

A Workshop Meeting/Retreat of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on Saturday, January 4, 2025, at 10:00AM at the Fort Coombs Armory, 66 4th Street, Apalachicola, Florida.

Present: Mayor Brenda Ash, Commissioner Anita Grove, Commissioner Adriane Elliott, Commissioner Despina George, Commissioner Donna Duncan, City Manager Travis Wade, City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings, Finance Director Lee Mathes, City Attorney Dan Hartman, City Planner Bree Robinson, Police Chief Bobby Varnes

The Workshop Meeting called to order by Mayor Ash followed by prayer and Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor Ash acknowledged the presence of Tom Morgan, a business owner of Apalach Outfitters, and Brian Deloach, a resident and former Leon City of Tallahassee Commissioner. The Mayor also welcomed Rebecca and Tom Brocato, local business owners, to the meeting.

Mayor Ash invited the Commission to share their vision for the City. Mayor Ash expressed that the City did not have a firm vision or mission statement. A sample vision statement was presented: "To be a vibrant, sustainable destination that celebrates its rich history, diverse culture, and natural beauty offering unforgettable experiences for all visitors."

Commissioner Grove suggested modifying the vision statement to focus on being a city first before being a destination. She emphasized the importance of addressing the needs of citizens and creating a balanced economy.

Commissioner George highlighted the need to address the concerns of residents, including the need for better services, affordable housing, and insurance issues. She also stressed the importance of preserving the city's history and authenticity.

Discussion held.

The discussion then moved to various city departments:

Police Department

Chief Barnes reported on the progress and challenges faced by the police department. He mentioned that the department had come a long way in recent years but still needed additional equipment and funding. Chief Barnes highlighted the need for:

- Replacing service weapons
- Funding for public relations events
- Addressing staffing challenges
- Continuing to adapt to changing times and technologies

The commission discussed the possibility of implementing fees for events to offset costs incurred by the police department.

Water Department

Field Crew Supervisor Rhett Butler opened the discussion on the focus of the water department being the city's three wells and the need for maintenance and upgrades. The possibility of implementing a carbon dioxide injection system to improve water quality was mentioned, along with

the pursuit of grants and legislative appropriations for this project. Mr. Butler also inquired about the City's ability to utilize interest on high-yield savings account(s) to be able to afford City employees' raises, Christmas bonuses, etc.

Finance and City Properties

The commission discussed the need to review city-owned properties, particularly the Johnson Complex, which was described as a "money pit" due to high insurance and utility costs. The possibility of downsizing City hall to a more cost-effective building was proposed.

Planning & Zoning /Grants

City Planner Bree Robinson presented the Commission with a handout of various recommendations and City projects that are ongoing and/or proposed detailing their projected costs, pros and cons of proceeding with said projects, accessory dwelling unit discussion, as well as the need for a full-time Building Official.

Discussion held on the current City Hall Building.

Clerk Office-Administration

City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings presented updates on the front office that included various staff suggestions, salary recommendations for Receptionist position, as well as an update on the newly acquired office equipment and utility billing software that streamline the Billing Department and front office.

Waste Water Treatment Plant

Manager Wade presented recommendations on behalf of WWTP Supervisor Will Cox and Public Works Supervisor Greg Harris. Manager Wade presented updates on the plan for the new Wastewater Treatment Plant, procurement for construction, receiving \$250K in federal funding to replace spray heads in the City's spray fields and the plan for any excess funds to be focused on the upkeep and maintenance of spray field zones. Manager Wade also presented the need for a new office building for the Water Treatment Plant etc.

Public Works

Manager Wade reported on the needs of the Public Works department, including:

- Regular replacement of equipment such as mowers, string trimmers, and chainsaws
- Vehicle replacements
- The need for a dedicated mini excavator
- A recent project to clean out stormwater manholes citywide

Library

The discussion on the library centered around issues of communication and management. Concerns were raised about:

- The library staff's perception of autonomy from city policies

- After-hours events and staffing
- The need for clear communication between the library, the city, and supporting organizations like the Pals group

Discussion held.

Strategic Planning Presentation

Mayor Ash emphasized the need for strategic planning and proposed scheduling a session with a professional strategic planner. Key points for future planning included:

- Updating the City's vision and mission statement
- Creating a scope of work for event service fees or impact fees
- Realistic budgeting for each department
- Reviewing and potentially selling surplus city properties
- Scheduling workshops for specific projects like the African American museum and relocating City Hall office
- Exploring the possibility of implementing a CRA (Community Redevelopment Agency) or sales tax; and any potential revenue opportunities
- Updating the Capital Improvement Plan

The meeting concluded with a call for continued discussion on improving the commercial area and addressing affordable housing issues in the City.

Discussion held.

Mayor Ash noted some suggestions for City Manager Wade in preparation for his resignation, including a meeting with Commissioner Grove in regard to the Capital Improvement Plan. Mayor Ash also recommended that Attorney Hartman communicate with Bree in regard to the ordinances that she proposed to be updated; meet with Finance Director Lee Mathis on updating the Water and Sewer ordinance pertaining to the rates, and fee(s); as well as review the City's Charter to see if any updates are needed etc. Suggestions were made to schedule meeting dates to discuss City Hall relocation, the African American history Museum, CRA Sales assessment and process(es) required to move forward with re-establishment and incorporate any potential revenue opportunities.

ADJOURNMENT

Workshop adjourned by Mayor Ash. None opposed.

Meeting Adjourned.

BRENDA ASH, MAYOR

ATTEST:

SHENEIDRA CUMMINGS, CITY CLERK