



# Ocala

## City Council

### Minutes

110 SE Watula Avenue  
Ocala, FL 34471

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**Tuesday, March 22, 2022**

**8:30 AM**

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#### **City Council Strategic Planning Session**

**1. Call to Order**

**2. Attendance**

The Ocala City Council held a meeting at Hilton Garden Inn Quarter Horse Ball Room, Second Floor 120 E Silver Springs Blvd <https://zoom.us/j/98617002326> (view only) on Tuesday, March 22, 2022 at 8:30 AM

**Present:** Mayor Reuben Kent Guinn  
Pro Tem James P. Hilty Sr  
Council Member Kristen M. Dreyer  
Council Member Barry Mansfield  
Council Member Jay A. Musleh  
Council President Ire J. Bethea Sr.

**3. Public Notice**

Public Notice for the March 22, 2022 City Council Annual Strategic Planning Session Meeting was posted on March 11, 2022

**4. Public Comments**

**5. Topics for Discussion**

**a. Strategic Planning Work Session**

Strategic & Legislative Affairs Administrator Jeannine Robbins thanked everyone for being in attendance for today's meeting.

City Manager Sandra Wilson thanked City staff for their hard work this year. She discussed the vision and mission of the City. She provided an overview of the four strategic priorities: quality of place, operational excellence, fiscal sustainability and economic hub.

David Harrawood, Consultant, Baldridge Group, discussed the Ocala Team Engagement Survey. He noted money, team safety, team development and engaged employees are the key to achieving the Ocala 2035 Vision. He explained how the Team Engagement Survey was based upon the Gallup Q12 survey questions. The City conducted the survey in November 2021 to December 2021.

Mr. Harrawood described how employees' information remained confidential during the survey participation: employees were given a physical copy of the survey along with an

envelope; employees were instructed to fold the completed survey and seal it in the envelope, which was then given to a trusted employee selected by the team, who put it into another sealed envelope and mailed directly to Mr. Harrawood's office. The department leader never saw the responses.

He discussed the City survey data results, which were very satisfactory: 89.18% answered "agree" or "strongly agree". 46.19% answered "strongly agree", which is higher than the 2021 national average of 34%. The top three important ranked survey questions: "I know what is expected of me", "good communication" and "feel like their leader cares about them". He spoke about the Fire Department's survey results, which showed the highest satisfaction and very satisfied results of any fire department they've surveyed. The survey data can be used to improve communication skills among the organization.

Mr. Harrawood explained larger departments such as Fire, Electric and Water Resources broke their surveys down a bit further, as certain shifts or subdivisions may have different priorities. He thanked the City for their participation.

Council Member Musleh commended the Fire and Electric departments for such a positive survey result, given the turmoil the departments had in 2021. He asked how they managed to get through it. Director of Electric Utility Doug Peebles responded he had conversations with his staff and listened to what their issues are. He also stated City leadership supported them. Fire Chief Welborn spoke to the conversations with his staff and open lines of communication.

Council Member Mansfield asked why the Police Department didn't participate in the survey. Police Chief Balken explained the first notice of the survey came out in early 2021 when the department was still grieving the loss of Chief Graham, so decided it wasn't the right time for their staff to do the survey. Mr. Harrawood noted he had many conversations with Chief Balken and agreed with his reasoning.

Mr. Harrawood encouraged leaders to create a structured process when distributing the survey results with staff. The goal is to take the four strategic priorities and incorporate them into the Strategic Plan for the City.

Ms. Wilson thanked the department heads for exhibiting great leadership during the survey process. Furthermore, she thanked Council for their leadership and providing resources and supporting staff throughout the process.

Fire Chief Welborn commented the Ocala Fire Rescue Department's goals consist of the following: decrease fatal/non-fatal overdoses, reduce overdose 911 calls, reduce the impacts of drug use on the homeless population, support families, combat drug use/incidents, reduce crime, reduce traffic and strengthen programs. The department implemented a Mobile Integrated Healthcare platform to support Community Paramedicine and Overdose Data 2 Action (OD2A). On August 15, 2020, OFR and Marion County Health Department began the OD2A program, now called the Ocala Recovery Project (ORP). The ORP supports the following populations: recurring 911

overdose patients, new and expecting mothers suffering from opioid addiction, and substance exposed newborns. Treatment is funded by a \$250,000 annual grant from the CDC, through the Marion County Department of Health. A heatmap of overdose calls shows a majority of them are happening centrally within Ocala. He provided an overview of the Ocala Recovery Project. In 2020, there were 976 patients, and 2021, there were 212 patients. Currently as of early March 2022, there have been 20 patients. He noted the decrease between 2020 and 2021 was due to a change that had been planned to have third party providers attend hospital calls, with OFR handling the overflow. He expects the average annual count to remain around 200 patients.

The Narcan distribution results: leave behind 72 boxes/144 doses and ORP (OD2A) 498 boxes/996 doses. He noted 866 patient care hours through the OD2A program, and several media highlights in January, May, June and October. Their next steps are secure the future funding for existing overdose mitigation and prevention, solidify and execute the plan for opioid settlement funds, and implement the Unite Us software to streamline patient referrals to ensure no patient is lost in the follow-up.

