



MINUTES

CITY COMMISSION WORKSHOP MEETING WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23, 2022, AT 5:00 P.M.

CITY OF ST. AUGUSTINE BEACH, 2200 A1A South, St. Augustine Beach, FL 32080

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Samora called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Commission recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. ROLL CALL

Present: Mayor Donald Samora, Vice Mayor Dylan Rumrell, and Commissioners Margaret England, Undine C. George, and Beth Sweeny.

Also, present were City Manager Max Royle, City Attorney Lex Taylor, Police Chief Daniel Carswell, City Clerk Dariana Fitzgerald, Building Official Brian Law, and Public Works Director Bill Tredik.

Mayor Samora advised that the Workshop meeting was to discuss the "old city hall", also known as the historic St. Augustine Beach Hotel. He stated that there is a presentation and that the main reason for the workshop is to get public comment for potential uses for the building. He asked City Manager Royle if there were any changes to be made.

City Manager Royle advised that Ms. Parrish Stone is present and that her presentation is ready to go. He suggested that she give the presentation first, then Commissioner Comments, and then Public Comments. The Commission would have discussion and then decide the next steps.

Mayor Samora advised that there would be no voting or formal decisions made at this workshop meeting. He moved on to Item IV.A and said that Ms. Parrish Stone would be providing us with valuable information, and asked her to come to the podium.

IV. TOPICS

- A. Presentation of *Cultural Arts Center at the St. Augustine Beach Hotel* by Ms. Christina Parrish Stone, Executive Director, St. Johns Cultural Council, and Information About Use of the Florida Department of State Grant

Ms. Parrish Stone introduced herself and said that she has only been here for about 2 ½ years. She advised that there are some St. Johns Cultural Council Board members who have been involved for 20 years and they could educate us on the questions that she cannot answer. She commented that she would move through the presentation quickly and then move on to discussion of the grant that has been announced. She showed the PowerPoint presentation from the agenda book and advised the Commissioners that she would be comfortable taking their questions during her presentation.

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that the building has had many names. It opened on Labor Day of 1940 as the St. Augustine Beach Hotel and was constructed with funds from a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project during the depression, which included two hotels and the pier. The building that is still standing was viewed as a recreational facility with efficiency apartments upstairs. In 1960, the Town of St. Augustine Beach took over and it became the City Hall. She said that the area became famous in 1964 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. visited and there were a series of wade-ins that got national attention and directly led to the Civil Rights Act being passed. She said that the north beach hotel was demolished in 1982, since it had been damaged by hurricanes and could not be saved. In 2001, the new City Hall was built which left the old building vacant and allowed for the Cultural Council to sign a 25-year lease to include maintaining/restoring the building. She showed some postcard photos of the northern building that was demolished and a layout of what the entire development looked like. She said that the building is significant because it was one of the first tourist developments in this area. She showed more photos, many that were obtained from the St. Augustine Historical Society and Library. She showed photos of how the building looked when the Cultural Council moved in 20 years ago, the progress that has been made, as well as a vision for the future. She said that the Cultural Council was successful in obtaining hundreds of thousands of dollars in grant money as well as private donations which allowed them to stabilize the building, but that not enough money was raised to finish the second floor. She showed the first-floor rehabilitation plan that was primarily for dance studio space and not The Art Studio or Cultural Council office space. The plan never really came to be, and the floor plan changed. She said that The Art Studio and The Dance Company are the current long-term tenants, and they are great community partners. She advised that there is additional space that could be used by other organizations at a low cost. She said that both The Art Studio and The Dance Company have made their own investments to make improvements to their spaces.

