

St. Johns County Civic Roundtable Minutes September 14, 2020

Submitted by
Maureen Long, Recording Secretary

The meeting was opened a little after 12:00 noon by **Chairman Jim McLane**, he thanked everyone for joining the St. Johns Civic Roundtable today.

He then stated that since our last meeting, **Commissioner Paul Waldron's** health has improved and he was able to participate in the budget hearing last week. We also have had an election and there will be some changes on the County Commission and in the Sheriff's Office.

But, before we get too far into our program, I would like to ask you all to unmute yourself, stand and join me in the Pledge of Allegiance, all joined in reciting the pledge.

Chairman announced that **Lisa** is at the controls and will be monitoring the questions that come over the chat line. Next, he asked **Ms. Janet Patten, the Chair of our Government Affairs Committee** to please introduce our Speaker.

Janet Patten began by thanking the Chair and welcomed **Mr. Hunter Conrad** here today. She explained the purpose of the St. Johns County Civic Roundtable is to preserve and improve the quality of life in St. Johns County. And how wonderful it is that the County's administration shows a real interest in the Roundtable by being represented at our meetings by Joy Andrews, **Assistant Administrator of Community Services and Economic Growth**.

Janet went onto introduce **Mr. Conrad** with a bit of his background. Starting with being the **St. Johns County Clerk of the Court**, next appointed by the **St. Johns County Board of Commissioners** in November 2019 as the **Interim County Administrator**, and in February of 2020 becoming the **St. Johns County Administrator**.

Janet saying that normally she would give him the floor but in these times of Covid-19, the zoom screen is all his.

Mr. Conrad thanked Janet for the screen, said that he would rather meet in person but agreed that with the threat of Covid-19 this is best.

He began by stating the three topics he was going to be discussing this afternoon would be-

- Covid-19, how the beaches were the hot topic with SJC being the last to close the beaches.
- The Cares Act, how SJC has been slower than Jacksonville in getting the funding.
- The 2021 County Budget, the leadership team we have here in SJC working on the budget.

First, he wanted everyone to know the three most important things in his life are-
1- Faith

2- Family

3- Country & Community

Being that his Dad, a minister and a cop, along with all of his family working in public service, that's how he was raised, to serve in the community, to work in public service.

He went on to give the **Covid-19 statistics for the county as of 10am 4,789 cases testing positive and 63 deaths**. He remarked that SJC residents have taken their health on their own to stay healthy since Covid-19 hit on March 8, 2020. The county made no independent decisions, we reached out to the Health Department along with other administrations and departments in the city and county for input.

While working on the budget, we knew there were going to be financial effects, taxes on which we depend were down, e.g. the consumption tax, gas tax and bed tax revenues. Plans to roll back the millage rate to help the citizens. The management and budgeting team is seeing a V shaped recovery, a quick decline due to Covid-19 but it is coming up with the sales tax rising recently. During the downward turn of Covid-19 the county had no layoffs or furloughs of their employees, we were able to keep all our people on board.

The Cares Act funding for economic development was under the **Deputy Administrator, Joy Andrews** who also handles all special developments, growth management, the St. Augustine Amp, and tourism development.

All staff were working to take calls from businesses, non-profits and citizens to help them make their claims. We had to look at the money we had to fund, as to how much would go where.

In the way federal funding works, the county spends the money and then gets reimbursed before 12/31/20. Eleven million came in, but we are still waiting on more. Jacksonville received their money first with SJC 3 to 4 months behind. **Mr. Conrad** described the scale as to how the money from the Cares Act is distributed to businesses and nonprofits as to how many employees they have.

St. Johns County will have a final public hearing on the 2021 budget September 21, at the County Administration Building. You can view the County's 800-page Budget, on the county's website.

Mr. Conrad wrapped up his presentation, he opened the floor for questions.

First question: Is there a **long-term plan for St. Johns County**? Is there any guidance or internal values for a long-term plan or vision for the county at this time, what or when is one going to be put into place?

