

CITY COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

SEPTEMBER 21, 2010

Vice Mayor Block called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Pastor Walter Lawlor, New Life Community Church, gave Invocation.

Present

Vice Mayor Trudy Block, Councilor Nancy Adorno, Councilor Mike Blethen, Councilor Don Kimsey and City Clerk Patricia Jackson. Mayor Joe LaCascia was absent.

A quorum was established.

Discuss the Business Plan for Polk

Vice Mayor Block asked everyone to set aside their anger for a couple of hours, respect other peoples' time, and not to shout out. Vice Mayor Block then made her presentation on the Business Plan for Polk City (a copy of her information is on file in the City Clerk's Office)

Commonality

- Want what is best for Polk City
- Pay less for property taxes and utilities
- Quality water/utilities
- Took 10 years to get here; we need more than 13 weeks to fix

Why Keep Polk City

- Local Control of Zoning – municipal zoning is easier
- Land Use and Zoning changes are easier
- If County would have to go to Bartow or Lakeland
- DCA – box around Polk City – Green Swamp
- Sewers – no plans to increase. Councilor Kimsey asked about the grant; Vice Mayor Block advised not for sewer – people in Railroad Heights doesn't want sewer

Resident from 406 Pope Avenue asked about septic

Councilor Kimsey spoke about zoning being flexible and brought up mobile homes. Vice Mayor Block advised that is not a dead issue; it is going back to the Planning Commission.

Doug Atwell, 609 Sayge Drive, asked if every resident in the city limits has city water and city sewer; he was advised no, not at this time. Councilor Adorno advised if an

area needs to be addressed because of quality, it would be addressed. Vice Mayor Block advised the City is not aggressively working toward that, and asked residents to come speak to them. There are no plans at this time; the City is re-examining everything.

- Property tax reduction is plan and goal
- Utility decrease is plan and goal -- \$650,000 CDBG Grant is hard to walk away from
- Local control of building plans and inspections
- Twelve extremely bright people who are working here; they are the best, smart people
- Tax is less than last year (even though millage is a little higher)

Kelly Downing, 756 Berkley Road, asked about the millage and roll-back rate; Vice Mayor Block advised we did not go back to the roll-back rate.

Lisa Shifflett, 234 Bayberry, spoke regarding taxes. Discussion took place regarding values going down 20%

Doug Atwell advised if property value goes up, the tax goes up; Vice Mayor Block advised the goal is to reduce.

- The City is paying their bills, and in a better position financially

Eugene Fleming, 8955 Golden Gate Blvd., asked how much money the City owed today; he advised in meeting with the County the City owes Fourteen Million Dollars. He also mentioned impact fees.

- Municipal Library – over 1,000 people visit the Library monthly.
- Polk City offers the chance to get Police back; we offer the possibility.
- Safe Haven Halloween and Christmas Parade
- The goal is to decrease debt, decrease utility rates and decrease property tax

Discussion took place regarding the building being renovated for church offices and whether or not they are exempt. Discussion also took place concerning houses for sale in Sandy Pointe

We have the ability to manage ourselves and have a plan.

What did we (Council) find in June?

- Unbalanced budget
- Late financial audits
- Over ten million dollars debt
- Over \$500,000 in unpaid impact fees owed to Polk County
- Defaulted loan payments of over \$370,000 to Polk County
- Sudden departure of City Manager

- Desire of some citizens within the city to de-annex from Polk City and by some to dissolve Polk City itself

Current State

- All debts are current and invoices are paid
- No need for special assessment
- Property taxes less for the most part
- Reduction in staff (three people)
- Acting City Manager volunteers time
- Mayor is here every day
- Part-time financial analyst for free
- Acting City Manager is a Nurse, Electrical Engineer, and has managed multi-million dollar programs. This is a business problem and needs to be fixed

Paula Roddenberry, 220 Sunshine Blvd., asked if the State found the City to be in a financial distress when the Audit was done. Acting City Manager Block advised they will not do it; we have called and talked to them.

- Soliciting information from other cities
- Responded to Florida Auditor General
- Renegotiated Sheriff's Contract
- Decreased cost of communications by half

Someone from 730 3rd Street advised we stand to lose a lot as a community if we lost City Management, and need to stand behind Council. We have to stick together as a community and stick it out; things can be accomplished.

Future Actions

- The City has cut \$566,000 out of the budget so far, and we are hoping to cut more
- Negotiation of some of the loans are not favorable for the City
- Outsourcing of Utilities; the city does not need expense of nine vehicles
- Pensions – look at short term and long term
- The decision made by Council will help in whatever direction the city goes

Mr. Jones, 365 Orange Blvd., asked about outsourcing. Vice Mayor Block advised the City has been outsourcing to Blount Utilities.

Lisa Shifflett questioned the utility rates going up should FGUA take over; Vice Mayor Block advised should the City sign a contract it is locked in for five years, and FGUA has no control over rates. The 80% to 90% was what they discussed if they were to purchase the system, and the City is not selling the water system or the wastewater system.

Susan Borsjé, 210 Bayberry Drive, wanted to know who pays for maintenance; she was advised that is the City's cost. Vice Mayor Block advised the wastewater treatment plant is being looked at to see what is more cost effective to the City. The project will not be done unless there is a decrease in property tax and utilities. It is going to take more than three months to resolve the City's situation. The City has smart people who work here. There are a lot of reasons to save Polk City; we are on the cusp of growth.