Council Member Mansfield asked what is the percentage of the people in the program who are homeless, and that of recurring patients. Fire Chief Welborn responded he will send the homeless population data results to Council. The program has significantly lowered the number of 911 emergency service calls and has been very successful. He explained the assistance and information people are given to ensure they are getting the help they need.

Police Chief Balken discussed the opioid response efforts of the Police Department. The data shows OPD response numbers remained relatively flat for year 2021. He noted there were fewer overdose responses, but one more death between 2020 and 2021, which he believes speaks to the potency of fentanyl in the area. The Drug Enforcement Strike Team seized a record number of drugs in 2021 and arrested 228 offenders. The drug arrests decreased for year 2021 (884 arrests) compared to year 2020 (1127 arrests). The three non-enforcement strategies for the department: Amnesty Program, DARE Program in schools and education via all media platforms. He spoke of difficulties they encounter with lack of bedspace for people in the Amnesty Program, sometimes having to send them as far away as Volusia County. As well, he warned of the next generation of drugs coming in the future, including one they're already seeing that is 20- to 100-times more deadly than fentanyl.

Council Member Musleh asked what the conviction rate is. Police Chief Balken responded the conviction rate stands at 62%.

Council Member Mansfield asked if the drug usage age is getting younger every year. Police Chief Balken explained how drug usage targets all ages. The department is working hard to educate the community and combat drug use. He further noted the United States is one of the biggest drug consumers in the world, with Florida being among the top in the country.

Council President Bethea requested clarification on the dangers of fentanyl drug usage.

Police Chief Balken explained how two micrograms is considered a lethal dose of fentanyl. The amount seized in 2021, 33 pounds of fentanyl, amounts to enough to kill 10 million people. The illegal drug is easy for drug traffickers to transport due to the size. He anticipates the opioid numbers will increase and the death rate will skyrocket.

Ms. Wilson discussed Initiative 2: better align approaches to homelessness. The intent of the initiative is to collaborate with local law enforcement and social service providers, to more efficiently serve homeless families and individuals, by providing directed access to available services; and to properly respond to nuisances in the mid-town area that may negatively affect citizens/businesses. To note, Marion County has funded grant services to combat homelessness. The Office of Homeless Prevention procured a software system (HMIS) to coordinate the services being provided to the homeless population. She provided an overview of community partners the City works with.

She discussed the Initiative 3: address unemployment and workforce preparedness. The City created the Targeted Local Hire Program to recruit members of the public for vacant City employment opportunities. The program provides an alternative pathway to careers with the City of Ocala by way of on-the-job training for residents in the focus area of Census Tracts 17 and 18. Candidates are hired as vocational workers for six months on-the-job training, at a training wage of \$12.50 per hour, with City benefits. Since the creation of the program in 2019, 14 people have participated in the program. Of the 14 participants, seven (7) were hired by the City, and three (3) currently remain employed by the City.

The Future Leaders Academy was designed to create on-the-job training in preparation for future roles within the organization. The program is open to all City of Ocala residents ages 16-19, and a total of 25 applicants will be chosen to participate in this year's program. The program starts June 6, 2022, and ends July 29, 2022. The Diverse Small Business Enterprise Program provides minority women and veteran owned businesses with targeted opportunities to participate in the City's procurement process. Currently, 225 people are enrolled in the program and the City is providing certifications.

The City has awarded 44 DSBE contracts valued at \$1.45 million. The Developing Recreation Professionals Program helps individuals develop technical and soft skills that are vital to the success of Recreation and Parks Professionals. The program is open to individuals ages 14-19 years old, and consists of twelve weeks of training broken out by six weeks of lifeguard training and six weeks of recreational academy training. The program teaches technical and soft skills in event program supervision. The program started February 15, 2022. Fourteen (14) people currently participate in the program.

Council Member Dreyer asked how the City disseminates information about these programs. Ms. Wilson elaborated on the various outlets used, such as: social media, media releases, the City's website, television stations, newspapers, fliers, speaking engagements and other Community Engagement Coordinator outreach.

Council President Bethea stressed the importance of relaying information about these programs to the public. He noted the programs offer the youth in the community an

opportunity to work in the City.

Ms. Wilson discussed Initiative 4: provide residential fiber to targeted neighborhoods. OFN's planned strategic approach to adding/connecting residential customers (30% take rate/36-month ROI) is by using a systematic implementation concept of Gigabit Passive Optical Networks (GPON) technology, in four pilot neighborhoods, and is now complete. OFN has expensed approximately \$600,000 in building costs and has received \$227,000 in revenue to date. She highlighted the Artpartments as the first multi-family build that has been connected to the network.

Furthermore, OFN won the IT Smart City Visual Equity & Accessibility Award by providing remote access to students at ten schools. The department will continue to connect with community anchor institutions and create public project partnerships. The City will explore the numerous grant opportunities available for building out of broadband. Ms. Wilson detailed a conversation with the City's congressional delegation in Washington DC to have them look at the definition of "rural", with the goal of potentially giving Ocala more access to grant opportunities. To note, Marion County allocated money for studying underserved areas in Marion County.

