



Welaka Gazette

November 2023

From The Mayor's Desk

As we enter the month of November, I am grateful for all that this month brings us. First, I am thankful that the 2023 Hurricane season will soon end. We were lucky here in Welaka this year, but many in Florida were not so fortunate. Florida experienced a major storm with Hurricane Idalia. The final numbers for the storm included ten fatalities and close to five billion dollars in damages. We are very fortunate that this storm came ashore so far north, a little closer, and it would have put us in its crosshairs. Please continue to keep those who are still recovering in your thoughts and prayers.

With Fall, I am also thankful for the cooler temperatures after the hot summer this year; a little cool weather is a welcomed relief. These last few weeks, I have had the opportunity to sit on my porch in the evening and enjoy the cool weather. Sometimes, it's the small things in life that I have come to appreciate the most. I hope you have enjoyed the cooler evenings in Welaka as well.

With the welcome of Fall, we also welcome the holidays and the opportunity to spend them with family. Soon, we will be celebrating Thanksgiving and then Christmas. On December 9th, the Town will host our annual Christmas Parade and Christmas at the River celebration. It will include our parade starting at noon on CR 309, followed by arts, crafts, food trucks, and toys for the children at Downtown Park, and, of course, our annual Boat Parade on the St. Johns River in the evening.

A new event I want to make you aware of and invite you to our Veterans Breakfast on November 10th at 10:00 AM at the Gordon Sands Jr. Pavilion next to Welaka Town Hall. Every freedom we enjoy in our Nation is a result of men and women who were willing to serve our country and place their lives on the line to protect our freedom. This breakfast is the Town's small way of saying thank you for your service. If you currently serve, or have previously served, or know someone who has, please invite them to join us that morning as we say thank you.

On the Town front, I want to talk about a subject that has been a point of controversy for the last few months in Welaka, and this is the use of side-by-sides on Welaka streets. For the last several years, Welaka Police Department's Chief Porath and I have tried to look at ways to include them in our golf cart ordinance and have come to realize it is not possible. We have even gone so far as to seek assistance from the Florida Police Chiefs Association and made trips to Tallahassee to visit our State Representatives and State Senators. The Florida Legislative Session will start in January, and we will be back in Tallahassee, asking again for our state leaders to help us with this issue. If you would like to join us as we champion this, please email me at jwatts@welaka-fl.gov, and I will share with you our key contacts in Tallahassee who are helping us. This is an important matter to many, and we will continue to champion our state to take action in helping to make them legal on city streets in Florida.

To talk briefly about the Welaka Police Department, there have been some questions in our community on why we need a full-time police department. I want to address those questions. People say, "There is no crime happening in Welaka." I wish that were the truth, but it simply is not. As more and more people move to Florida and into our community, we continue to see an increase in call volume with the Welaka PD. A few weeks ago, several arrests

were made in Welaka, including one for drug trafficking. I am being very candid when I say Welaka, like other towns in the Nation, has its share of crime. Our PD deals with everything from drugs to theft to speeding in our community, which puts our residents at risk, so there is very much a need for law enforcement in our community. But remember, it is not only the responsibility of law enforcement to investigate crime, it is also their responsibility to prevent it from happening in the first place. Welaka is the only Town in south Putnam that operates its own Police Department. We have also moved to night and weekend patrols of our community. I can assure you that word has gotten out about our increased police presence, which has caused many who would seek to do us harm to stay out of Welaka. Many residents in Putnam County are forced to wait up to forty minutes for a law enforcement officer to arrive when they need one. Isn't it nice to know you can call and have an officer respond almost immediately? Isn't it also nice to see them patrolling our community and keeping us safe? When I took office as Mayor, my two main focuses were public safety and infrastructure. Let me now share my 100% unequivocal support of the Welaka Police Department, and the long hours and great job they do keeping us safe. I hope you feel the same way as well; if so, please let them know that when you see them out in our community, your words of encouragement mean more than you know.

To talk on Public Works for a few moments, their department continues to make great strides in improving the look of our Town. Recently, the Town Council approved the purchase of a new John Deere Tractor with a six-foot wide high-speed mower deck to allow them to mow the right-of-way on CR 309 and CR 308-B faster. Last year, the Town purchased a new zero-turn mower. Unfortunately, there is a lot of right-away to mow, and it is starting to take its toll on our lawnmowers. This new equipment will give the Public Works Department the ability to work more efficiently and at a lower cost to taxpayers.

