



Welaka Gazette

April 2021

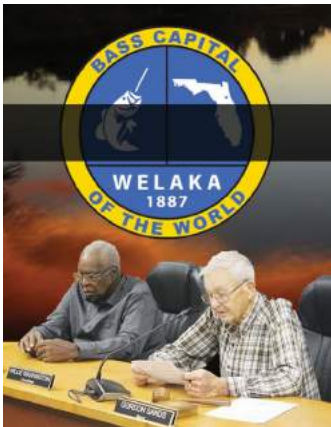
Our New Town Newsletter

You notice that the look and feel of our newsletter has changed. My goal is to make it more informative for you, the Town residents. I want it to give you more information on what is happening with our Town and share unique stories that you might not hear about otherwise. In the coming months, you will watch our newsletter grow into something pretty unique. I hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we do in putting it together for you each month.

Mayor Watts

Honoring A Legacy

This month the Town of Welaka mourns the loss of two amazing men with a combined service to our community of over eighty years. On March 3, 2021, Councilman Willie Washington peacefully entered the sunset of life, and on March 21, 2021, former Mayor Gordon L. Sands, Jr joined him. Councilman Washington shattered racial barriers by becoming the first African-American Deputy Constable in Putnam County's history and the first African-American Council Member in the Town of Welaka. He continued his over fifty years of service to our community right up to his passing, and we will be forever in his debt for all that he has done to help Welaka.



Mayor Sands served as both a Welaka Town Council Member and as Mayor of Welaka since March 4, 1994. He was a faithful servant of the Town of Welaka for 27 years. His dedicated work to our Town included our floating dock at Bryant's Wharf, several of the beautiful parks in our Town, along with his hard work in improving our streets and modernizing our water and sewer plant. His long-time work has truly enriched all the lives of Welaka residents, and he will be tremendously missed.

If it weren't for these two great men's hard work and dedication, we would not have the foundation we have today as we continue to make Welaka the best little community in Florida. We owe them both a tremendous debt of gratitude. We also wish to thank their families for sharing them with our Town and allowing them to serve our community. Your

loss is our loss, and your pain is our pain. You will be in our thoughts and prayers in the coming day.

From The Mayor's Desk

I have been your Mayor for just over twenty-eight days, and first, let me say it is an honor and a privilege to serve you, the residents of Welaka. I want to share with you a little of what is going on with the Town. When I took office, I realized we did not have an effective way to gather information, create and prioritize essential projects in the Town. We also did not have a central communication program for all Town employees to communicate in real-time with. The first thing I set out to do was work with our information technology Department to create these critical systems. I am pleased to say we now have a digital whiteboard system that has allowed us to develop digital Departments with each Department's list at our fingertips on our Ipads. The Town has three Ipads we purchased for water meter reading; up until now, these Ipads were only used one day a month. They are currently assigned to our General Maintenance, Utility Supervisor, and our Code Enforcement Officer. Our new system allows our staff to create work orders in real-time and assign them to the correct employee. If the work order requires purchases, myself or my Town Clerk can approve the purchase almost immediately. This new system will allow us to streamline and prioritize our needs, ultimately saving money and allowing us to get more accomplished each week. Don't be surprised if you see me out on a Saturday or Sunday with my own Ipad making lists. I like to get a jump on the week and have my staff ready to go each Monday morning.

Our new communication system also ties to our digital planning board and allows us to communicate with each other instantly. With our new communication system, each employee has an app on their phone, and they are assigned to various Departments. Our software allows everyone in the Department to join in the discussion in real-time to bring all ideas and input into the conversation and get answers almost immediately. I am pleased to say that our staff has very well received both systems and they are excited about how effective and more effective they are going to be.

I am also pleased to say we recently completed a workshop where we have created parliamentary procedures to govern our Town Council Meeting, governing our Town Council moving forward. Our Town Attorney is in the final stages of reviewing them, and I expect to have them before the Town Council at our meeting on April 13th. The purpose of the procedures is to streamline our council meetings and give the Council some guidelines on how they should conduct the session. It will also ensure you, the Town residents, have a voice in your Town Government.