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that she found out in January that the application, which was started 20 years ago, was approved for a listing on the National Register of Historic Places. She said that she contacted Ms. Leslee Keys, one of the Country's most preeminent historic preservationists, to help with the application. She advised that the listing is significant for a number of reasons, such as its architecture and the activities related to the Civil Rights movement. But it does not mean that the City cannot do what it wants with the building, and it opens up a lot of opportunities. She said that it might be eligible for funding that other buildings may not be, such as the grant that was just received. She said that it is difficult to find funding for projects like this and normally you would have to have matching funds. Last year the Florida State Legislature took some of their American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds and created a fund for African American Cultural and Historical grants and that program did not require matching funds for up to \$500,000. She said that the application proposed replacing the windows, balcony restoration, protective awnings, etc. She advised that over the past year, the University of Florida has used the building as a case study for their Historic Preservation Institute and they produced some suggestions that would help preserve the building, such as the protective awnings. She said that it does not include finishing the interior upstairs for any particular use, but it would beautify the exterior. This grant funding process is slow and there were about 170 applicants and the Cultural Council scored in the top forty. It will be fully funded with Federal dollars, which means that it will be closely scrutinized.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that there is a much smaller grant that has been approved, which is for interpretation of the site for things such as signage as shown in the PowerPoint presentation. She said that African American culture and history in St. Johns County is really important to tourism, and this could be another piece of that history to promote the site and potentially to become part

of the National Civil Rights Trail. She said that a formal announcement about the grant could be made in early April.

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that the Cultural Council still has several years left on its lease of the building. She said that the Council does not have offices in the building but visits frequently and has done multiple improvements and updates over the years. She said that the Council cares deeply for the building and has Board members who have been invested in this project for 20 years. She said the Council's position is to continue being stewards of the building for the remainder of their lease period and that any continuation of the lease could be discussed at another time. She advised that the Council does not have an agenda, but it does have ideas for the upstairs. She said that a historic preservationist would want to maintain the original plan. Some funding from grants has an expectation that standards will be followed and the only reason the grant was received is because of the listing on the National Register of Historic Places which should open up opportunities in the future as well.

Mayor Samora thanked Ms. Parrish-Stone for providing a lot of valuable information. He asked for Commissioner questions.

Commissioner George thanked Ms. Parrish Stone for her hard work getting the designations and grants, which is a real game changer. Ms. Parrish Stone advised that many people have done a lot more work than she has and that it has been a huge team effort.

Commissioner Sweeny asked when the grant funds need to be used. Ms. Parrish Stone said that she believes it is a two year period to spend the funds and that Ms. Brenda Swan may be able to clarify that. Ms. Brenda Swan advised by June of 2024.

Commissioner England thanked Ms. Parrish Stone for a great presentation. She said that one point the Cultural Council wanted out of the lease and asked what the plan was for the future. Ms. Parrish Stone advised that she cannot speak for the entire Board, but that she can safely say the Board is committed to the building and would be open to extending the lease.

Vice Mayor Rumrell thanked Ms. Parrish Stone for her presentation.

City Manager Royle advised that Ms. Parrish Stone mentioned that the Cultural Council had ideas for the use of the building, and he would be interested in hearing them after hearing Public Comments.

Mayor Samora moved on to Item IV.B and advised that each Public Comment would have three minutes. He asked for anyone who wanted to speak to please fill out a speaker card either before or after they speak and to please provide their name and address at the podium for the record.

B. Discussion with Public About Ms. Parrish Stone's Presentation and Possible Uses of the Former City Hall

Susan Brady, 121 14th Street, St. Augustine Beach, FL, thanked the Commission for holding the workshop and the Cultural Council for working so hard for the arts. She thanked Tommy, Les, and Dr. Keys for working hard for historical significance. She was thrilled 20 years ago when there was a proposal for the building to be used as an arts center and that she was willing for a portion of her taxes to be used for preserving the building for the arts, but that did not happen. She suggested using the second floor for studio/gallery and museum space. As an artist and a teacher, she would be willing to donate time to create museum space. With hundreds of hotel rooms in St. Augustine Beach, a portion of the bed tax could be used to support the building and the museum.

Jeannine Litty, 285 Atlantis Circle #G101, St. Augustine Beach, FL, lives across from the pier and is an ex-ballet dancer and enjoys going to watch the kids dance and viewing the artwork, etc. When

she heard that the building might be saved or torn down, she got chills, there is so much history with the building. She hopes that the City approves preserving the building.