I also want to speak very briefly about our Utility Department. About eighteen months ago, I asked the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to fund a utility asset survey to determine the condition of our system. When the study was complete, it was determined that our system suffers from decades of neglect and lack of maintenance. We have made great strides with grants in the total funding of our new sewer plant and water projects. Unfortunately, we have also had to invest over a hundred thousand dollars of our own money into our water and sewer system to ensure it always operates as it should. One of the challenges we face is that it has been many years since the Town has had a water rate increase despite the cost of everything going up each year. On Monday, November 6th, at 5:05 PM at Welaka Town Hall, the Welaka Town Council will hold a Special-Called Meeting to discuss water rates and the possible need to increase them. I understand it is tough for everyone, and I never like the idea of putting a financial burden on our residents. However, we must make sure that our water utility system is solvent and can meet its obligation in the future. We cannot allow our Town to experience the situation they faced in Jackson, Mississippi, when their water system failed, and people had no water for drinking or bathing. One of the biggest challenges the Town faces is the limited number of water connections, which is roughly eight hundred. If you recall, earlier in the year, I asked the Town Council to approve the expansion of our Utility District outside the Town limits. This was the first step in extending our system to allow for more connections and customers, thereby spreading the cost to cover more customers. Many have told me they want to keep Welaka from changing or growing. While I share in their concern to protect our small-town charm, the price for that is an increase in utility rates when operation costs rise, and there are no additional residents to help carry the cost. Our goal is to do this in a way that will have the least effect on residents while also ensuring we can continue to maintain our system. Please join us on November 6th as we are having this discussion. We welcome your input.

In closing, I hope everyone has a happy Thanksgiving, and I look forward to seeing you all at our Christmas Parade in December.

Very Best Regards,

The image shows a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jamie D. Watts". To the right of the signature, the word "MAYOR" is printed in a small, sans-serif font.

From The Council President

The last couple of months I've been utilizing data from the www.Redevlopment.net website to provide information to you regarding the procedure for creating and the purpose of CRAs.

During our visioning process, we emphasized the need for our citizens to be in the driver's seat as far as future development is concerned.

As I am writing this, I am on break at the Redevelopment Conference in Jacksonville. One particular presentation stood out to me, and I just wanted to highlight a few key concepts:

The scenic qualities of our community directly impacts our quality of life. These impacts potentially include our economic prosperity, our mental health, and our community pride. When we have higher expectations and hold others to these expectations, we will ultimately get better results. The character of our town is more important than development for development's sake. We must remember we have options, always, as we move forward.

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? Report online at www.TellTownHall.com
Or make a Codes Enforcement Complaint? Email codes@welaka-fl.gov

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



AN ANNUAL REGISTRATION STICKER IS REQUIRED BY OCTOBER 1, 2023 IN ORDER TO DRIVE YOUR GOLF CART IN WELAKA

Please bring your driver's license, proof of insurance (with golf cart listed) and \$25.00 to the Welaka Town Hall.

New ORANGE Registration Stickers are now available!



ANNUAL BUSINESS TAX LICENSE REQUIRED BY OCTOBER 1, 2023

Applications and Fee Schedule ORD 2022-07 are located in the 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)

JOIN US FOR A
**VETERAN'S DAY
 CELEBRATION!**
NOVEMBER 10
 CELEBRATION STARTS AT 10AM
 AT THE TOWN HALL PAVILION
 BREAKFAST PROVIDED



 Welaka, FL
River of Lakes

~ LET'S RECOGNIZE OUR WELAKA VETERANS ~

SUBMIT A PHOTO!

**SUPER HEROES
 VETERANS DAY GALLERY**





PLEASE INCLUDE THEIR NAME, PHOTO IN UNIFORM, RANK, & RETIRED/ACTIVE STATUS

DROP OFF AT THE WELAKA TOWN HALL
 OR
 E-MAIL TO TOWNCLERK@WELAKA-FL.GOV



**Historic Emmanuel
 Episcopal Church**
 Welaka's Oldest Structure built in 1880



Fundraiser
 For church repairs

Selling
Hawg Wash BBQ
Smoked Boston Butts
November 11, 2023

Tickets in advance!!
 Whole Butt (9-11 lbs.) \$45.00
 Single pound \$10.00

Please support the restoration of our church
 For tickets call 386-530-0228, 352-494-3790

 **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!



November

Welaka, FL
River of Lakes



2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Daylight Savings Time 			1 Charter Review Committee Meeting 5:00 PM - Town Hall	2 Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting 9:00 AM - Town Hall Welaka Fire Board Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Fire Station	3 National Sandwich Day 	4 Veteran's Day 
5	6 Trash & Recycling Pickup Special-Called Town Council Meeting (Utility Rate Increase) 5:05 PM - Town Hall	7	8 Meter-Reading Day	9 Zoning Board Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	10 Town Hall Closed (Veteran's Day) Veteran's Day Celebration & Breakfast 10:00 AM Town Hall Pavilion	11
12	13 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	14 Town Council Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	15	16	17	18
19	20 Trash & Recycling Pickup	21	22 Town Charter Public Workshop 6-8 PM - Town Hall	23 Town Hall Closed (Thanksgiving) <i>Happy</i> THANKSGIVING	24 Town Hall Closed (Thanksgiving)	25
26	27 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	28 Code Board Meeting 6:00 PM - Town Hall	29	30		

**PLEASE MAKE SURE YOU OR YOUR BANK'S BILL-PAY FEATURE
PUTS YOUR FULL ACCOUNT NUMBER ON YOUR PAYMENT.**

Thank you!