



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
JANUARY 26, 2023, JOINT WORKSHOP
CITY COUNCIL, BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSION, AND
OKEECHOBEE UTILITY AUTHORITY BOARD OF DIRECTORS
SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION

I. Commencement

County Commission Chairperson Hazellief called the Joint Workshop to order on Thursday, January 26, 2023, at 6:00 P.M. in the William L. Hendry Courtroom, Room 270, located at the Okeechobee County Historic Courthouse, 304 Northwest 2nd Street, Okeechobee, Florida. The invocation was offered by Commissioner DeCarlo, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Commissioner Goodbread.

Attendance of the three entities is noted as follows:

Those present from the City Council were Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Vice Mayor Monica M. Clark, Council Members Noel A. Chandler, Robert "Bob" J. Jarriel, and David R. McAuley; accompanied by City Clerk Lane Gamiotea and City Administrator Gary Ritter.

Those present from the Board of County Commission (BOCC) were Chair David E. Hazellief, Commissioners Frank DeCarlo, Bradley G. Goodbread, and Kelly Owens. Commissioner Terry W. Burroughs was absent. Staff in attendance were County Attorney Garrett Olsen, Deputy County Administrator Richard Reade, and Deputy Clerk Thomas Hudek.

Those present from the Okeechobee Utility Authority (OUA) Board of Directors were Chairperson John Creasman, Regular Board Members Melanie Anderson, Tommy Clay, Steve Nelson, and Tabitha Trent, Alternate Board Members Glenn Sneider and Harry Moldenhauer. Alternate Member Jeff Fadley was absent. Staff Members present were Executive Director John Hayford.

II. Agenda

1. OUA Executive Director Hayford began by explaining the timeline and notification procedures to property owners with costs and payment options when wastewater collection lines are being added to the OUA system. These notifications and procedures are mandated by Florida Statute, essentially the property owner is notified twice, once before the project begins, then again after the project is completed, allowing them up to 12-months to connect to the new collection system.

The City's Code of Ordinances, Section, 58-72, mandates property owners connect to the wastewater system within 90-days after receiving official notice that the collection system is available. However, there are exceptions, connection is not required when: 1) the house, building, or structure is situated on property that is not abutting a street, alley, or road right-of-way where the wastewater connection is located; 2) the property is not within 100-feet of the wastewater connection; or 3) connection would require unusual and costly plumbing such as a lift station, force main or similar plumbing facilities. All new development is required to connect to the OUA collection system. The County's Land Development Regulations, Section 7.06.07 A.2, reads that connection shall be required when such system is available when it is capable of being connected to the plumbing of a residence or establishment, is not under a moratorium, and has adequate permitted capacity to provide the services.

The OUA is requesting the Council and BOCC amend the current regulations to mandate water and wastewater connections without exceptions, and utilize their respective Code Enforcement procedures when property owners fail to connect to the system. The OUA Board lowered the water and wastewater connection fees for a single family residence by 75 percent for Fiscal Year 2022-23. They have obtained funding to assist the property owners with other related costs and adopted various payment options. However, several property owners continue to refuse to connect. The County has begun to utilize the Code Enforcement process in the Taylor Creek area, whose wastewater collection system was completed in 2005, there are 19 occupied residences that have not connected. The Council asked the OUA to identify City customers/properties, who have refused to connect to the water and/or wastewater system. Once the list has been provided, the Council may also consider utilizing its Code Enforcement process.

The Council and BOCC confirmed their agreement on the importance of having existing homes/structures connect to the wastewater collection system in addition to new developments. Refer to 15-pages of materials identified as Action Item ID No. 9145 within the Minute File, to provide more detailed content pertaining to this discussion.