Commissioner George advised for clarification that there is no suggestion or discussion about taking down the building and that the grant to improve it has been approved.

Mayor Samora advised that the purpose of the workshop is to discuss preserving the building and to get ideas from the community for uses of the space.

John Grapsas, 7 16th Street, St. Augustine Beach, FL, said that he is a registered Professional Engineer with the State of Florida and worked with Public Works Director Howell on a structural study several year ago to determine what the second floor is capable of handling, which the study determined it for general office use and not a heavy load and that leads to limitations. He said that the upstairs could be a money maker to rent space for artist's studio space/lessons. Would like to see the windows back open and said that it is a bit of eyesore right now. Consensus is that most people want a center for the arts and maybe get a sponsor or hire a planner. Infrastructure and parking cannot support some uses, like a restaurant. He said that he would be glad to donate his time as an engineer.

Leslee Keys, 207 Mission Cove Circle, St. Augustine, FL, St. Johns Cultural Council, wrote the original National Register application 20 years ago and the state grant for the first floor. She also worked for Hagler College and the Division of Historical Resources Estate Preservation along with experience with hurricane recovery. Excited to see this happen at the state level, first property anywhere in this part of Florida that has national significance for civil rights, first for WPA construction during the great depression. It has local significance for an architect, Francis Hollingsworth, who was the architect for the Florida East Coast railroad. This building shares all those periods of history, it is structurally sound, and is waiting direction to move forward.

Michael Doyle, 433 Altara Drive, St. Augustine, FL, representing The Art Studio, stated that tourists only have access to The Art Studio, which has about 200 members and can only display art from about a third of them and they need more space such as the room next to it.

Craig Thomson, 6 D Street, St. Augustine Beach, FL, has been involved with the building for about 20 years and it is nice to see the Cultural Council coming forward with their proposal. The Dance Company and The Art Studio have provided a wonderful service to the community. He was the architect for the first two renovations and the initiator and first president of The Art Studio. He said he loves the building and likes that it has been put on the National Register which gives it more significance. Likes having a workshop to discuss the uses for the building and asked to think in a broader envelope of how to expand the use and make it more visible and accessible.

Alison Schaeffler-Murphy, 237 Michael Drive, St. Augustine, FL, a member of The Art Studio, said that there have been some wonderful ideas, and it is historically significant to African American communities in our area. She suggested to use at least one room upstairs for an African American museum. Other communities throughout Florida, like St. Petersburg Beach have it going on for the artists. She suggested to create common use areas and working studios.

Seren Collins, 16th Street, St. Augustine Beach, FL, suggested that if they were going to do something, like changing it to a full museum, to do it right.

Mayor Samora said that it is great to see so much public interest.

Thomas Jackson, St. Augustine, FL, has been a lifelong resident and remembers the pier how it used to be and would like to see classes offered for all County communities. His daughter took dance classes that did wonders for her and would like to see those continue to be offered to the entire County. With an African American focus, it should do outreach and coordinate with other areas such as Lincolnville & West Augustine.

Paul Slava, 1575 SR A1A, St. Augustine, FL, St. Johns Cultural Council, wants to reiterate about the great partnership between the City, the Cultural Council, and The Dance Company. He is excited about the future and wants to make sure they are part of the building's future. Being given the raw space, they have done a lot with it and having a Certificate of Occupancy for the second floor and meeting the ADA requirements would take a lot more than this grant. He hopes that it gets used for something good and that they can continue being there to be a service to the community, such as the upcoming Art and Bark in the Park on April 30th.

Ann Doyle, 433 Altara Drive, St. Augustine, FL, member of The Art Studio, thanked Mr. Slava for his hard work and dedication. The Art Studio offers free classes and could use more space. Suggested to have a room just for classes, and it is a great opportunity to exhibit to the public the interesting history of this area. Suggested to recreate hotel space from 1945, space telling civil rights story, to fundraise and possibly find corporate sponsors to get an elevator.

