



CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA
MAY 17, 2022, REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING
OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Watford, called the regular meeting of the City Council for the City of Okeechobee to order on May 17, 2022, at 6:00 P.M. in the City Council Chambers, located at 55 Southeast (SE) 3rd Avenue, Room 200, Okeechobee, Florida. The invocation was offered by Pastor Douglas Ryan of the Treasure Island Baptist Church; followed by the Pledge of Allegiance led by Council Member Keefe.

II. ATTENDANCE

Roll was taken by City Clerk Lane Gamiotea to establish a quorum. Members present: Mayor Dowling R. Watford, Jr., Council Members Noel A. Chandler, Monica M. Clark, Robert "Bob" Jarriel, and Robert "Bobby" M. Keefe, Jr.

III. AGENDA AND PUBLIC COMMENTS

- A. There were two items added to the agenda, Proclaiming Mental Health Month and issue a Certificate of Retirement to Fire Chief Herb Smith.
- B. Motion and second by Council Members Keefe and Clark to approve the agenda as amended. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**
- C. One comment card was submitted by Bridgette Waldau, Chairperson of the Okeechobee Main Street Arts and Culture Alliance Committee. Mrs. Waldau excitedly announced the Cattle Drive sculptures for the Cattlemen's Square within Flagler Park would be shipped on July 15, 2022, allowing for the Dedication to be held on Saturday, July 23, 2022, the National Day of the Cowboy.

IV. PRESENTATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS

- A. **Item Added to the Agenda:** Mayor Watford proclaimed the month of May 2022 as "Mental Health Awareness Month." The document was presented to Mrs. Leah Suarez, Executive Director of Our Village, and read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, mental health and substance use conditions affect individuals, families, and communities across Okeechobee County, Florida, and the Nation; and Whereas, good mental health is a key component in a child's healthy development. Children's Mental Health Week and National Prevention Week provides the opportunity to focus on these important matters, while celebrating the accomplishments of children and families affected by mental health concerns and substance use. It is imperative that a visible, united effort by community members be launched and sustained to prevent substance use and promote mental wellness; and Whereas, it is important that youth, their families, and communities learn about the warning signs of mental health disorders, substance use, and where to obtain necessary assistance and services. Open dialogue is an essential component to fight stigma and encourage those who might benefit from services to seek help; and Whereas, there is a need for access to comprehensive services that are family-driven, youth guided, culturally and linguistically competent, and community based. Individuals would also benefit from the integration of behavioral health in primary care, education, and child welfare; and Whereas, all citizens, agencies, and organizations interested in advancing innovative strategies addressing children's behavioral health including prevention can unite to promote effective services. Promoting mental health and wellness leads to higher overall productivity, better educational outcomes, lower crime rates, stronger economies, lower health care costs, improved family life, improved quality of life and increased lifespan. Studies show that the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences are felt by people regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. Now Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford, Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Okeechobee, Florida, do hereby proclaim the month of May 2022 as "Mental Health Awareness Month" in the City of Okeechobee."**
- B. Police Records Clerk, Ericka Smith, accompanied by her family, was recognized by Mayor Watford and Police Chief Donald Hagan for her years of service. She was presented with a Cross Pen featuring her name engraved and framed Longevity Service Certificate, read into the record as follows: **"In Recognition of your 5 Years of Service, Hard Work, and Dedication to the City, its citizens, and your fellow employees from May 15, 2017 through May 15, 2022."**
- C. Mayor Watford proclaimed the week of May 15 through 21, 2022 as "National Public Works Week."
(continued)