Council Member Mansfield requested clarification on the \$200,000 revenue - is that annually? Ms. Wilson responded OFN has received about \$200,000 revenue to date. Council Member Mansfield asked how much money the City is bringing in annually. Ocala Fiber Network Director Mel Poole explained they spent approximately \$600,000 over two years in the four pilot neighborhoods to build the infrastructure. Council Member Mansfield commented that works out to be approximately four years to pay for the cost to build, and it will be profitable for the City. Mr. Poole agreed, noting the estimations are based on a 30% take rate. Council Member Mansfield asked if the money is kept in the same account for future construction. Assistant City Manager Bill Kauffman explained there is a 15% transfer. He noted 30% of OFN customers are residential. The majority of OFN revenue is commercial-based. Council Member Mansfield asked what the take rate has been. Mr. Poole responded Windstream is 54-56%. Bellechase is around 16%; he noted Cox offers Triple Play in that neighborhood. Highlands is around a 17% take rate, and Happiness Homes around 2%. Council Member Mansfield asked if there are plans to install fiber downtown, and are the lines underground. Mr. Poole agreed there are a lot of requests downtown and there is a mix of aboveground and underground cables.

Council Member Dreyer asked if the County qualifies for the rural broadband expansion grants. Ms. Wilson replied they probably do. Council Member Dreyer noted Marion Oaks doesn't have broadband. Mr. Poole discussed the County broadband study and commented there are 4100 potential connections in eastern Marion County. He's hopeful the results of the study would allow OFN to partner with the County to expand broadband.

Ms. Wilson discussed Initiative 5: support diversification of the City's economic base. Diversification of the City's economic base continues to be a priority. The Ocala Metro CEP leads the charge on this initiative, and the City provides support where

able/appropriate. She shared a picture of a new UF Health Shands neighborhood hospital project for the community.

City Engineer/Director of Water Resources Sean Lanier discussed Initiative 6: proactive approach to infrastructure. The City maintains up-to-date master plans, which focus on condition assessments and include future growth projections. Through this planning they have the ability to generate an accurate priority list of infrastructure needs. Utilizing the master plan is essential to successfully appropriating funds for the budget's cycle to implement timely replacement and rehabilitation life projects. He shared several construction projects, including the North Magnolia Lane Reduction Project, SE Watula Resurfacing, MLK First Responder Campus and Lower Floridan Wells.

Electric Utility Director Doug Peebles discussed Ocala Electric Utility's reliability and future growth. The objective is to plan for the future by replacing aging equipment and make needed upgrades. Also, take advantage of new technology to increase efficiency and allow for more capacity. He shared challenges working with neighboring communities and finding a balance. Regarding vegetation management, the department is averaging 1.3 million feet of right-of-way trim, and on track to exceed that amount this year. The department is also addressing aging 30-year life underground cable in various subdivisions. .

He discussed the challenges the department is facing, such as supply chain issues. He provided an overview of the Paddock & Baseline Substation upgrades. He commented these projects were done in-house, which was a huge savings compared to being contracted out, and noted the department's training program made that possible. In 2009, the department started using AMI (automated metering infrastructure, also referred to as smart meters). Furthermore in 2011, the department partnered with a prepay software company to create a Meter Data Management system, which saves the City and customers \$160,000 annually. As well, another program they have developed, Lumen, has saved the City over \$700,000 annually over the last four years.

Council Member Mansfield asked if the City has any money set aside for storm recovery to move overhead lines underground, as well as is the City looking at current overhead to move underground. Mr. Peebles responded the City is currently reviewing a quote for the Pine Oaks area, which was between \$12-20 million for a half mile. Council Member Mansfield noted all new subdivisions are required to lay underground lines, and asked if, in public areas, downed lines from storm damage may be rebuilt underground. Mr. Peebles replied there have been some unsuccessful grant applications, but they will keep trying. Council Member Mansfield asked if there is a charge for other companies to attach to City-owned power poles. Mr. Peebles responded in the affirmative, and noted the City is charged to connect to other companies' poles as well.

Ms. Wilson discussed Initiative Seven: foreclose on vacant properties for redevelopment. She presented a map of vacant properties within the City that are City-owned or foreclosed through the Code Enforcement lien process, and noted they are scattered, which makes it difficult to redevelop. She then presented another map detailing an "assembly approach" to redevelopment, citing the Tucker Hill Plan as an example. The

project is currently on hold while a foreclosure/lien issue is handled, but will be restarted once the issue is resolved.

Ms. Wilson discussed Initiative 8: create one City. The community was able to provide feedback regarding the mural at the E.D. Croskey Center. Furthermore, the Police Department's Polar Patrol provides great community engagement.

In April 2021, the City implemented the blind application process, which has been a huge hiring success and promotes equal opportunity. The City is considering hiring a Chief Equity Officer.

Initiative 9: capitalize on additional funding Sources - shovel-ready projects. She requested Council combine initiatives six and nine together.

