



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
MARCH 21, 2023, TOWN HALL MEETING
MEETING MINUTES

As noticed, a meet and greet with refreshments was held beginning at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast (SE) 3rd Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watford called the Town Hall meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on March 21, 2023, at 6:20 P.M. The invocation was offered by Pastor Don Hannah of First United Methodist Church; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member Jarriel.

II. ATTENDANCE

Roll was taken by City Clerk Lane Gamiotea to establish a quorum. Members present: Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Vice Mayor Monica M. Clark, Council Members Noel A. Chandler, Robert "Bob" J. Jarriel, and David R. McAuley. Staff Present: City Clerk Gamiotea, City Administrator Gary Ritter, City Attorney John Fumero, Police Chief Donald Hagan, Finance Director India Riedel, Public Works Director David Allen, General Services Coordinator Patty Burnette, Executive Assistant Jacqueline Boer, Deputy City Clerk Heather Prince, Administrative Secretary Katie Rogers, and Administrative Secretary Ashley Marshall.

III. INTRODUCTION

Mayor Watford gave an overview of the meeting procedures, clarifying the difference between comment cards and written comment forms. Individuals wanting to address the Council should complete a comment card and turn it in to Clerk Gamiotea. Written comment forms are to be completed by individuals who do not want to publicly speak, submitted forms will be read aloud at the end of the meeting. He also extended an invitation for the public to attend and speak at all Council meetings, held the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6:00 P.M.

IV. RECOGNITION CEREMONY

A. Chief Hagan recognized Jessica Francis and K-9 Luna, who were promoted April 8, 2022, to Sergeant, she was pinned with her badge by her family. Cody Daigneault was promoted to Sergeant on June 24, 2022, he was pinned with his badge by his wife. Sergeant Aurelio Almazan, who was transferred to the Detective Unit July 22, 2022, was not able to attend.

B. Officer Jack Boon who was rehired on April 4, 2022, and assigned to the Detective Unit, was not able to attend.

C. Chief Hagan administered the Oath of Office to Officer Jason Chapman; with his right hand raised, he recited the following Oath: **"I, Jason Chapman, am a citizen of the State of Florida and of the United States of America. I am being employed by the City of Okeechobee as an Officer of the Okeechobee Police Department and a recipient of public funds. I, Jason Chapman, do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and the government of the United States and of the State of Florida and I will bear the faith, loyalty, and allegiance to the same. I will protect against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I will faithfully perform all duties, as an Officer, of the Okeechobee Police Department."** He was pinned with his badge by his mother.

Chief Hagan administered the Oath of Office to Officer Garrett Kelly; with his right hand raised, he recited the following Oath: **"I, Garrett Kelly, am a citizen of the State of Florida and of the United States of America. I am being employed by the City of Okeechobee as an Officer of the Okeechobee Police Department and a recipient of public funds. I, Garrett Kelly, do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and the government of the United States and of the State of Florida and I will bear the faith, loyalty, and allegiance to the same. I will protect against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I will faithfully perform all duties, as an Officer, of the Okeechobee Police Department."** He was pinned with his badge by his parents.

Chief Hagan administered the Oath of Office to Officer Brandi Drapal; with her right hand raised, she recited the following Oath: **"I, Brandi Drapal, am a citizen of the State of Florida and of the United States of America. I am being employed by the City of Okeechobee as an Officer of the Okeechobee Police Department and a recipient of public funds. I, Brandi Drapal, do solemnly swear or affirm that I will support, protect, and defend the Constitution and the government of the United States and of the State of Florida and I will bear the faith, loyalty, and allegiance to the same. I will protect against all enemies, foreign and domestic. I will faithfully perform all duties, as an Officer, of the Okeechobee Police Department."** She was pinned with her badge by her children.

Officers Alexis Bieger, hired March 14, 2022, Derek Nails, hired April 22, 2022, and Dalton Pitts, hired August 19, 2022, were unable to attend.

