed to you every month. After you enroll to receive your bills online, please notify the Town Hall Utility Clerk that you prefer to receive e-Bills so we can stop printing and mailing your bill to save Welaka TIME & MONEY.

Emma Sledge, Welaka Utility Clerk
(386) 467-9800, Option # 3
esledge@welaka-fl.gov

Please note that the monthly Welaka Newsletter is always available on our sites:
Website: www.welaka-fl.gov
Facebook: www.facebook.com/townofwelaka/

We also have printed copies in the Town Hall Lobby, or feel free to email the Town Clerk to have a copy e-mailed to you: TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov

*Feel free to sign up for Automatic Bill Payments also. You can use your bank account or your debit/credit card. Once you pay a bill on www.WelakaWater.com, it will ask you if you'd like to set up Auto-Pay.

THANK YOU for your HELP in saving Welaka TIME & MONEY!



Encore! Encore!
Blueberry Pancake Drive-Thru
Breakfast
Saturday, May 6
8:00-10:00
Woman's Club of Welaka
644 CR 309 Welaka

Pancakes, butter, syrup and
choice of bacon or sausage
\$6 donation requested



See you then!
Come hungry!



Come play



at the Woman's Club of Welaka

644 CR309 in Welaka

Monday, May 8
6:30-8:30 p.m.

Light snacks provided
BYOB

\$5 donation per player
Must be 21 to play



Hope you can join us!



SUNDAYS AT ANDERSEN'S



**BILLIARDS
ALL DAY**

LET'S PLAY

DRINKS • BINGO • FOOD





EVENTS

MON - WED AT ANDERSEN'S



**HAPPY
HOUR**

LET'S GET HAPPY!

DRINKS • MUSIC • FOOD



TUESDAYS AT ANDERSEN'S



**TACOS & BINGO
NIGHT**

LET'S PLAY

DRINKS • BINGO • FOOD



WEDNESDAYS AT ANDERSEN'S



**POOL NIGHT
6:00 PM**

LET'S PLAY

DRINKS • BINGO • FOOD



THURSDAYS AT ANDERSEN'S



**KARAOKE
NIGHT**

LET'S SING

DRINKS • MUSIC • FOOD



Town Of Welaka invites you to



Food truck

Fridays

April 7th May 5th June 2nd
July 7th August 4th

6:00 Pm - 9:00 Pm

Jefferson Smith Park, Welaka

Monday, May 15

Free UF/IFAS and Master Gardener events

5:00PM – 6:00PM **Plant Clinic**
6:00PM – 7:00PM **Learning Workshop**

Growing Ginger and Turmeric at home

(starter plants will be sold for \$4)

Welaka Woman's Club
644 Co Rd 309, Welaka

An Equal Opportunity Institution.




Makers' Market

at the

Woman's Club of Welaka

644 CR 309 Welaka

Saturday, May 20 9:00-3:00

Come join us!

Crafts, food, vendors and fun!

Sunshine and good company!

Vendor info: 904-347-7758

TOWN OF WELAKA CONTACT LIST

WELAKA POLICE DEPARTMENT

Michael Porath - Police Chief

Direct Line: (386) 524-4015

Town Hall Extension: 107

mporath@welaka-fl.gov

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

WELAKA TOWN COUNCIL

Council President Jessica Finch

(386) 467-9800 (Option 7, Option 2)

Town Hall Extension: 200

jfinch@welaka-fl.gov

Ellen Dickason - Assistant Town Clerk

(386) 467-9800 Ext. 104

edickason@welaka-fl.gov

Councilwoman Kimberly Dugger

(386) 467-9800 (Option 7, Option 3)

Town Hall Extension: 201

kdugger@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA UTILITY DEPARTMENT

Emma Sledge - Utility Clerk

(386) 467-9800 Ext. 103

esledge@welaka-fl.gov

Councilwoman Tonya Long

(386) 467-9800 (Option 7, Option 4)

Town Hall Extension: 202

tonyalong@welaka-fl.gov

Welaka AFTER HOURS Call Center

(386) 467-8677 / TDD: (800) 955-8771

Councilwoman Kathy Washington

(386) 467-9800 (Option 7, Option 5)

Town Hall Extension: 203

kwashington@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA CODE DEPARTMENT

Pauline Kinney

(386) 530-0336

codes@welaka-fl.gov

Town Attorney, Patrick Kennedy

TownAttorney@welaka-fl.gov

WELAKA BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Mark Criswell - Universal Building Inspector

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

building@welaka-fl.gov

Events Committee: events@welaka-fl.gov

Waste Pro: (386) 328-5445

It is our pleasure to serve the Town of Welaka!



May

2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	2	3	4	5 Citizens Advisory Board Meeting 9:00 AM Welaka Town Hall Food Truck Friday 6 - 9 PM Jefferson Smith Park	6 Blueberry Pancake Breakfast 8 – 10 AM Woman's Club of Welaka
7	8 Trash & Recycling Pickup Events Committee Meeting 5:45 PM – Town Hall Pavilion Bunco 6:30 - 8:30 PM Woman's Club of Welaka	9 Welaka Town Council Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	10	11 Welaka Fire Board Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Fire Station	12 Town Water Flush Day (May experience low water pressure)	13
14	15 Meter-Reading Day Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup Plant Clinic 5 PM Workshop 6 PM Woman's Club of Welaka	16	17	18 Zoning Board Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	19	20 Makers' Market 9 AM – 3 PM Woman's Club of Welaka
21	22 Trash & Recycling Pickup	23 Code Enforcement Board Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	24	25	26	27
28	29 Town Hall Closed (Memorial Day Observed) Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	30	31			