City Engineer Sean Lanier commented the City analyzes the master plan to identify needs. He noted some of the projects must be shovel-ready in order to apply for grant funding and some grants also cover the design phase. For the last 5-years, grant funding totaled \$33 million, and the City received \$16 million in FY21. The Citywide Sidewalk Improvement Project is a grant-funded project through the State of Florida's Local Agency Program (LAP). The project consists of the construction of four (4) to six (6) foot wide sidewalks and is intended to fill in gaps where sidewalks are not connected to promote more connectivity through the City.

The funding for the project: FDOT \$1,246,666 and City \$38,092. The SW/NW 44th Ave Extension Phase 1 project funding: State Legislator funds \$1 million and City \$2,050,000. Mr. Lanier remarked the State has tentatively approved another \$8 million, which would allow the extension to be four lanes for the entire length.

Ms. Wilson discussed the status of City finances. The City maintained a flat millage rate of 6.6177, since 2016. The reserves are fully funded, with the General Fund at 25% and Enterprise Funds at 20%. The City maintained strong debt ratios. To note, the penny sales tax (2021-2024) was renewed. The City was approved for \$12.2 million in ARPA funding and implemented the Fire Assessment to replace lost revenue from fire fee.

The City received the 1st tranche totaling \$6.1 million in June 2021 and provided \$600,000 to non-profits located in the City limits through the Community Foundation. The State shared revenue totals increased from past pre-pandemic levels. The City will continue to focus on obtaining grants to fund projects and added funding for OPD salary increase (\$2.1 million). The City set aside funding for the OPD communication center expansion and maintained commitments to City unions. The City is proud of the successful opening of the MLK First Responder Campus and increased presence of art in the community.

The City supports the activity/growth of the Ocala International Airport and will continue the expansion of Ocala Fiber Network. The 2022-2023 budget considerations include approximately \$4.8 million for the fire user fee loan payment and limited funds for General Fund CIP expenses, due to use of reserves to fund fire user fee refunds. Also,

the unknown fiscal impact of pending legislation granting additional homestead property tax exemption to the Critical Public Service Workforce. The requests from the Police and Fire Department exceed available revenues. OPD is requesting almost 39 new full-time positions, as well as a land purchase to support a mounted unit. OFR is requesting 6 new full-time positions, and construction of a new fire station and training facility. The City will take into consideration the following: increased staffing/operational expenses associated with opening the Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place, escalating salary costs to recruit and retain a qualified workforce, as well as escalating costs of goods and services procured by the organization. Other considerations include the need for a second parking garage, funding for NW/SW 44th Avenue expansion, Growth Management fees and public safety impact fees. Ms. Wilson recommended discussing these fees during the roundtable session.

Mr. Peebles commented the City completed the substation projects. He explained several electric engineering/transmission/distribution projects taking place in the community. He noted Circuit 831 past the Interstate is being installed, but is currently delayed due to the discovery of gopher tortoise burrows, which are being relocated. The LIDAR project is expected to be completed this year.

Council Member Mansfield asked about renewable resource incentives from the Federal Government and asked where our power is purchase from. Mr. Peebles isn't aware of any federal money the City gets directly, but the City purchases power through the Florida Municipal Power Agency (FMPA). The City is partnered with the FMPA for a solar project, with some future opportunities coming. Signature Brands recently signed up to receive their power solely from solar resources to offset their consumption.

Mr. Lanier discussed the Fairfield Village/Saddle Oak sewer connection project. The package plant removal is 40% complete, the sewers are done, and the City has been installing residential water meters. He explained the Suntree/Old Castle filtration boxes project, which are mainly funded by DEP grants. The Tusawilla project is 95% done, Coldwell Pond is 10%, and the design is complete for Edgewood. The Lift Station 91 construction project funding is partially funded by an American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant of \$1,250,000, with the City covering \$2,086,208. The Ocala Wetland Recharge Park has a FDEP funding of \$376,880 and City cost of \$94,231 for the construction of a new pavilion that will feature public washrooms and shade covers. The Mary Sue Rich Community Center at Reed Place contract amounts to \$9,630,211, with a grant from the Hospital District of \$2.3 million, and the estimated completion date is October 2022. He explained the Transportation Rehabilitation Improvement Program (TRIP) on South Magnolia Avenue, noting current cost fluctuations may force the project out to bid in the future, and FEMA Drainage Retention Area (DRA) projects. FEMA is covering 75% of the costs for Pump Station 201, Fisher Park DRA expansion, and Heritage Hills DRA. The manhole lid and seal replacement are another FEMA project in design with an expected construction cost of \$800,000. The Fisher Park and lift station improvement funding: FEMA \$1,454,256.75 and City \$484,752.25. He commented in order to qualify to apply for FEMA grants, a project has to be listed as a Local Mitigation Strategy (LMS) plan before a storm hits.



Council Member Dreyer asked how the City receives information about the available grants. Mr. Lanier explained he sits on the Steering Committee for the LMS, so it helps keep him up to date on some of it. Also, the DEP and the St. Johns River Water Management District also provides information. He recognized without the contacts in place, they would have to research more to find this information. Mr. Kauffman noted the State and Federal lobbyist groups disburse information as well.