Also, be aware that on the night of our Town Council Meeting on April 13th, I will be delivering my annual State of the Town address to the Welaka Town Council and you, the Town's residents. The purpose of this address is to inform you, the Town residents of the State of our Town, everything from our financial state to current projects and future goals. Our council meetings are now open back to back live sessions, and we encourage you to

come out and attend our meetings. If you cannot attend in person, we will be live streaming each meeting with playback after the meeting. You can watch it on the Town of Welaka Facebook page; we are also working on streaming it on youtube once we determine the cost.

I have also created a link on the Town of Welaka website that allows you to book an appointment with me. It is important that I make myself available to you, the Town resident, so if you would like a meeting with your new Mayor, head over to our Town of Welaka website at www.welaka-fl.gov and feel free to book an appointment with me. On a final note, I want to share so much with you each month that I realize that I will not be able to fit it all into our Town newsletter. This is why I will be hosting a monthly address live online from the Mayor's Desk the first of each month. This short five to ten-minute address will allow me, as your new Mayor, the opportunity to let you know all the great things we are getting accomplished for you. My address will be posted on the Town of Welaka Facebook page, so if you cannot watch it live, you will be able to go back and watch it when you can. I hope you are as excited as I am about all the great things happening in Welaka. I look forward to working with the entire community as we Move Welaka forward together.

Respectively Submitted

Mayor Jamie D. Watts

From Our Council President

This month has been challenging, don't you agree? When I was asked by Mayor Watts to contribute to the monthly newsletter, only one thing came to mind, the passing of two beloved public servants, Willie Washington, Jr. and Gordon L. Sands, Jr. To say that Welaka has suffered a significant loss is an understatement. Together they served a lifetime in public service. Their commitment and love of our community stand unsurpassed.

As I reflected on their lives, one poignant memory stood out. In 2018, as I was eagerly and excitedly being sworn in, the Honorable Tim Smith commented to me something that I'll never forget. He stood before the dais, pointing to Mr. Washington, Mr. Sands, and Mr. McGauley, and said, "This is what public service looks like." Those words resonated with me and stand true today.

But they started somewhere, and so must we. Welaka, although small, has diverse needs. And if we look around our neighborhood, with eyes wide open, those needs will present themselves. You don't have to be on the Council or Code Board to serve; all you need is a willingness to step up and out. As we move forward as a Town, and reverently we must, let us always remember the contributions these gentlemen have made to our community. Let our actions honor them, and our footsteps follow them in our service to our Town.

In Your Service,
Council President Jessica Finch

Utility Updates

We want to take the time to acknowledge Utility Foreman Tyler Buford for all the hard work he has put into the new communication tower and control system we are installing at lift station six located on 2nd Ave. Lift station six is a crucial lift station for our sewer plant. With our new system, we will get immediate notifications should a malfunction occur. The new system will reduce our response time, reduce overtime, extend equipment life, thus saving us time and money. Lift station six is the start of our new sewer monitoring system project; my goal is to have the entire sewer plant on the new system in the near future. This is just one more way we are moving Welaka forward together.



Our Community

I want to thank the Welaka Women's Club for hosting our first blood drive of the year. I was at my office at Town Hall when I got a call from Debbie Johnson, Past President of Welaka's Woman's Club, asking for the new Mayor to come down and get stuck for the cause. Blood donation is so critical in our community that the blood bank is often short of essential blood types. If you can, I encourage you to give blood. You never know the life you save might be your own or a family member. We will keep you updated on when our next blood drive will be held in Welaka.



I also want to take the time to publicly acknowledge the Welaka Women's Club for all the important work they do in service to our community. Ladies, our community would not be the great place it is to live if it wasn't for yourself and others like you giving back to our community. Thank you for all you do, and we look forward to continuing to work with your organization as we move Welaka forward together.

Monthly Town Meetings

April 13, 2021

Zoning Board Meeting 5:30 PM

Code Enforcement Meeting 5:45 PM

Town Council Meeting 6:30 PM

All three will be live streamed on our Town of Welaka Facebook Page

April Meter Reading

Will be April 16th if you have any issues with your water or sewer remember the Town Utility Department is available 24 hours a day at (386) 467-8677 or TDD (800) 955-8771. We ask you to please do your part in conserving water.

