



# Welaka Gazette

May 2024



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## From The Mayor's Desk

As the Charter Review Committee progresses towards finalizing the new Town Charter, which is slated for a vote by the residents in November of this year, I am compelled to reiterate a topic that has been a constant point of discussion. This topic pertains to the crucial decision of whether to hire a Town Manager who can also oversee the Utility Department or solely hire a Utility Director. Your input and understanding of this decision holds significant implications for the future of our community.

It is crucial that we address the issue of our Utility Department without delay. The Welaka Utility Department provides drinking water and processes wastewater for over a thousand people in and out of Welaka. Given the importance of drinking water and public safety, it is too important of a job to be placed in the hands of whoever the Town elects as Mayor. Under the current system, the strong Mayor is also the Welaka Utility Director. In the past 3 years, I have discovered countless reasons beyond public safety why this is a terrible idea.

When I took office as Mayor, I quickly became familiar with our water and wastewater utility system, which I discovered was appalling. I found a sewer plant that is rusting and falling apart, critical pumps out of service or completely missing, no map of our system, and no maintenance or improvement plan. The failure of the sewer plant or pumps could have quickly displaced you from your home for weeks because you could not live in a house without water or sewer. However, we immediately went to work identifying the most critical issues and then fixing them based on priority. In the past three years, the Town has spent over \$175,000 making critical repairs to our system to ensure it operates properly.

Why so much in repairs? To be very candid, the former Mayors neglected the system's maintenance and repair. Post-COVID, we have faced record inflation and supply chain issues, forcing the Town to make repairs at one of the most expensive times in American history. In the past month alone, we have discovered improper maintenance of our system, which was buried in the ground and could cost upward of \$100,000 to fix. We are also working on 3 critical capital improvement projects, including building a new sewer plant, upgrading the sewer system in Sportsmans Harbor, and installing a new auto-read water metering system. These 3 projects have been funded by the state of Florida to the tune of \$19.1 Million Dollars, a testament to our community's resilience and determination. If the Town had been forced to borrow the money for those projects, we would be at \$3.8 Million Dollars in loans to repay after an 80% loan forgiveness, that is, if the state would even grant the loan forgiveness. The Town's annual loan payment for 40-years would be \$121,000 annually. With 730 customers, that would increase your water bill by \$14 monthly, just to make the loan payment, and would not include any future increases for inflation. Your bill is not going up \$14. I am simply explaining what it would have increased to, had we not gotten the grant funding.

As your Mayor, I have prioritized infrastructure and public safety. I have made an understanding of water, wastewater and grant funding my top priority. I have attended countless Florida Rural Water conferences and training, and even took the wastewater plant operators class to better understand the process as I oversee the design of the new sewer plant. However, there is no guarantee that the next Mayor will take that initiative. History has shown us that previous Mayors did not share my concerns. Also, after taking office, we asked Florida Rural Water to come in and evaluate our system and determine its condition and repair cost. After a thorough evaluation, they estimated it to be around \$1.3 Million Dollars, not including the recent issues we found buried. This is the reason for your recent water rate increase, so we could create a Utility Asset Management fund to start those repairs and ensure this does not occur again.

Before you read this and say "why don't we just turn over our system to the county or a private third party?" That will not solve our problem. At this point, the county is struggling to make its utility system profitable. Also, the repairs to our system are our concern. Even if a third party takes over the system, they will still charge you a rate to give them the

finances they need to repair and maintain the system. Turning over our system to someone else does not stop you from being a utility customer, so you will still pay regardless of who operates the system, however, you will lose local accountability.

The need for a qualified Utility Director is clear. We need a full-time qualified person to oversee the repair and maintenance of our system and apply for grant funding to help fund the critical projects. Consider this: our former Mayor was in office for over seventeen years, and no action was taken to apply for grants to fix our aging utility system. We received over \$19 Million Dollars in grant funds only when I took office. Why? I made it a priority to seek this funding. We cannot return to hoping that future Mayors will take the same interest in our utility system, or we will be in trouble. As I said earlier, we must have a qualified Utility Director oversee our system and make sure we provide clean drinking water to our residents in the future.