Fire Chief Welborn discussed the Fire Department operations. The Operations Division is composed of 126 personnel across 7 stations. Call volume is going up, with the current average around 60 calls per day. In 2020, they responded to approximately 19,000 calls, and in 2021 that number increased to approximately 22,000 calls, not including paramedicine and OD2A calls. The department will be requesting Council approval to build an 8th fire station, to be located in the NW section. He noted the department will need a second aerial truck, as one has been decommissioned due to old age. He explained OFR's ISO (Insurance Services Office) rating is currently a 2, on a scale of 1-10; 1 being the highest rating. He believes the department can get to a 1 rating; however the lack of a reserve aerial truck will negatively affect the department's score. The additional fire station would also improve the deployment analysis. The department applied for a SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grant to add an additional person to the aerial truck. He explained the training operations and promotions. He highlighted staff recertifications, and training opportunities from donated buildings, as well as ARFF (Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting) team successes including a training record of a 53 second response time to a mock emergency at the airport. The aerial team is now hosting training sessions that include other fire department trainees. The ISO rating can be improved with an additional training center, as well as additional Battalion Chief in that division.

The Prevention Division consists of four (4) personnel, three (3) of which are Prevention Fire Captains, and one (1) Battalion Chief. To note, the team met all business measures this past year and plan reviews were completed in a timely manner. The team exceeded the smoke detector installation stretch goal by 32 devices, including inspecting each home for fire hazards while providing installation and training during their visits. The division has experienced high turnover and completed 54% more inspections than the previous year. In FY 20/21, 3870 inspections were completed and 710 plans reviewed. In the past 5 months, there have been 2289 inspections and 392 plans reviewed. He noted growth in northwest and southwest Ocala will add over 5,000 new units. He explained the priorities for the division. The Community Paramedicine Program focuses on addressing the medical needs of low-income/uninsured community members, and is a grant funded Program through AdventHealth. In 2021, the program had 1,045 patient visits, with 500 patient care hours. The readmission rate is 82%, and between April 2021 and March 2022, the readmission rate was 0. 83 City employees and families were treated by the monoclonal antibody COVID treatment. The program has received grants from the Department of Financial Services and FEMA.

The Emergency Management division advises the City of weather impacts, assisted with COVID monitoring and planning for future interdepartmental training opportunities and securing grants. Furthermore, the Mentorship Program has greatly grown in the City. The

cadets in the program meet with the mentors three (3) times per week. Each session hosts an average of 40 cadets. In 2021, the program had 129 participants and 26 were employed through connections from the program; 4 enlisted in the military. Cadets secured \$135,000 in scholarships, completed 40 hours of community cleanup, 40 hours of station details, 20 hours during Christmas events, 12 hours assisting new hire testing, 20 hours assisting in special details, with many media highlights. Council Member Dreyer asked how the program is advertised. He explained the City markets the program by distributing flyers in the community.

Council Member Mansfield asked why OFR doesn't transport patients. Chief Welborn explained a Certificate of Need is required, which the City does not hold, but the County does. The current model is the closest unit (City or County) would respond to a call, but the County would come in to transport if needed. If OFR is directed to, they would look into the feasibility. Council Member Mansfield asked if it would have a positive or negative affect on services. Chief Welborn noted there is a positive revenue in transport, however staffing requirements would be required to expand quickly, with multiple certification levels as well as quantity of staff needs increasing. It would be expensive. He noted Advent and Ocala Health will be starting to transport between facilities, to help alleviate County pressure.

Police Chief Balken discussed crime data for Ocala and neighboring communities of similar size (60-70,000). He noted Ocala's serviced population during the week, Monday - Friday 8-5, is estimated by the CEP to grow to 250,000, along with three hospitals and a thriving industrial sector, as well as being the largest city within a relatively rural County. He explained the clearance and arrest comparisons for neighboring communities, emphasizing the annual arrest rate is double that of the similar agencies (3375 to 1538 or less) but the clearance rate percent is also much higher (47.2% for Ocala versus between 17.6% and 26.4% for the other cities). The City's number of arrests per capita (5441) is higher than the State average (2350). The majority of emergency calls received are not for crimes, but often for Baker Acts, mental health issues, drug overdoses, disturbances, and others, which makes it difficult to compare.

He provided an overview of the crash comparison data to the same agencies and noted Ocala's numbers are higher. The number of violent and property crimes reported in FY2021 both decreased from the prior year, which allowed more of the cases to be cleared. He explained the estimations per ICMA (International City/County Management Association) guidance, which recommends following the rule of 60s: 60% in patrol, 60% time spent on response, 60 minutes average time on a service call. The patrol proactivity rate for year 2021 is 46.38%, compared to 46.94% for year 2020. He explained in 2018, the department went live with their online reporting software, which allows people to file police reports on the OPD website. They are currently mandating the use of the online system due to staffing issues, which he said is artificially deflating the actual numbers. He cited an example of an older person having difficulties navigating the system. The department averages 140 online cases per month. In 2021, there were 3,139 resident arrests as compared to 6,857 non-resident offenders. He reviewed the response times in 2021, and noted he would like to see the response times for Priority 1 calls to improve to under two minutes, and the response times for Priority 2

and 3 calls are currently unacceptable.