Mayor Samora asked for any further Public Comments. Being none, he moved on to Commissioner discussion and asked Ms. Parrish Stone if she had any comments after hearing Public Comments.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that she is pleased that there are consistent views on how the building should be used and that the public view is in line with some projects that the Cultural Council has discussed. Preserving the existing floor plan is important and is ideal for artists' studios. Her personal view is to use the large rooms for classes, and the small rooms for artists to rent. She liked the suggestion of recreating a 1940s hotel space which could potentially be used for visiting performing artists to stay. Would like to see the large beachfront room become a museum to celebrate the history of St. Augustine Beach. She said that a lot of progress can be made with the \$500,000 grant, but would need to raise at least that much more money, and they would pursue additional grant funding. Hopes that the community would be willing to collaborate with the Cultural Council on fundraising campaigns. The Council works to present programming throughout the County and is working with the City on events such as Art and Bark in the Park and last year's Full Moon Luau. Appreciates all the support of this important building and not every local government body understands the importance of historic preservation that many generations have enjoyed.

Mayor Samora thanked Ms. Parrish Stone and asked for Commissioner comments.

Commissioner George said that she concurred and that the vision for this building has recently been to push toward restoration/conservation for an art center and she would like to move forward with that. She liked the idea of additional art space upstairs, hotel room/museum visioning with an emphasis on the WPA history. She would like to see museum space for civil rights, along with a public art project and more signage outside since not everyone would take the time to go inside. As people walk from the parking lot to the beach they would walk past public art that captures the experience to make them conscious of humanity's goals to do better in society. She suggested to potentially appoint a committee for details.

Mayor Samora agreed that the outside component is important to bring up.

Vice Mayor Rumrell said that it was all useful information and thanked everyone being here. He said that his mom owned an art gallery in Atlantic Beach, and she brought the arts to schools in Duval County. He agreed with having something outside leading to the beach, like the County's footsteps on King Street. He suggested a phrase "footsteps to freedom in St. Augustine Beach". He suggested that the upstairs could be co-op and classrooms, and to possibly look for a national sponsor to raise more money. He looks forward to participating.

Commissioner England thanked everyone for coming and bringing their ideas and the support for the arts. The Cultural Council has done a fantastic job getting grants and will have to do fundraising primarily for restoration and renovation. She said that long-term the City has to be fiscally

responsible on how it is going to be maintained, and however it is used, it will have to pay for itself and be open to the public.

Mayor Samora agreed that maintenance of the building is important.

Commissioner Sweeny echoed the comments of her fellow Commissioners and thanked everyone for attending. She said that she did not have a clear vision of what she would like to see, and she appreciates the comments from everyone. She said that she would like to see an expansion of artist space, what structural load the building could handle, and the renovation costs. She likes keeping it centered around the arts and likes the public art outside. She asked Ms. Parrish Stone if the new grant could be used for signage/outdoor art.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that it is an interpretation grant and that art may be challenging, but it could be a possibility. The Cultural Council is open to working on other funding sources for an art project and currently has a grant for public art in St. Johns County and could apply for more funding next year for a beach art project. She recommends a citizen committee and maybe participation from people who were involved in the wade-ins would be very important.

Mayor Samora said that it was nice to see some commonality in the themes for the uses such as civil rights, art, museums, expansion for The Art Studio, and outside components. He asked if Tourist Development Council (TDC) funds could be used for continued maintenance or support for this project.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that the TDC funds are governed by state statutes and local ordinances and could be used for cultural facilities for physical improvements, but St. Johns County has not done so in the past. She said that the Cultural Council's goal for some of those funds are to be available for historic preservation projects and this building would be a candidate for that grant fund if it is approved by the TDC. She said that the citizens could advocate with the County about the use of those funds and the County is aware that the beach generates a significant portion of the bed tax dollars, so it would be reasonable to ask for.