IV. PRESENTATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS CONTINUED

- C. Continued: The document was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, public works professionals focus on infrastructure, facilities, emergency management, and services that are of vital importance to sustainable and resilient communities and the public health, high quality of life, and well-being of the people of; and Whereas, these infrastructures, facilities, and services could not be provided without the dedicated efforts of public works professionals, who are federally mandated first responders, and the engineers, managers, and employees at all levels of government and the private sector, who are responsible for rebuilding, improving, and protecting our nation's transportation, waste systems, public buildings, parks, and other structures and facilities essential for our citizens; and Whereas, it is in the public interest for the citizens, civic leaders, and children in The City of Okeechobee, Florida, to gain knowledge and maintain ongoing interest and understanding of the importance of public works first responders and public works programs in their respective communities; and Whereas, the year 2022 marks the 62nd annual National Public Works Week sponsored by the American Public Works Association. Now Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Okeechobee, Florida, do hereby proclaim the week of May 15 through 21, 2022, as 'National Public Works Week' in the City of Okeechobee, and call upon all citizens to pay tribute to our public works professionals, engineers, managers, and employees and to recognize the substantial contributions they make to protecting our national health, safety, and quality of life."** Those present to receive the proclamation were Public Works Director David Allen, Maintenance Foreman Marvin Roberts, Lead Operator Willie Hall, Administrative Secretary Kay Matchett, Mechanic Jeffrey Treece, and newest hires, Maintenance Operators Dalton Pitts, Dustin Cook, James Bass, and Pam Barton (the first female Maintenance Operator).
- D. Mayor Watford proclaimed the month of May 2022 as "Building Safety Month." He read the following into the record and presented the document to City Building Official Jeffery Newell: **"Whereas, the City of Okeechobee is committed to recognizing that our growth and strength depends on the safety and essential role our homes, buildings and infrastructure play, both in everyday life and when disasters strike, and; Whereas, our confidence in the resilience of these buildings that make up our community is achieved through the devotion of vigilant guardians, building safety and fire prevention officials, architects, engineers, builders, tradespeople, design professionals, laborers, plumbers and others in the construction industry, who work year-round to ensure the safe construction of buildings; and; Whereas, these guardians are dedicated members of the International Code Council, a nonprofit, that brings together local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal officials who are experts in the built environment to create and implement the highest-quality codes to protect us in the buildings where we live, learn, work, play, and; Whereas, these modern building codes include safeguards to protect the public from hazards such as hurricanes, snowstorms, tornadoes, wildland fires, floods, and earthquakes, and; Whereas, Building Safety Month is sponsored by the International Code Council to remind the public about the critical role of our communities' largely unknown protectors of public safety, our local code officials, who assure us of safe, sustainable, and affordable buildings that are essential to our prosperity, and; Whereas, "Safety for All: Building Codes in Action," the theme for Building Safety Month 2022, encourages us all to raise awareness about planning for safe and sustainable construction; career opportunities in building safety; understanding disaster mitigation, energy conservation; and creating a safe and abundant water supply to all of our benefit, and; Whereas, each year, in observance of Building Safety Month, people all over the world are asked to consider the commitment to improve building safety, resilience and economic investment at home and in the community, and to acknowledge the essential service provided to all of us by local and state building departments, fire prevention bureaus and federal agencies in protecting lives and property. Now, Therefore, I, Dowling R. Watford, Jr., by virtue of the authority vested in me as Mayor of the City of Okeechobee, Florida, do hereby proclaim the month of May 2022 as "Building Safety Month."**
- E. Item Added to Agenda: Mayor Watford presented a Certificate of Retirement to Fire Chief Smith, which was read into the record as follows: **"Whereas, Mr. Herbert E. Smith, fondly known as Herb, began his public service career prior to joining the City Family where for three months he was employed at the Okeechobee County Fire Rescue, until Prat Whitney Aircraft made him an offer he could not refuse to work as a Firefighter from May 1989 through July 1991. During this time, he received rescue dive team and special haz-mat training; additionally, he served as the CPR Instructor for Indian River State College. On February 3, 1992, he accepted Fire Chief Keith Tomey's offer to become a City Firefighter/EMT, and was assigned to the late Lieutenant Douglas's shift; and Whereas, on January 27, 1995, Herb was promoted to Fire Lieutenant. Then in 1998, Herb received three special commendations, one from the City of Okeechobee, one from Brevard County Public Safety, and the most notable, from the State of Florida, (continued)**

IV. **PRESENTATIONS AND PROCLAMATIONS CONTINUED**

- E. Continued: the Distinguished Service Award for his bravery and meritorious service due to his participation in fighting the Florida Firestorm which began in late May and lasted through early June, involving Brevard, Osceola, Orange, Seminole, St. Johns, Flagler, and Volusia counties, destroying over 150 structures and \$300 million of Florida's timber resources; and the Farmington Fire in Brevard County that destroyed over 45,000 acres; and Whereas, on October 1, 2001, Herb was promoted to the newly created position of Battalion Chief. He remained in this position until April 20, 2004, when the City Council reclassified him to "Chief in Training" to replace retiring Chief Tomey on May 20th; and Whereas, because of Herb's desire to make the City of Okeechobee Fire Department the strongest unit for its citizen, he applied for a grant from the City of Pinellas Park, and just before being named "Chief-In-Training" he was awarded the grant, where for the first time in the Fire Department's 89-year history, were able to acquire a Ladder Truck for firefighting; and Whereas, shortly after being appointed as Fire Chief in 2004, the State of Florida survived one of the most devastating Hurricane Seasons as five hurricanes made Florida landfall in six weeks, of which three were major storms, and two directly impacted the City. Herb confirmed he was the right man for the job as Fire Chief in displaying leadership that was above and beyond the call of duty as noted in a letter of recognition from then City Administrator Bill Veach; and Whereas, during his 30 years, Herb has obtained hundreds of certificates of completion for attending conferences, training, and continuing education classes. He's served under two Mayors, 14 City Council Members, and alongside two City Clerks, six City Administrators, five Police Chiefs, three Public Works Directors, and numerous employees. Furthermore, he was appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Firefighters' Retirement Fund from October 1, 2003 through September 30, 2006, then reappointed where he has served since August 17, 2015; and Now, Therefore, this Certificate is presented to recognize our deep sense of gratitude of 30 years of faithful service, and his official retirement, May 31, 2022. Herb will always be known for his dedication and willingness to care for the well-being of the citizens and his fellow firefighters."