So what will this person cost the Town, and more importantly, the utility customers, like yourself? Well, recently, the Town of Welaka did a work compensation study, and below is what we discovered. We expect to pay a qualified Utility Director a mid-range salary of \$80,000 per year, plus benefits. Benefits include paying 80% of their health insurance and contributing 7.5% for their retirement. So what will the cost be? Assuming this person is approximately 45 years of age for health insurance purposes, it would be as follows: \$80,000 salary, plus \$6,120 in Social Security and Medicare taxes, plus \$6,000 in retirement, and \$8,100 in health insurance costs. The total cost would be just over \$100,000 per year. This will increase your water bill's base rate by \$11.50 per month.

So what is the alternative? What most Towns our size do, is hire a Town Manager who also directs the Utility Department. That way, their salary can be shared between the Town government and the Town Utility Department. So what is the cost of that? The same work compensation study estimates a mid range salary of \$100,000 per year. Here is the breakdown: Assuming this person is approximately 45 years of age for health insurance purposes, it would be as follows: \$100,000 salary, plus \$7,650 in Social Security and Medicare taxes, plus \$7,500 in retirement, and \$8,100 in health insurance costs. The total cost is just over \$123,000 per year. If the Utility Department paid 25% of the salary, about \$31,000, the Town government would pay the additional \$92,000. The Town government and the Town Utility Department have this in their budget currently, meaning you would not see an increase in your property taxes or utility bills.

In conclusion, we have already seen how critical it is to hire a Utility Director for the future of our utility system. We have to decide if we want to split that cost between the Town government and the Utility Department for a Town Manager or only hire a Utility Director and see another increase of \$11.50 per month to our minimum water bill. There is a lot of information circulation about the Town government, which is why it is so critical to get solid information. I deal with facts and figures because they cannot be disputed.

On a personal note, I want to express my care for Welaka; it's been my home for over 32 years, and my love for this Town runs deep. I truly care about Welaka, perhaps more than words can convey. I want to assure you all that despite any rumors or misconceptions, my commitment to transparent governance remains steadfast. Your trust in me means everything, and I will always strive to keep you informed and involved.

Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or concerns about anything I've discussed today. You can call me or email me at [jwatts@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jwatts@welaka-fl.gov), and I'll be more than happy to assist you. Additionally, I've included the slides below from the work compensation study for your review. Your feedback is valuable, and I welcome any thoughts you may have.

*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.

## Work Compensation Study Information

### Market Results Average

Position	Minimum Salary Range	Midpoint Salary	Maximum Salary	Minimum Salary Range	Midpoint Salary	Maximum Salary	Salary Spread
	Hourly			Annual Salary			
Town Manager	\$ 40.74	\$ 47.93	\$ 55.12	\$ 84,736.22	\$ 99,689.67	\$ 114,643.11	35%

### Market Results Average

Position	Minimum Salary	Midpoint Salary	Maximum Salary	Minimum Salary	Midpoint Salary	Maximum Salary	Salary Spread
	Hourly Rate			Annual Salary			
Public Works Director/Utilities Director	\$ 32.64	\$ 38.40	\$ 44.16	\$ 67,892.83	\$ 79,873.91	\$ 91,855.00	35%

## From The Council President

If you missed the presentation by Jim Hanson from the Florida City & County Management Association on April 17th, as I did, you missed an informative discussion.

In his presentation, Mr Hanson outlined the nature of the Council-Manager form of government, including both the roles of Council and the Town Manager. Hint: The Council's role doesn't change and is still responsible for setting and approving the annual budget, approving local ordinances and establishing priorities for the Town.

Each week, on Wednesday at 5 pm, the newly appointed Charter Review Committee will meet to discuss the revision of the Charter, including, ultimately, the form of government that will be included in the updated Charter. As you may be aware, the Town's Charter has mostly remained unchanged since the 1940s and is in dire need of revision. The goal of the Charter Review Committee is to bring a finished document to the Council for review by late June or early July. The Council will then vote in two separate readings whether or not the new Charter will be placed on the ballot in November for you, the voters, to decide whether or not to approve the updated Charter.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these meetings and the Charter itself. These meetings are a chance for you to provide input to the committee and be a part of the process.

Please come out and have your voice count.