IV. RECOGNITION CEREMONY CONTINUED

- C. Detective James Pickering was honored and presented with a Certificate of Retirement by Mayor Watford and Chief Hagan. He was accompanied by his wife and mother. The certificate was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, Mr. James Walter Pickering, began his law enforcement career in November of 2004 when he was appointed to the Okeechobee Police Auxiliary. After a few years, he realized this was the career for him, and on March 6, 2006, he was hired by Chief Davis as a non-certified Officer and sponsored by the City Police Department to attend the Indian River Community College Law Enforcement Academy. On October 27, 2006, he earned his Florida Department of Law Enforcement Certificate and was assigned to the Road Patrol; and Whereas, only four months later Officer Pickering applied to fill the City's vacancy on the Narcotics Unit of the Joint Drug Task Force. On February 19, 2007, his job title changed to Detective Pickering. He represented the City Police Department extremely well during these six years. The highlights of this time include attending the Drug Enforcement Administration Basic Course School; was designated as a Special Agent for the Immigration and Customs Services as a member of the Blue Lighting Task Force. He, together with the members of the Narcotics Unit were honored on December 6, 2012, with a Unit Citation Award issued by Sheriff Paul May for their success with a cocaine trafficking and wiretap prosecution dubbed "Operation Cocaine Cowboy." Then on January 14, 2013, he transferred from the Task Force to the Detective Unit of the Police Department; and Whereas, education and training has been an important key to Detective Pickering's leadership role, obtaining over 150 certificates of completion for attending seminars, conferences, training, and continuing education courses. Furthermore, since July of 2018, he served as one of the Department's Firearms Instructors, and then in March of 2022, began serving as an Instructor for the Department and for Indian River State College Police Academy, instilling a dedicated work ethic in future recruits; and Whereas during his tenure James was elected by his co-workers to represent their interests on the Police Officers' Pension Plan Board of Trustees from June 1, 2019 through his retirement date; and Whereas James has served under the guidance of three City Police Chiefs, Dennis Davis, Robert Peterson, and Donald Hagan, II, all of which described him as an asset to the Department because of his dedication to the people of this City. Now, Therefore, this Certificate is presented this 21st day of March 2023, to recognize our gratitude for over 17 years of faithful service, upon his official retirement, March 31, 2023. James will always be known for his willingness to care for the well-being of the citizens, but most especially for his unequivocal love of the Christmas season, and all things Santa Claus."**
- E. Dispatchers Jennifer Rosas, hired November 1, 2021, Carmen Coreas, hired August 27, 2021, Paula Robertson, hired August 2, 2021, Raymond McMillan, hired February 25, 2022, and Beth Gearhart, hired February 24, 2023, were unable to be in attendance.

V. STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS

- A. The inaugural State of the City Address was presented by Administrator Ritter, utilizing a twelve-slide Power Point presentation which has been added to the official minute file. The mission of the City of Okeechobee is to provide accommodating services that enhance the quality of life for our citizens and businesses in a fiscally sound manner. The vision of the City of Okeechobee is to maintain a vibrant and prosperous community built on our heritage, history, unique character, and small-town atmosphere. Major milestones completed for Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 included new businesses, the completion of Cattlemen's Square at FLAGLER Park, development of a reserve fund policy, and adoption of a new City Charter. Anticipated expenditures for FY 2022-23 were reviewed, with a detailed summary of the responsibilities of each department. Strategic planning includes repairs of resurfacing of road, proposed plans to renovate City Hall and the Public Safety Building (former City Fire Station) by hardening the exterior using grant funding as much as possible, redevelopment and new businesses, stormwater drainage in Commerce Center, mandatory connection to sewer, housing, salary study, and annexation opportunities. Top priority project initiatives include maintenance and restoration of roads, repair and upgrading of stormwater infrastructure, and replacement of Police Department radios to comply with the new State Law Enforcement Radio System.

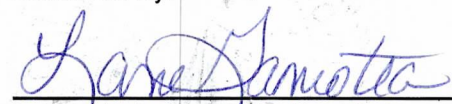
VII. DISCUSSION WITH CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

One comment card was submitted by Mr. Jeff Sumner, Vice Chairman of the Okeechobee Economic Council, expressing their support of on-going City activities including the new landscaping on South Park Street, work on an ordinance regarding mandatory utility connections, and the potential tax abatement program.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further items of discussion, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 7:30 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.