Mayor Samora asked if the grant funds are restricted to what was proposed in the application, such as windows.

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that the budget could be revised because the application period was short and so the State expects changes. As we all work together the grant will require us to engage engineers and architects.

Commissioner George said that the windows and the awning are a priority. She asked if the vision for the elevator was to add external shaft or interior.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that the estimate was based on a small interior elevator, and that it is the biggest issue from a historic preservation aspect. It would increase access, but may not be feasible, and the budgeted money could be used for something else. The appearance of the building is important, and we would need guidance from a preservation expert for what would be appropriate from a historic standpoint but would still protect it from weather.

Commissioner England said that time is of the essence, and she asked when Ms. Parrish Stone might come back with a plan as an agenda item.

Ms. Parrish Stone is at mercy of the State right now and they are still working on administration of the grant. The State has not provided them with specific instructions on how to go about requesting disbursements after the next deadline.

Commissioner Sweeny said if the elevator is not feasible, it would limit use of the second floor if it could not provide access according to the building codes and ADA compliance.

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that there are some exceptions for historic buildings, and she asked if the experts in the room had any input.

Leslee Keys said that there is precedent for both options. She said that Government House had an elevator added inside because the exterior walls had to stay the same, Key West old city hall did not add an elevator and it affects the use of the second floor since the public could not go to the second floor. Looking at the floor plan staircase, the most logical place for an elevator and possibly handicapped restrooms would be the room immediately to the east. She said there is precedent for hurricane glass and Flagler College and the hotel Ponce De Leon had four federal and state window grants for custom made hurricane glass on the upper floors.

Les Thomas, 32 Cordova Street, St. Augustine, FL, advised that an elevator and second stairway would be needed according to the City's Building Official. Taking a five by six foot space for an elevator would be easy to do and would need to be done for the purposes that were outlined today. The person who started the Cultural Council wanted artist studios and he is happy that people still think it is a good idea now.

Mayor Samora moved on to Item IV.C.

C. Commission Guidance as to Next Steps

Ms. Parrish Stone advised that she is waiting for direction from the State after this Friday's deadline and would like to move quickly. She said that it might be wise to know whether to pursue the elevator and the windows and she would like agreement on the priorities in the grant to make it easier to hire professionals and move forward.

Mayor Samora asked City Attorney Taylor if the Commission could give general direction at this workshop meeting.

City Attorney Taylor advised that the Commission could give general direction without any problems and could vote on consensus items but could not have a vote to approve money.

It was the consensus of the Commission for the Cultural Council to pursue the windows, elevator, and awning weatherproofing.

Ms. Parrish Stone said that is helpful. They will take that direction and when they hear from the State, they would start working on it. She said that she would update and communicate with City Manager Royle to schedule a follow up presentation to the Commission. She recapped that she would be able to release more information about the interpretive signage grant in April and that she could work with Commission George on it, if the Commission agrees. She suggested maybe ARPA funds could be used and noted that she is looking for fundraising ideas and volunteers.

Mayor Samora noted that the community certainly showed up tonight.

Ms. Parrish Stone noted that the final slide contains her contact information and invited any members of the community to contact her if they had any suggestions, questions, or would like to volunteer. She thanked the City for hosting the workshop and the community for attending.

Mayor Samora thanked Ms. Parrish Stone for her time and effort on the project. He also asked City Manager Royle to include updates from the Cultural Council in the monthly report.

Commissioner George encouraged residents to reach out to the City for updates on any further workshops. Mayor Samora suggested that the City's Newsletter would be a source for that information and Communications & Event Coordinator Melinda Conlon informed from audience that those interested could sign up for the Newsletter on the City's website.

V. ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Samora asked for a motion to adjourn.

Motion: to adjourn. **Moved by** Commissioner George, **Seconded by** Vice Mayor Rumrell. Motion passed unanimously.

Mayor Samora adjourned the meeting at 6:27 p.m.


Donald Samora, Mayor

ATTEST:


Dariana Fitzgerald, City Clerk