In Your Service,

*Jessica Finch, Welaka Town Council President*



### Need A Meeting With Your Mayor?

To schedule a meeting with your Mayor, please email  
TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov



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

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



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

Street or Park issue? Report online at [www.TellTownHall.com](http://www.TellTownHall.com)  
Code Enforcement Complaint? Email [codes@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:codes@welaka-fl.gov)



### Eyeglass Recycling

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



### 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](mailto:events@welaka-fl.gov).

Town Of Welaka invites you to

# FOOD



# truck



# Fridays

March 1st April 5th May 3rd  
June 7th July 5th August 2nd  
5:30Pm - 9:00 Pm



Jefferson Smith Park, Welaka



## Welaka, FL

River of Lakes

### Let data lead the way!

Please visit our Website for all your Town needs  
[www.welaka-fl.gov](http://www.welaka-fl.gov)

Lee Conlee House, Inc. & GFWC Woman's Club of Welaka presents....

# Spilling the T.E.A.

Spilling Truth, Empowerment, & Advocacy

## Mother's Day Tea Party

Location: GFWC Womans Club of Welaka  
604 Co Rd 309  
Welaka, FL 32193

Tickets: \$30 each (Scan QR code below to purchase) / \$35 at the door  
For More Info, Contact: 386.325.4447 / Donations Accepted: [www.leeconleehouse.org](http://www.leeconleehouse.org)

Saturday, May 11th 10:00am-12:00pm



Guest Speaker

Yassah Lee  
Teacher, Author,  
Motivational Speaker, Pastor

High Tea Attire/ Hats & Fascinators  
Best Hat Contest  
SILENT AUCTION & RAFFLE

All proceeds benefit survivors of domestic violence

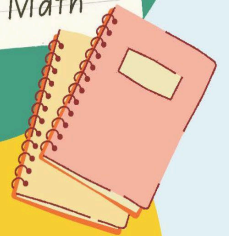
EVERY WEDNESDAY

# After School Tutoring

Reading & Math



FROM  
4 - 4:30 PM



FRIENDS OF WELAKA

Please Contact:  
Laurie Porath  
(561) 267-7466



## WELAKA WALKS

Saturday, May 11, 2024  
Downtown Park 8:30 – 10:30 AM

Let's Come Out and Demonstrate our **UNITY** as a **COMMUNITY**  
and Start the Day Feeling **GREAT!**



We will meet at Downtown Park for coffee and a healthy breakfast. Then take a beautiful walk down Front Street, Teronda, and River Bend.

The **GOALS** are Simple:

1. Meet and enjoy your Neighbors!
2. Exercising with a **BUDDY** is fun!
3. Enjoy Natural Beauty of Welaka!
4. Start a

**HEALTHY** new Habit!

### Mark Your Calendar

Questions? Call or text Kim Dugger  
904-477-5567



## **SUNDAY NIGHT GATHERING**

COME JOIN US FOR

**DINNER AND FELLOWSHIP NIGHT EVERY  
SUNDAY EVENING AT 6:00 PM**

~~~~~  
**WORSHIP AND LEARNING GOD'S WORD TOGETHER**  
~~~~~

**LOCATION: WELAKA EVENTS CENTER  
501 4<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE  
WELAKA, FL 32193**

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**FEATURED SPEAKER, KENNETH WOOD**

- PUTNAM COUNTY RESIDENTS -

# WASTE TIRE AMNESTY DAY

One Day Event - Saturday, April 20, 2024 • 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Putnam County Landfill

140 County Landfill Road, Palatka, FL 32177 • 386-329-0395

Waste tires are not only unsightly they are a health hazard for our community and our environment.

**Must provide proof of Putnam County Residency.**

Residents may bring up to 20 tires for FREE disposal (Car and light truck tires only).

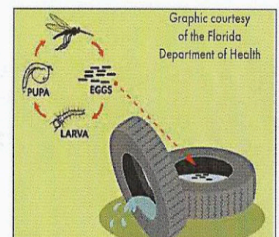
Tires must be clean and free of debris with **NO RIMS.**

**NO COMMERCIAL LOADS WILL BE ACCEPTED**



**\$ FREE EVENT \$**

Limit (20) Car & Light Truck Tires  
ONLY ... Per Resident



# 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](mailto:mporath@welaka-fl.gov)

**AFTER HOURS:** (386) 329-0801

**EMERGENCY:** 911

## WELAKA MUNICIPAL SERVICES

**Meghan Allmon - Town Clerk**

(386) 467-9800 ext. 102

[TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov)