Ocala is located in the 5th largest county in the State and serves as the County seat. The County is relatively rural outside of Ocala proper. The CEP estimates a daytime population of 250,000, but the department staffs for 63,000. The department is concerned about the rapid growth rate of the City. He provided an overview of several department goals, such as purchasing land and the formation of a Field Force Unit to respond to civil disturbances. In addition, he would like to staff a downtown service area with a bike or mounted patrol unit. Being the “Horse Capital of the World”, it would make sense for Ocala to have a mounted unit. He noted the bike unit the department used to have was very effective in lowering drug enforcement. He would also like to reconstitute the Traffic Enforcement Unit, which is currently staffed with a single officer to ensure receipt of State funding. OPD has a part-time staff member dedicated to detecting internet crimes against children (ICAC). They worked a joint operation with the Sheriff’s office recently and apprehended 12 offenders over two days. Chief Balkan would like to form an ICAC unit.

The City consists of two (2) distinct districts. The current standard is one (1) Sergeant to seven (7) Officers per district. He recalled when he first started his police career, there was a ratio of one Sergeant to four officers, with the officers having 8-10 years of experience and Sergeants having much more. Today, the police force is much younger, with many officers between 21-25 years old. The goal is to have four (4) distinct quadrants, with one (1) Sergeant to five (5) Officers per quadrant. The plan will overcome the overtime expenditures, allow additional training and increase efficiency. He reviewed the department’s requests for new staffing for both sworn and non-sworn positions, noting the total implantation time for new officer is 13 months from hiring to end of training.

Council Member Dreyer asked for clarification on how long an officer spends at an active call. Police Chief Balken responded about 43 minutes on average, ranging from a 5-minute false alarm to a 24-hour double homicide. She asked if the higher crime rates in Ocala compared to the other cities can be related to the interstate access Ocala has. He agreed that it has some relation, but also that Ocala is an “island” within the County, without any abutting cities for people to easily go as an alternative. He further commented there is a large majority of reoffenders, and noted the Police Department resources could be better allocated if those 10% of reoffenders weren’t committing 90% of the crimes.

Aubrey Hale, Chief Development Official, Growth Management, discussed the development/redevelopment updates. Future development includes manufacturing/medical, multi-family and redevelopment/infill. He noted a lot of development is taking place on the west side. He explained the development projects taking place in Ocala, including nearly 5.5 million square feet of distribution facilities, and 13,000 new residential single and multi-family units around the City. Many redevelopment areas are in the downtown core. Activity data for year 2021: 8,505 building permits processed (1,776 for 2022 to date) and 115 site development permits (16 for 2022 to date). He shared several development project updates. The Airport

Logistics project is being constructed in three phases and will handle nearly 3.5 million square feet of distribution. It is a spec build, to be leased after construction is complete. The Goldman Building is nearing completion. The Reilly Arts Center renovation is complete. Ground has been broken for Lamplighter Legacy Apartments project, which will provide for a 102-unit multi-family dwelling within the downtown area. Watula South is a 7-unit townhouse style build on Watula Ave. The Brick City Lofts & Shops is currently undergoing review of their concept plan; an amended Developer's Agreement will be presented to Council to update the plan to fully residential instead of shops on the street level. The Brewery in Midtown was approved at the last City Council meeting, and construction should be starting soon. The spine road in the West Oak development is being constructed, with Phase 2 subdivision coming before Council in the next couple of weeks. It will be a mix of single and multi-family developments. Heath Preserve is currently being cleared and infrastructure installed. It will have about 300 single family homes when complete. UF Health is building a fully functional neighborhood hospital and is currently undergoing a traffic study.

Council Member Hilty asked about traffic mitigation at the UF Health location with it so close to I-75. Mr. Hale commented the new flyover will help with that once it's completed. Mayor Guinn asked about the hotel in the area. Mr. Hale responded the City has discussed acquiring the property.

David Harrawood discussed the next step in the Strategic Plan, reviewing the current goal structure, and explained the addition of a new goal, "team and workforce engagement" compliments and expands upon the current goals. Ms. Robbins noted the FY2023 plan is a living document. Mr. Harrawood opened the floor to council member discussion.

Council Member Mansfield requested an update on the Airport's growth, including a potential new airline and fuel cost concerns. Airport Director Matthew Grow spoke about airline services. He explained the Ocala Airport is a well-running general aviation airport. It is difficult to strike a proper balance between a general aviation airport and a commercial airport. He described some improvements that would be required if a commercial airline wanted to fly out of the airport, and noted two years ago, this could have been done with some minor modifications to existing structure. Currently there is incredible popularity growth in the general aviation market. There are 140,000 square feet of hangar space, with 133,000 square feet that is currently in some stage of development.