II. Agenda Continued

2. Mr. Hayford then presented water and wastewater projects for review and discussion. The completed projects consisted of the wastewater collection for the **Taylor Creek Area**, that was completed through a State Grant in 2005. The **Basswood/Whispering Pines Area** was a Community Development Block Grant funded project for water and wastewater and provided connections for approximately 160 residents. To date 15 occupied residences have not connected, plus 18 vacant properties that are not mandated to connect. The **Pine Ridge Park Area** project will be completed in August 2023 and provided approximately 80 water connections and approximately 110 septic customers to connect to the wastewater collection system. New Projects consisted of the **Southwest Service Area (SWSA)**, due to its magnitude is a three-part project: **1.** Construction of a master force main, master pump station and SE2 Interconnect. **2.** Construct the vacuum collection system to provide approximately 500 connections in late 2025. **3.** Construct the Okee-Tantie force main to provide approximately 633 connections in late 2025. The **Treasure Island Area** septic to sewer project would provide approximately 2400 connections. The **Southwest 5th Avenue Area** project is another septic to sewer project without a designated funding source, for 110 wastewater connections. The Orange Loop, Buckhead Ridge area and Northwest 5th Street area projects are almost complete, connection information was not available. Refer to 24-pages of materials identified as Action Item ID No. 9146 within the Minute File, to provide more detailed content pertaining to this discussion.

3. The discussion then turned to reviewing which projects were partially funded, emphasizing mandatory enforcement for connections is critical for additional funding options. A \$1,000,000.00 Federal Grant is assisting with a portion of the Treasure Island project. A \$7,508,000.00 USDA Loan is covering a portion of SWSA 2. A \$883,000.00 USDA Grant is covering a portion of SWSA 2. Then Florida Department of Environmental Protection Appropriation funding is covering all of SWSA 1, \$6,320,980.00; a portion of SWSA 2, \$3,842,941.00; all of SWSA 3, \$8,336,079.00; a portion of Pineridge Wastewater \$2,473,400.00, and a portion of Treasure Island \$24,520,580.00. What remains unfunded is \$3,998,332.00 of SWSA 2, \$1,350,568.00 of Pineridge Wastewater, all of SW 5th Avenue, \$2,080,000.00, and \$4,879,420.00 of Treasure Island. OUA has made and/or will be making additional funding requests to multiple agencies and requested support from the Council and BOCC. Refer to 4-pages of materials identified as Action Item ID No. 9147 within the Minute File, to provide more detailed content pertaining to this discussion.

In addition to the connection fees to be paid by property owners, costs they must also incur to construct the connection line from their sewer line (the house) to the OUA system (the street), and to fill-in or remove the existing septic tank. Depending on the property, this can cost approximately \$1,500.00 to \$2,000.00 per home. Possible funding can be sought after to assist with these costs and other options, such as consolidating all costs not one total per household will be considered by the OUA Board.

Citizen, Mrs. Raia Black clarified about the types of connections and required downpayment percentages, then asked the OUA Board to consider payment plans through the water bills without a down payment. Mr. Erik Howard, a professional engineer, and DeSoto County resident addressed the Boards explaining the Town of Lake Placid officials are having similar conversations. He suggested the City see how other municipalities have handled similar issues and that the BOCC research how other counties have consolidated multiple project funding and financing over 20 to 30 years in the utility bills.

Another item BOCC Chair Hazellief noted briefly was for the OUA Board to consider waiving connection fees for government developments, giving the example of the expansion of the County Jail. The City waived the Building Permit and Inspection Fees for the project, the OUA did not waive any of the connection fees. The Council and BOCC will consider amendments to their regulations at their respective individual Board meetings. The Boards agreed to jointly apply for and support OUA funding grants and/or State Appropriation requests to the local legislative delegation.

III. Adjournment, there being no further discussion, Chair Hazellief adjourned the Joint Workshop at 7:27 P.M.

Submitted By:


 Lane Gamiotea, CMC, City Clerk

Please take notice and be advised that when a person decides to appeal any decision made by the City Council with respect to any matter considered at this meeting, s/he may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based. City Clerk media are for the sole purpose of backup for official records of the Clerk.