V. **CONSENT AGENDA**

Motion and second by Council Members Keefe and Jarriel to:

- A. [Dispense with the reading and] approve the meeting Minutes for May 3, 2022 [as presented in Exhibit 1].
- B. Approve the Warrant Register for April 2022 [in the amounts: General Fund, \$473,573.55; Public Facilities Improvement Fund, \$226,890.64; and Capital Improvement Projects Fund, \$24,051.26; and Law Enforcement Special Fund \$75.00, as presented in Exhibit 2].

Motion Carried Unanimously.

VI. **MAYOR WATFORD OPENED THE PUBLIC HEARING AT 6:37 P.M.**

- A. Motion and second by Council Members Jarriel and Clark to read by title only, proposed Ordinance No. 1253, regarding a referendum on the November 8, 2022, General Election Ballot adopting a new City Charter [as presented in Exhibit 3]. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

City Attorney John Fumero read proposed Ordinance No. 1253 by title only as follows: "AN ORDINANCE OF THE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA, PERTAINING TO THE CITY CHARTER; PROVIDING FINDINGS OF CITY COUNCIL REGARDING THE CURRENT CHARTER AND A PROPOSED REVISED CHARTER; CALLING FOR A REFERENDUM FOR ELECTORS OF THE CITY TO VOTE ON WHETHER TO APPROVE REVISIONS TO THE CITY CHARTER; AUTHORIZING AND DIRECTING THE FILING AND PUBLICATION OF THE NEW CITY CHARTER; DECLARING THE LEGAL AUTHORITY FOR ENACTMENT OF THE ORDINANCE; PROVIDING THE BALLOT TITLE AND BALLOT SUMMARY FOR THE REFERENDUM; PROVIDING FOR OTHER RELATED MATTERS; PROVIDING FOR CONFLICT; PROVIDING FOR SEVERABILITY; PROVIDING FOR EFFECTIVE DATES."

Motion and second by Council Members Keefe and Jarriel to adopt proposed Ordinance No. 1253. City Clerk Gamiotea requested the Council modify the amendment made at the April 19th meeting and separate the issue of the City Clerk position to go from elected to appointed to be a second referendum question on the ballot. Mr. Mack (Hoot) Worley, Mrs. Miranda Whirls, and Mr. Jamie Gamiotea, who were Members of the Citizen Charter Review Advisory Committee, asked the Council to also separate the issue to a separate question for fear that the amendments to the Charter that needed to be approved would not be due to the City Clerk issue. Citizens Mr. David and Mrs. Sandra McAuley, Mr. Lawrence Fipps, and Mr. Billy McCullers made individual presentations also requesting the City Clerk issue be a separate referendum question. Mayor Watford called for a motion to amend as requested, one was not offered. Clerk Gamiotea advised Mayor Watford there was an email submitted by Mrs. Donna Howard that needed to be noted for the record, also requesting the issue be separated. Attorney Fumero and Administrator Ritter also recommended the issue be separated to a second question.

VI. PUBLIC HEARING CONTINUED

- A. Continued: **Council Members Jarriel and Clark moved to postpone the motion on the floor to a date certain, June 7, 2022 [next regular meeting, 6:00 P.M]. Motion Carried 3 to 2 with Council Members Chandler and Keefe voting No.**

MAYOR WATFORD CLOSED THE PUBLIC HEARING AND CALLED FOR A RECESS AT 8:04 P.M.; AT 8:11 P.M. MAYOR WATFORD RECONVENED THE MEETING.

VII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Fire Chief Ralph Franklin distributed a written quarterly update on services provided by Okeechobee County Fire Rescue, within the City from January 1, through March 31, 2022. They responded to 341 incidents, of which 272 were for emergency medical services, and completed 132 fire inspections. The report has been incorporated into the official minute file. This item is for informational purposes only, no official action is required.
- B. Motion and second by Council Members Clark and Jarriel to approve the Fiscal Year 2021-22 proposed Mid-Year Budget Amendments [as presented in Exhibit 4]. **Motion Carried Unanimously.**

VIII. CITY ATTORNEY UPDATE

Nothing at this time.

IX. ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

- Provided the Legislative Update, Senate Bill 620 is still pending, and the proposed budget is not signed yet.

X. CITY COUNCIL COMMENTS

Council Member Chandler:

- Reminded everyone about the May 24, 2022 Joint Workshop next week with the Planning Board.

Council Member Keefe:

- Inquired about the Department Head Reports on the agenda at least quarterly.
- Inquired on the status of the Primitive Baptist Church property and buildings. Administrator Ritter advised there are several items Staff is working on - grants and an agreement with the Historical Society to lease the facilities.
- Requested a year-to-date status update by the next meeting on Code Enforcement.
- Suggested a pre-budget workshop that would include discussion options for adopting a fire assessment within the City.
- Requested the budget calendar be on the next agenda to get an idea of what dates to reserve during the summer.

XI. ADJOURN, Mayor Watford adjourned the meeting at 8:49 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.