For March 2022, a record 140,000 gallons of jet fuel are projected, and 2021 was the best year for fuel sales in the airport's history. He remarked there has been nothing special to happen to create this growth - no presidential visits, no fire tankers, etc. It's business traffic. The Airport is experiencing higher volumes of traffic and larger aircrafts are flying into the City. Currently, the Airport does not have enough aircraft parking and the City is negotiating with the FAA to expand the apron. He explained the Airport operations and developing infrastructure to maintain Airport services.

Council Member Mansfield asked if there is anything limiting a second fixed base

operator (FBO), and if there is any possibility of the addition of another runway. Mr. Grow responded the Airport has two runways; one runway is not suitable for larger aircraft. He explained the runway extension projects, and remarked the Airport does not have enough room to establish a parallel runway, nor does current capacity justify a second parallel runway. The City owns/operates eight buildings and 101 T-Hangars, which is a great revenue source for the Airport. There are currently about 35 people on a wait list for the T-Hangars. He suggested doubling the T-Hangar capacity on the north end of the Airport with the assistance of grant money from FDOT. The City is working on securing a State grant to build a roadway on 67th, which will open access on the north end.

Council Member Mansfield asked if there is the possibility of adding another fuel source to compete with Sheltair.. Mr. Grow responded you get what you pay for; he noted Williston has been out of fuel recently. The Airport previously had a goal of hitting one million gallons of fuel sales, and with sales currently around 1.1 million gallons, the new goal is 1.4 million gallons for year 2022. He explained Sheltair is a phenomenal real estate company who understands the changing climate of aviation and has been able to capitalize on the real estate side of aviation as well as the fuel side. They have just built another 20,000 square feet of hangar space at the Airport, and are looking to build another 40,000 square feet as well. Ocala Airport has a lot of land available if another company wants to build.. The City is focusing on developing the north end, due to existing access and capitalization on T-Hangar developments.

Council President Pro Tem Hilty spoke about hurdles the Airport has had in the past with commercial airlines and asked if there are any current concerns with more corporations using online meeting spaces that may curtail airline growth. Mr. Grow explained how the airline industry is growing in America; in-person meetings are still vital to corporations.

Council Member Mansfield commended Mr. Grow on his management of the Airport. Mr. Grow discussed making Taxiway Charley a high priority to support the Airport's growth. The project design and construction can take approximately one (1) year each. He anticipates the Airport will be able to utilize the taxiway in four (4) years.

Council Member Mansfield commented the commercial airlines are here. Mr. Grow responded the major airlines are already flying into Ocala. The goal is to have infrastructure in place to support the Airport's operational needs.

Council Member Dreyer asked about the procedures involved in building new T-Hangars, given the current wait list. Mr. Grow responded the Airport builds ten units at a time. The two buildings will consist of 20 units. To note, the grant to build the road will be available in July 2022, and the plan is to start construction next year. He anticipates the construction project will take five (5) years to complete.

David Harrawood introduced the topic "diversification of downtown". Council President Pro Tem Hilty discussed the need to attract more downtown retail businesses, and the demand for a small-scale grocery store/deli. He also suggested including a financial

section to expand on the local banking industry, which would help raise the level of employment within the community. Mayor Guinn concurred, noting the new residential developments downtown will necessitate a smaller grocery store in the area. Council President noted there used to be a number of grocery stores downtown, and an addition of a new one would be beneficial. Council Member Mansfield asked how this can be incentivized. Assistant City Manager Pete Lee discussed some factors that would drive these businesses downtown. Mayor Guinn commented the area around the S-curve has a lot of potential.

David Harrawood introduced the next items “Midtown redevelopment of the art district”. Council Member Dreyer asked to edit this goal and move it beyond Midtown. Assistant City Manager Pete Lee concurred, noting the proposal on Lot 5 and the Cochran Lot, as well as Tuscawilla, the train station redevelopment, and the midtown brewery will spur further growth and connection to downtown. Pedestrian crossings and lighting across SR40 will be addressed.

Council Member Dreyer spoke to the importance of creating a technology district, noting it could be a great addition alongside the warehouse expansion. Mr. Lee commented they have looked at various uses of the land at the airport, as well as land values. Council Member Dreyer clarified if a technology district makes more sense elsewhere, such as Midtown or Downtown, she would be for that location as well.

Council President Bethea spoke about feedback he has received regarding delays in the permitting process. Ms. Wilson discussed, in response to feedback from the builders’ roundtable recently, the City is working to be more responsive and provide more information and communication to the building community.

Council Member Mansfield stressed the need for communication and available information, and suggested City permitting staff be more proactive with following up with contractors during the permitting process, rather than contractors bearing the sole responsibility.

Mr. Lee discussed the importance of City staff having conversations with builders in the community. He supports streamlining the process for builders and receiving customer feedback.

Council Member Hilty quoted a text he received from a friend, who is former County building inspector, complaining about lack of accessibility to the building department. There was a 2-week delay before staff looked at the mandatory online-submitted application, which was further delayed due to an error in the application. Mayor Guinn stated the City focus needs to be serving the citizens, and working with them on their projects instead of finding reasons to tell them no. Council Members Hilty and Mansfield agreed. Ms. Wilson discussed some limitations staff encounter during the process, and explained she is working with Mr. Lee to empower staff to be responsive and escalate where needed. Mr. Harrawood noted more regular meetings with the building community will provide better feedback and explained new ways of receiving feedback during the permitting process. Mr. Lee noted some requests are not simple and

require more time. Council Member Dreyer suggested some issues may stem from personality conflicts.

