

DeFuniak Springs City Council

Workshop

January 12, 2010

The DeFuniak Springs City Council met in Workshop Session at 5:30 PM with the following members present: Mayor C. Harold Carpenter; Mayor Pro-Tem James Huffman; City Council Members: Don Harrison, James Coffield, Henry Ennis, Wayne Graham; City Manager Kim Kirby, Finance Director Sara Bowers, and City Clerk Susie Campbell-Work. City Attorney Clayton Adkinson was not required to be in attendance.

Mayor Carpenter called the meeting to order and announced the topic of discussion would be the Smart Growth grant and introduced Mr. Cliff Long.

Mr. Cliff Long went over the history of meetings that had brought them to this point. He described previous meetings of gathering thoughts of citizens and business owners and said tonight's meeting was about getting the Council's thoughts and direction for the City. Mr. Long stated DeFuniak Springs will grow with or without us and what remained was the question of whether we will manage that growth or would that growth manage us. He said that is the point that Smart growth speaks to, us managing that growth. We do not want to stifle or stop growth but we do not want it to overrun us.

He said his first area of interest was the downtown historic district and through workshops he has learned of other areas of the City that may need management as well. Mr. Huffman talked about the good possibilities that could come of this; managing the growth, maintaining the quality of life and the things that make us what we are, he said he would not like to see us lose those things in the process of growth. Mr. Long asked if he liked the pedestrian friendly features, like crosswalks, things that made it easier on people. Mr. Huffman said we have found out through the Communities for a Lifetime initiative and the Life Enrichment Senior Center that we have an active senior population. Mr. Long said one thing that was found is that DeFuniak Springs brings a nice alternative as compared to the South end of the County. He asked how important the historic nature of the town was to them. Ms. Sally Merrifield said it was very important and would like to see the Hwy 331 and Hwy 90 corridors (our entry ways) improved to say it is a wonderful place to stop. She said she would like to see the personality of town reflected in these areas. Discussion followed on signage for the downtown area. Mr. Long said that was something that could come out of the plan. It was discussed that people think Hwy 331 and Hwy 90 are the town of DeFuniak Springs, and are amazed when they discover the Lake and the downtown area. Ms. Kirby asked if there was a way to improve the corridor and at the same time get the look and feel of the historic district to draw them in that direction. Mr. Harrison said comments that he hears is that we need a Cracker Barrel and a Publix in those corridors, those types of shopping centers. Discussion followed about people vs. new business. Mr. Long said it is a cycle, and through this plan, we can create a working model that shows that we can drive traffic which will in turn attract business. Discussion followed on businesses coming into town.

Mr. Harrison said we need to have a plan as to what Hwy 331 and Hwy 90 will look when people come through town. Ms. Merrifield said we need an architectural plan, something that will make it pretty (for lack of a better term). Mr. Long said a Hwy 331 improvement plan. Mr. Scoville said we need wider sidewalks, stronger street scapes, period lighting fixtures, something that shows we welcome pedestrians. He said he thought we need to do something that dresses up the corridors that tells the community the City is investing in it. Mr. Harrison said we definitely need to improve lighting between Wal-Mart and I-10. Ms. Kirby said she had already contacted Gulf Power to check the lighting along that corridor and she asked them to check Hwy 90 as well. Discussion followed on CRA's and Enterprise Zones. Ms. Kirby said one of the strategic objectives this year was coming up with a plan and steps to take to establish a Main Street program or CRA.

Mr. Huffman discussed our downtown area and asked how we were going to maintain the continuity and integrity of our downtown area. He discussed our facilities, how small City Hall was, and with only one small restroom and water fountain and how it is lacking in security. He said he would like to discuss expanding the town North instead of South. Discussion followed on City facilities. Mr. Huffman asked if Mr. Long could put some pictures together to show how we can expand the City facilities. Mr. Long said that was part of smart growth and could do that, strategic placement of City facilities as it pertains to the community. He asked how they felt about a possible village of Municipal facilities. Consensus was in agreement and to be modern but still have a period look. Mr. Huffman said we needed to grow but to still have our anchor (the downtown area). Mr. Harrison commented that the area up hwy 83 was really become institutional and the area down Hwy 331 was more commercial and there was some institutional on Hwy 90 East.