**Kendra Quick - Assistant Town Clerk**

(386) 467-9800 ext. 104

[kquick@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:kquick@welaka-fl.gov)

## WELAKA UTILITY DEPARTMENT

**Emma Sledge - Utility Clerk**

(386) 467-9800 ext. 103

[esledge@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:esledge@welaka-fl.gov)

## WELAKA AFTER HOURS

(386) 467-9800

## WELAKA CODE DEPARTMENT

**Welaka Police Department**

(386) 467-9800 ext. 107

[codes@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:codes@welaka-fl.gov)

## WELAKA BUILDING DEPARTMENT

**Universal Building Inspector**

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

[building@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:building@welaka-fl.gov)

## MAYOR'S OFFICE

**Mayor Jamie Watts**

(386) 467-9800 ext. 101

Direct: 386-524-4009

[jwatts@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jwatts@welaka-fl.gov)

## WELAKA TOWN COUNCIL

**Council President Jessica Finch**

(386)467-9800, ext. 200

[jfinch@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jfinch@welaka-fl.gov)

**Councilwoman Kimberly Dugger**

(386) 467-9800, ext. 201

[kdugger@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:kdugger@welaka-fl.gov)

**Councilwoman Tonya Long**

(386) 467-9800, ext. 202

[tonyalong@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:tonyalong@welaka-fl.gov)

**Councilwoman Kathy Washington**

(386) 467-9800, ext. 203

[kwashington@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:kwashington@welaka-fl.gov)

**Town Attorney, Patrick Kennedy**

[townattorney@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:townattorney@welaka-fl.gov)

**Events Committee:** [events@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:events@welaka-fl.gov)

**Waste Pro:** (386) 328-5445

**Waste Pro:** (386) 328-5445

**Putnam County Animal Control**

(386) 329-0396

*It is our pleasure to serve the Town of Welaka!*



# May



## Welaka, FL River of Lakes



# 2024

| Sunday    | Monday                                                                                                         | Tuesday                                               | Wednesday                                                         | Thursday                                              | Friday                                                               | Saturday                                                                                       |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           |                                                                                                                |                                                       | <b>1</b><br>Charter Review Committee Meeting<br>5 PM - Town Hall  | <b>2</b>                                              | <b>3</b><br>Food Truck Friday<br>Jefferson Smith Park<br>5:30 - 9 PM | <b>4</b>                                                                                       |
| <b>5</b>  | <b>6</b><br>Trash & Recycling Pickup                                                                           | <b>7</b>                                              | <b>8</b><br>Charter Review Committee Meeting<br>5 PM - Town Hall  | <b>9</b>                                              | <b>10</b><br>Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting<br>9 AM - Town Hall | <b>11</b><br>Welaka Walks Event<br>Mason Newstead Memorial<br>Downtown Park<br>8:30 - 10:30 AM |
| <b>12</b> | <b>13</b><br>Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup                                                             | <b>14</b><br>Town Council Meeting<br>6 PM - Town Hall | <b>15</b><br>Charter Review Committee Meeting<br>5 PM - Town Hall | <b>16</b><br>Zoning Board Meeting<br>6 PM - Town Hall | <b>17</b>                                                            | <b>18</b>                                                                                      |
| <b>19</b> | <b>20</b><br>Trash & Recycling Pickup                                                                          | <b>21</b>                                             | <b>22</b><br>Charter Review Committee Meeting<br>5 PM - Town Hall | <b>23</b><br>Tree Board Meeting<br>6 PM - Town Hall   | <b>24</b>                                                            | <b>25</b>                                                                                      |
| <b>26</b> | <b>27</b><br>Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup<br><b>TOWN HALL CLOSED</b><br>in Observance of Memorial Day | <b>28</b><br>Code Board Meeting<br>6 PM - Town Hall   | <b>29</b><br>Charter Review Committee Meeting<br>5 PM - Town Hall | <b>30</b>                                             | <b>31</b>                                                            |                                                                                                |

**PLEASE MAKE SURE YOUR FULL ACCOUNT NUMBER IS ON YOUR PAYMENT**  
**PLEASE DO NOT STAPLE OR PLACE WHITE-OUT ON ANY CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS**

*Thank you!*