Councilor Adorno asked for clarification when Lisa asked about the Church Office and not paying property taxes. Kathy Delp advised it was her understanding they would not be tax exempt; it is only being used as an office and not a ministry. Lisa Shifflett then discussed a situation that happened in Clearwater with the Church of Scientology. Vice Mayor Block advised we would check on that. When asked about the utility bill, Vice Mayor asked them to please come into City Hall.

Ted Borsjé, 210 Bayberry Drive, asked about people outside of the City receiving a 25% surcharge as it relates to residents on the Mt. Olive System; Mr. Borsjé was advised they are not receiving a 25% surcharge, but are receiving inside city rates based on the contract between the City and Polk County.

Councilor Adorno discussed the City budget and adopting a balanced budget – she used the Sheriff's Contract as an example. The City has to do things in order to balance the budget; we are looking at the Sheriff's Contract as temporary, and want to eventually add deputies back to the Contract.

Mr. Atwood if the Sheriff's Office issues traffic citations; Sergeant Conover explained they do and gave them information as to how it works.

Councilor Adorno advised the City is looking to benefit from the USF Campus going up off of I-4.

Randy Carroll, 264 Waterview Drive, addressed Council and gave history of Polk City – his Grandmother was a pioneer in helping clear the path for Polk City to be built (he gave history). His family loves this town, and he wants to preserve this town; he wants Polk City to stay here.

Keith Prestige, 620 Reba Reda Rd, owns property at 224 Citrus Grove; Polk City has great meaning to him. He knows there are issues and things that need to be resolved; however, he thinks Council is sincere and will work with the citizens. He is for Polk City and is against the effort to destroy Polk City. The City was built with blood, sweat and tears, and believes voices need to be heard; believes we can work together as a community to make it happen.

Paul Roddenberry advised she has paper buttons, she knows there are some people in favor of keeping Polk City, and some are in favor of doing away with Polk City. She would like to know what she could do to show Council and staff there are people who care. She appreciates the hard work and effort; she worked here for 12 years, and she

has come to love this city. She then touched on rates; no one came when the rates were at their lowest, and rates being high can't be blamed for people not coming here. Paula then gave some history of the City's water system, she discussed the wastewater treatment plant, and touched on the financial situation – it can be fixed. Paula then asked if we are losing the City Library (if dissolve); Marry Ellin Barrett, who is the City Librarian, advised we would lose the Library – the Library Co-operative does not run the Library. Paula briefly discussed Founders Day.

Bobby Dunn, 11751 Dean Still Road East, addressed Council and asked if anyone asked the County if they will assess a special district tax; Vice Mayor Block advised County Manager Herr had made it clear that Polk City will have to pay their debt back. Discussion took place regarding the special assessment. Mr. Dunn advised for him it is cheaper to be in the County; however, he would like to see this town stay together, and feels Council should be given a chance; they didn't cause the problem.

Frank Anderson, 309 Persimmon Drive, referred to an article in the Ledger on June 8 whereby Polk City had to raise rates by 50% or the City would run out of money; he also spoke about the meeting with the County Commission (September 15) when they voted to take back the Mt. Olive System – where did the money come from to pay the County. He also mentioned a time when the Finance Administrator had commented the sewer fund was facing an \$80,000 deficit. Pamela Lawson advised the increases came into place, several positions were cut, the Sheriff's Office Contract was decreased, and the City received a refund from that. Pam also advised the Auditors advised the City what funds could be used to pay the County. It was also noted the City is paying their bills, except for the impact fees, and the City is not in a financial emergency. Pam also advised the City has a positive balance. Mr. Anderson asked about staying on top of the impact fees, and Vice Mayor Block advised Mr. Anderson if he wants to see that, to please come in and make a public records request.

At this time Vice Mayor Block took a five minute recess and called the meeting back to order at 8:15 p.m.

Lisa Shifflett, 234 Bayberry Drive, asked how much money was left to run the day to day operations once the check was cut to the County; Pam advised she would have to get that information; however, it will be tight for a few weeks. Discussion took place regarding the city finances, if an emergency happens, and everyday issues.

Al Schneider, 775 Teaberry Trail, advised money is coming in every month with the water bills.

Doug Atwood, 609 Sayge Drive, spoke about when he moved to Polk City four years ago; he asked how Polk City could support itself with such a small tax base. They are newcomers here because they like it; he has his viewpoints, and they would like to see a nice place if "we can afford it."

Denise Truden, 197 Sunshine Blvd, advised she moved here in 1991; she thinks Council has possibilities and we should give them support.

Mr. Duncan, 408 Rosewood Lane, advised he hasn't had a problem in 25 years, and has not been involved in politics; however, he feels Polk City is too small to support sewage, and he signed the petition. He hopes we can look at what the sewage did to us; he commends the Council, and he asked to forget the sewer. He also hopes Polk City will continue on.

Mr. McAlister, 231 Greenleaf Lane, advised the 10.4 million dollar debt bothers most people, and asked about an itemized list of who the City owes.

John McElwee, spoke about where we are now and look at where we were. He then discussed the wastewater plant and the Cardinal Hill property lease. If feels we can work together even if the County takes over.

Councilor Blethen advised we have a balanced budget, we are paying bills and we have money in the back; he feels we need to go forward. He also spoke about revisiting the mobile home issue.

Councilor Kimsey advised the mobile home issue is dear to his heart, and that is one of the things that prompted him to run for Council. He spoke about the Land Development Regulations regarding limitations with mobile homes, and he is glad to see Council address this.

Councilor Adorno thanked everyone for coming.

Vice Mayor Block apologized if she offended anyone; we should be kind to each other and she feels the character assassination needs to stop.

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Patricia R. Jackson, City Clerk

Trudy Block, Vice Mayor

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