

**City of West Orange  
City Council Planning Workshop  
Tuesday, June 11, 2019  
5:00 P.M.  
Luigi's Italian Grill**

**COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Roy McDonald  
Shirley Bonnin

Mike Shugart  
Randy Branch

Dale Dardeau  
Brent Dearing

**APPOINTED OFFICIALS PRESENT:**

Theresa Van Meter  
David Roberts

Dean Fuller  
Simmie Gibson

Mike Stelly

Mayor McDonald called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., after which Council Member Shugart gave the blessing for the meal.

The mayor opened the floor to a review of the goals set at the last planning workshop:

**Continue cleanup of unkempt properties, as well as the City in general –**

Chief Stelly announced that Hurricane Harvey grant funds will be coming for demolition of damaged structures in low-to-moderate-income (LMI) areas. He then explained the criteria for "FEMA Acquisition," as set forth at this time. The house had to be here during Harvey, with the value assessed at post-Harvey value. If the structure has been repaired after Harvey, the value is assessed after the storm, but prior to repairs. The City can purchase the property with grant funds, tear down the structure, elevate the land and resell that property. The current home-owner can bid to purchase said property.

Council Member Dearing asked how the City would go about buying the property. Chief Stelly responded that the property owner would actually have to apply, but would have to meet certain requirements in order to qualify. It will all be post-storm value. Mr. Fuller reiterated that it will be post-storm value before any repairs have been done if any have been done.

Mayor Pro-Tem Bonnin asked about the properties that have been abandoned since the storm. Mr. Fuller explained that they can be handled as previous condemned properties have been handled. They can be given so many days by council to repair or remove structure, and if after that time has passed and nothing has been done, condemnation proceedings will proceed through the attorney handling the grant matters. These will not be acquisitions, but condemnations.

Chief Stelly then explained that Council Members may also hear about another program called the "Buyout Program," in which the property can be purchased at pre-storm value, but the property must remain as green space forever, which means the City must mow it and nothing can be built on it. Mr. Roberts asked if the City could lease this property out and both the Chief and Mr. Fuller responded yes, but nothing could really be done with it other than possibly a garden.

The City is participating in the "FEMA Acquisition Program", not the "FEMA Buyout Program"...you cannot do both.

**Pursue repair of crossings with the railroad –**

Chief Stelly reported that the Dayton Street crossings have been repaired, however the others have not. Mayor McDonald stated that the materials needed to repair the other crossing are there, just lying on the ground, but nothing is being done with it. The only thing he knows to do is to keep contacting the railroad. The City cannot do any work on the crossings at all. If we do, and there is a train wreck, we are liable.

Council Member Dearing questioned who was responsible for mowing along the railroad tracks, such as along South Street. He was told that the railroad is responsible for their rights-of-way. The City is not permitted onto their property. Chief Stelly added that the City cannot enforce any State laws nor City ordinances against the railroad. They are federally protected.

Council Member Branch inquired concerning the status of the two school properties within the City.

Mr. Fuller responded that some cleanup work has begun at the Western Avenue site. A tree has been cut down. A corporation has purchased the former Lorena Oates building and he has been unable to find a person to file against.

Council Member Dardeau stated that both schools should be a priority. Both schools should be condemned and the City should begin immediately. The Mayor responded that the City can do that, but if they do not comply, the City would be responsible for paying to have them torn down. Council Member Dardeau stated that the City could use grant funds to do this. Mr. Fuller responded that grant funds cannot be used to demolish commercial property. Council Member Dardeau did not agree that school property is considered "commercial" property.

Council Member Branch stated that lots of work needs to be done within West Orange and "we need to stay on top of it."

Mayor McDonald suggested that the legislature be approached regarding these school districts who abandon school buildings. He feels that they should be forced to demolish them and clean the property before they are eligible to present a bond issue to citizens for a vote for any other projects.

The discussion then turned to setting goals for the 2019-20 fiscal year.

Mayor McDonald stated that he would like to keep the last goals on the list, and add two more:

- Improve lighting in Seale-Alford Park;
- Update Christmas decorations/banners, etc.

He also reported that he recently met with a Boy Scout who feels that the City needs the following recreational venues for youth:

- Skating rink (indoor);
- Movie theater;
- Splash pad;
- Bowling alley;
- Basketball area (outside)

The mayor explained to him that he felt that these items would be more private enterprise than City-funded.

Council Member Branch stated he feels the City needs to focus on getting the Fire Department the equipment that they need to fight fires.

Chief Roberts and Assistant Chief Gibson then listed some of the things that they have found so far that are needed, or need to be replaced, in the department:

- Bunker gear;
- Lockers for each firefighter to store bunker gear (gear will not go home any longer);
- Automated External Defibrillator (AED);
- Video security system for fire station;
- Badging system; automatic locks;
- Gear-ready racks;
- Hose rack (can be built by firefighters);
- Upgrade to FireHouse software;
- Computer tablet(s) for use on trucks;
- Cameras inside cabs of trucks;
- Small brush fire truck;
- Large fire truck

Chief Roberts asked that the station be sprayed for spiders, bugs, etc.

Asst. Chief Gibson also stated that the Ford Explorer also needs an emergency vehicle warning system labeling it as a fire department vehicle.

Everyone was in agreement that an ordinance was needed to establish fines for excessive false alarm calls. There were two false alarm calls to one place alone earlier in the week. This utilizes City equipment and manpower.

Council Member Dearing asked if anyone felt there would be a conflict if he joined the fire

department. No one did, however he would have to recuse himself from any discussion and votes pertaining to the department, its budget, etc.

At the conclusion of the workshop the following goals for the upcoming year were agreed upon:

- **Continue cleanup of unkempt properties, as well as the City in general;**
- **Pursue repair of crossings with the railroad;**
- **Improve lighting in Seale-Alford Park;**
- **Update Christmas decorations/banners, etc.;**
- **Work within budget (and through grants) as much as possible to better equip the Fire Department**

With there being no further business or discussion, the workshop adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

  
Roy McDonald, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
Theresa Van Meter, City Secretary