Hunter: I agree, I haven't seen a long-term plan. I realized this, one of my goals is to take a community tour in each district with the Commissioner that represents that district. See what kind of infrastructures are needed in their districts for the future. I'd like to do that over the next two years. Come back and develop a strategic plan for the

county based on the districts and county, as a whole. We'll need to work on that in the next two years, so that in four years we will have a twenty-year plan.

Second question: A new interim director of emergency management has been named, when will a permanent director be named?

Hunter: As you know **Linda Stoughton** retired in July, after working as the director since 2014, and after working in county government for more than 30 years. Linda was ready to leave, her husband had already retired and she wanted to join him.

Joe Giammanco took over as **interim** director, and **Kelly Wilson** as **interim deputy director**. Joe began working as the county's director of Disaster Recovery in 2017. He is retired from the U.S. Coast Guard after 23 years and has experience in planning for natural disasters and other emergencies. Kelly's been with the county since 2006 as an emergency management planner and recently as emergency management coordinator. We don't have a **deadline for naming a permanent director or deputy director**.

Third question: Does the county have any plans on reinstating the **LAMP program**, are there any funds for the program?

Hunter: The problem with getting the LAMP program reinstated is there hasn't been enough votes for it from the County Commissioners. Hopefully with the new County Commissioner, he will vote in favor of reinstating the program. No funds have been set aside, as of yet.

With questions answered **Chair McLane thanked Mr. Conrad** for his time as our guest speaker today.

At this time we moved onto our business meeting, **Chair McLane** began his

President's Report:

1. The Board has been working to make the Roundtable a meaningful organization and your input is always important.
2. According to our By-laws, we have elections every year in November. I would like to start now to solicit and invite anyone who has any interest in serving on the Board , either in an elected position, or an At Large position, or who would like to serve on a committee, to please let me or **Lisa McGlynn** know.
3. If elected, I will serve another year as Chairman of the Roundtable, but that is it. It is time for new people to come forward and for me to play a little more. I would like to use this coming year to recruit some new people to the Board and hopefully someone who would be willing to step in as President.
4. We'll move on with the rest of the meeting. We are going to defer the approval of the July minutes, because they did not get sent out.

Chair asked for the Treasurers Report:

Co-Chair McGlynn reported \$1269.00 in our Suntrust Bank Account.

Chair asked for **Janet Patten's Gov't Affairs Report:**

Janet Patten reported:

- Late August SJC commissioners voted 4-0 to approve changes to the **SilverLeaf** development agreement, a hospital to be built but also commercial and office uses.
- A plan to develop with an entrance on Wildwood Drive and 207, **DRHorton** to pay for the infrastructures.
- Plans for 300 acres on the other side of 95 to be developed.
- Last week there was a roll back for property taxes, 6.8 mills, \$4 million to be used from reserves, showing a decrease.
- There will be a second Budget hearing on 9/21/20 at 9:30.
- The Candidate Questionnaire will be ready 9/24/20, for all to view on Roundtable's Web Site.
- **BFC/Gate** is planning on building an Express Car Wash next to the entrance to **Fish Island**, there is opposition by the Friends of Fish Island.

Janet called for a resolution to be written in opposition to the building of the Gate Express Car Wash. All were in favor. Janet will write the resolution for submission.

Chair McLane called on **John Pilecki** to give us an Education Update.

John said he attended the Web version of the 9/8/20 School Board Meeting and reported:

- The Board praised the Teachers and Administrators
- Call in participants stated that masks should be worn by students.
- Teachers Union Representative commented on the stress the Teachers are experiencing.
- Tuesday night 9/15/20 there is going to be a 5:30 meeting to address any Covid-19 concerns by parents and students.

The Chair called for members to go around the room to hear issues and from Candidates attending this afternoon.

We heard from several candidates running for county positions.

Chair McLane reminded all that our next meeting is scheduled **for Monday, October 12 at noon with Ms. Vicki Oakes as our speaker**, he thanked all for coming today. Meeting was adjourned at **1:12**.