Council Member Mansfield discussed an inspection scenario. He questioned how the City can fix the inspection process to alleviate builder impacts. He expressed concern the inspectors are overwhelmed and suggested streamlining the process. Council Member Mansfield shared his experience with inspectors and diffusing situations.

Ms. Wilson noted the City is working to train staff further. Chief Balken spoke of the training police officers receive for diffusing situations. Mr. Batsel noted the rate of growth within the City has the Growth Department very busy, and while many people understand that and have some patience, there are many others who don't and cause extra work with incomplete or incorrect paperwork. Council Member Mansfield concurred, and commented City staff are not bad, but they need to be better.

David Harrawood introduced item "engagement center and shelter". Council President Pro Tem Hilty discussed the history of a proposal to create an engagement center and low-barrier shelter for the homeless population that ended when the previous City Council had funding concerns. He stated the City has a homeless problem and needs to address the issue. Case management is important, and an engagement center is central to increasing their accessibility to professional assistance. Mr. Lee explained the City has been in discussions with the County for options. He agreed no shelter will be successful without additional services available on-site, or if it is not well run. A shelter has implications for police, fire & health services, as well as the surrounding community.

Mayor Guinn described issues Orlando has with their low-barrier shelter. Council President Bethea discussed his growth in understanding issues the homeless face. He expressed concern about the proposed location the engagement center across from Interfaith, and Mayor Guinn agreed.

Mr. Harrawood asked Council if they would like City staff to make a presentation to further discuss the matter in the future. Council President Pro Tem Hilty stated it should be an ongoing conversation. He noted wherever the location is approved, crime will follow. Mr. Lee commented if it is built correctly in the right place with the right services, the crime will be reduced.

Council Member Dreyer noted there has been a lot of discussion over the years on this topic and asked how this matter can be moved forward. Mr. Lee responded the focus has to follow the Housing First model to reduce the number of homeless people. Council President Pro Tem Hilty discussed plans for the soup kitchen to move across the street from Interfaith. Mayor Guinn further discussed issues relating to Interfaith and the soup kitchen. Mr. Harrawood asked Mr. Lee to continue this conversation after the meeting.

Mr. Lee provided an overview of "smart growth" in collaboration with the County and the TPO. Council President Bethea explained it makes sense for the City, County and TPO to work together to understand the bigger picture as Ocala/Marion County expands and grows. Council President Pro Tem Hilty expressed concern that the traffic studies

don't take into account other upcoming projects. City Engineer Sean Lanier explained the thought process involved in a traffic study, and agreed working with the County and TPO to understand County projects that may additionally affect City roads.

Council Member Dreyer asked whether the City follows through on their traffic commitments in Developer's Agreements. Mr. Lanier explained FDOT, the County and the City have various responsibilities depending on the roads within the agreement. He noted the Lake Weir agreement is under FDOT that could be driven by the TPO. Mr. Batsel discussed issues with Maricamp Road. He explained an applicant cannot be responsible for 20 years of mismanagement, but that they can be responsible for a proportionate fair share of the offside improvements. He noted Maricamp is a State road and FDOT is responsible for it; the City cannot manage the road. Council Member Dreyer asked if the City is doing anything with the areas it can control. Mr. Batsel responded yes, any on-side improvements that can be done are being addressed. Mr. Lanier explained, in conjunction with the TPO and FDOT, there will be a traffic study to understand the traffic coming from the Shores.

Mayor Guinn asked if the County still charged impact fees on developments. Mr. Lanier discussed impact fees and Mr. Batsel expanded on different ways a developer may be charged improvement fees as part of their project, and limitations involved.

Assistant City Manager Ken Whitehead asked if Council would like to discuss a presentation by Jerry Lourenco with regards to Friends Recycling. Mr. Lee discussed options to approach the situation including updating the ordinance or terminology, and community and industry outreach. Council President Pro Tem Hilty asked if the ordinance is outdated. Mr. Batsel discussed FDEP definitions, and asked Council for direction if they want to update the City code to allow MRFs, Recycling Centers and/or Transfer Stations within the City.

Ms. Wilson asked Council for feedback on the initiatives presented and asked for any feedback or changes in priorities. Council Member Dreyer suggested focusing on redevelopment infill and improving popularity of the Future Leaders Academy and the targeted hire program. Council President Bethea stated they appreciate the work that City staff does, noting multiple awards received, and reiterates the need for the City, County, FDOT and other entities to work together toward a common goal.

Ms. Wilson thanked Council for their participation and great leadership. Furthermore, she thanked City staff for their hard work and professionalism. Council will receive a link to the presentation and hard copies will be distributed.

## **6. Adjournment**

**Adjourned at 1:12 p.m.**

**Minutes**



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Ire Bethea Sr.  
Council President

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Angel B. Jacobs  
City Clerk