Garbage Pickup

Garbage and Recycling pick up will be April the 5th, 12th, 19th and 26th of the month. Yard debris pick up will be April the 5th and 19th of the month. Please remember to call Waste Pro at (386) 328-5445 if you have any issues with your garbage, yard debris or recycling pick up.

Pay Your Water Bill Online

You can now pay your water bill online using our Online Utility Bill pay system. To get started go to www.welakawater.com and create your account. In your account you can track your monthly water usage and even set up your account for auto pay so you never have to worry about a late charge again. If you need assistance setting up your account online please call our Utility Department at (386) 467-9800 option 4. You can also drop your payment by Town Hall anytime using our Utility Payment drop box located to the right of the front door of Town Hall.

March's Recognitions and Proclamations

Town of Welaka Proclamation 2021 -01

Honoring Mayor Gordon L. Sands, Jr.

Establishing January 21st of Each Year as Gordon L. Sands Jr. Day and awarding him a Key to the Town.

Town of Welaka Resolution 2021- 01

A Resolution of Respect and Honor

For The Honorable Welaka Town Councilman Willie Washington, Jr.

A Beloved Member Of Our Community

Town Of Welaka Proclamation 2021- 02

A Proclamation Closing Welaka Town Hall On March 10, 2021

In Honor Of Welaka Town Councilman Willie Washington, Jr.

And Declaring A Time of Town Mourning

Are You A Veteran Or Do You Know One In Welaka

It is important to honor our United States Military servicemen and servicewoman's sacrifice to our Country. To do this, we would like to invite a resident of the Town of Welaka who is or has, in the past, honorably served in our military to come out to our monthly council meeting and lead us in our pledge of allegiance. We ask you for your help in identifying these brave men and women who live in our Town. If you have yourself served or knew of someone in our Town, please contact our Town Clerk Jennifer McDaniel at (386) 467-9800

or by email jennifermcdaniel@welaka-fl.gov so we can add them to our list. We would even like to feature them in our newsletter if they allow us to do so.

Join Us In Welcoming Our Newest Council Member

We want to take a moment to recognize our newest Council Member Tonya Long who was elected to our Town Council on March 2nd. She and her husband, Waylon Long, are long-time residents of the Town of Welaka. We look forward to working with her in the coming days as we endeavor to better our community.

We would also like to welcome back Councilwoman Marianne Milledge as she starts her second term on the Welaka Town Council. Marianne serves on our Tree Board and puts in a lot of hard work to improve our Town.

Friendly Reminder

In the coming months, we will be increasing our Code Enforcement efforts as we endeavor to polish up our Town. Code Enforcement is not designed to punish people but is an effort to work together to make our Town look its best. We are all proud to live in this beautiful little Town. For the next 30 days, we will have a grace period as we ask everyone in the Town to work diligently to make their property look its best. Beginning May 1, 2021, we will ramp up our Code Enforcement. We all want to work together to help, so if you are a senior who requires some assistance, we have had offers from residents in the Town to help those in need. Please contact our Town Clerk Jennifer McDaniel at (386) 467-9800 or by email jennifermcdaniel@welaka-fl.gov, and she will be happy to pass your information on to those who have offered to help. Yet another example of how amazing the residents of the Town of Welaka are with neighbors helping neighbors.

A Moment In History

The Town of Welaka was originally a 500-acre tract purchased by James William Bryant in 1852 and was known as Mt. Tucker. Prior to the war, there were large orange groves and cotton plantations. In 1860, Welaka's population was slightly over 100. At the end of the Civil War, fewer than 20 remained. The Town grew again and was incorporated on April 23, 1887 and Welaka was affirmed as the Town's name; the name Welaka is said to have been derived from the word local American Indians used for the St. Johns River. By the 1880s, Welaka had become a resort Town, marketing itself to visitors seeking medicinal cures from the mineral water of the local springs. The Welaka Mineral Water Company was incorporated in 1907. To the left is a photo of Octavia Bryant Stephens, with her son Winston (left) and Rosalie (right), taken in 1868. Octavia (Tivie) was the daughter of James William Bryant and his wife Rosa who were the original founders of our Town. In the coming months we will share interesting facts and more history about this amazing little jewel of a Town that we call home.