Mr. Long commented that there are a lot of opportunities for people to partner with the community and help make these things possible such as Mr. James Lee Whit, who works with Municipalities that need to redesign and build emergency facilities and shelters. Discussion followed. Mr. Long commented that if they built a new building, not only is it not going to cost them what they think it will, but new buildings will greatly reduce the City's insurance cost, and reduce other bills, and there are grants that will pay for that type of construction. He said the only thing they need to do is do it right the first time. He commented that there are people out there who specialize in securing that type of funding for them. Discussion followed. Comments were made regarding City owned land. Mr. Huffman said we need to be purchasing property next land we already own when it comes up for sale. Mr. Harrison agreed and said it wasn't that we needed to tear down structures and start building right away (on newly acquired property); this was a ten-fifteen year plan. Mr. Long said it was never meant to be a plan that you finish right away, but a plan that had steps we would accomplish every year. Discussion followed on land purchases. Ms. Merrifield suggested finding funds to build a new civic center/ multi use facility that was also a hurricane shelter.

Mr. Long said with new horizons must come new mind sets. He said we need to make this a place that people want to come to. He discussed having someone on the State level that knows about our needs. Mr. Harrison discussed our City library; he felt we didn't need to close our current library but to build a library that was modern and had parking and media centers. Discussion followed on the potential library on the NWFL State College campus. Mr. Long said that they should know the vision for that campus. Discussion followed.

Mr. Long discussed City owned utilities and resources like cable television and wireless internet service for the City. Mr. Long recapped the discussion had covered a municipally village, the downtown area and a need of signage, and making sure we are directing traffic coming in on Hwy 90 and Hwy 331. He asked about mix use dwellings that incorporate businesses and residences and how they felt about those types of structures. He reminded them the goal was to create a night life, with businesses staying open later in the evening, and encouraging pedestrian foot traffic. Greg Scoville discussed our comprehensive plan and said we will need to address mixed use zoning for DCA. Mr. Long said a previous workshop had provided a comment about bringing our youth home, or trying to keep them here, and said a night life would encourage that. Discussion followed. Mr. Scoville discussed the one restaurant that is open late downtown. Ms. Merrifield commented that mixed use goes along with historic districts, she knows how protective people are of the historic district but we need to get our historic district to a point of what people expect it to be and that would include mixed use. Mr. Huffman said that was why it was important to grow North. Mr. Scoville added we should bridge those two areas (downtown with growth across Hwy 90). Ms. Kirby said there were comments made to her that people would love to come downtown at night, go to an event, and walk to go to dinner. Mr. Huffman has heard comments that when people come from out of town for Christmas Reflections, they would like to have something to do besides drive around the lake a couple of times.

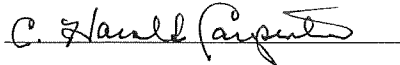
Mr. Graham suggested that our City needs to invest in some businesses such as bowling alleys, and build the buildings, and invest in (recreational type) businesses. Mr. Graham wanted to know if we had the funds, how could we get started. He commented that the

businesses downtown are privately owned, and if we put up signs directing people to go downtown and they get there past 5 pm, everything is shut down. Mr. Graham said he would like to see us sit down as a City and decide how much money we want to invest to bring something to DeFuniak for entertainment for our citizens. Ms. Kirby said that may be more economic development and suggested if we built a municipality village, we could look at renting out office space. Mr. Huffman said that is why he had suggested the City get involved in the Walton County Economic Development Alliance because they have buildings online right now that are available for rent. Mr. Long encouraged them to have an aggressive mind set when it comes to economic development. Mr. Long said, the City is in the same position as other communities across the panhandle and we needed to have a plan to make ourselves competitive or give us an advantage. Discussion followed regarding incentives for businesses to encourage them to locate here. Mr. Long commented that DeFuniak's business model will have to change in order to make ourselves competitive. Mr. Huffman commented that it felt good to get together and brainstorm ideas and said we needed more forums such as this. Mr. Long continued his discussion regarding being proactive versus reactive and being creative in ways that we can help businesses chose to locate in DeFuniak Springs as compared to other parts of the County or area. He encouraged the City to be creative and progressive.

There will be another workshop scheduled after Mr. Long puts his presentation together.

There being no further business, Mayor C. Harold Carpenter adjourned the meeting.

ADOPTED this 22 day of February, 2010



C. Harold Carpenter, Mayor

ATTEST:



Vanessa Mitchell, Deputy City Clerk