MINUTES
City of Cocoa
Council Priorities Workshop

March 5, 2024

A City Council Priorities Workshop was held on Tuesday, March 5, 2024, in Cocoa City Hall, in City Council Chambers, located at 65 Stone Street, in Cocoa, Florida, 32922, as publicly noticed.

I. Opening Matters:

Mayor Blake called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

Pastor Scott Billue provided the invocation and Assistant City Attorney Eick led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance.

The City Clerk took the roll.

PRESENT:	Michael C. Blake	Mayor
	Lavander Hearn	Deputy Mayor
	Matthew Barringer	Councilmember
	Alex Goins	Councilmember
	Lorraine Koss	Councilmember
	Kristin Eick	Asst. City Attorney
	Stockton Whitten	City Manager
	Monica Arsenault	City Clerk

OTHER STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Abby Morgan, Public Works Director; Rebecca Bowman, Finance Director; Charlene Neuterman, Community Services Director; Evander Collier, Police Chief; Jack Walsh, Utilities Director; Tammy Gemmati, Administrative Services Director; Samantha Senger, Communications & Economic Development Director; Mitchell Lawyer, Systems Support Manager; and Lisa Richardson, Help Desk Support Tech.

II. Workshop Topics:

* **CONSENSUS by Council to allow public input after each item.**

City Manager Whitten reviewed the agenda[1] for the evening and reviewed the topics to be discussed.

1. Affordable Housing

City Manager Whitten discussed the upcoming affordable housing projects, including:

- Michael C. Blake Subdivision
- 203 Orange St. (Consent Decree Area/CRA)
- Approximately 21 infill lots surplused for affordable housing
- Orchid Lakes Apartments – 90 units
- Allegra Apartments – 10% of units dedicated to affordable housing

City Manager Whitten noted that the HUD sales price is $269,000 or less. The buydown of the market appraised value is $310,000 to $320,000. This reduces or eliminates the ROI to reseed the program.

Additionally, the cities of Jacksonville, Fort Myers and St. Petersburg are developing a program for placing affordable housing lots in the market. These are the cities that staff are looking at as an example. City Manager Whitten shared some of the stipulations that the other cities require for the program.

Discussion was held on the steps that would need to take place if the home was foreclosed on.

Rose Flowers and Reagan Louis, asked Council to consider including special needs equipment and ramps at the local parks which will help to bridge the gap among all children. There are a lot of children in the area that are special needs and there are no ramps or playground equipment that they can use.

Additionally, Ms. Flowers asked how to go about asking for signs to be put up in neighborhoods that house special needs children because they are having issues with speeding. In response, Mayor Blake shared that he agrees, and is sure the City Manager and/or the Public Works Director can assist with this.

* **MOTION by Mayor Blake; Seconded by Councilmember Goins, to direct staff to prioritize special needs equipment at the parks with funding to come**

[1] Exhibit A: FY2025 Council Priorities & Planning

either through the District 4 Special Taxing District revenues or through the General Fund.

AYES: Blake, Hearn, Barringer, Goins, Koss

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (5-0)

It was pointed out that this motion is for direction only, and not a final decision. This discussion will come back before Council so that further information can be provided, and specific park locations can be determined for the special needs equipment.

Deputy Mayor Hearn asked if Council would consider inviting some developers in to provide information on affordable housing. In response, Councilmember Goins noted that he would be in favor of that. Additionally, Councilmember Barringer shared that he would be open to staff bringing back more information. Mayor Blake added that he is open to the conversation, however he has some questions and concerns about it.

Further discussion was held on tiny homes and the vetting process. City Manager Whitten pointed out that certain things such as zoning changes would come into play should Council decide that they want to pursue the option of tiny homes, container homes, or other types of similar housing.

There being no further questions or comments from Council, Mayor Blake opened the discussion to the public.

Kristin Lortie, Cocoa, thanked Council for allowing public comment after each item rather than at the end of the meeting. She spoke to a point made during the presentation about single family homes being a priority for these parcels but she has done a lot of reading and it seems that the trajectory of the country is to try and have more density on the lots, such as duplexes or triplexes. She added that she is curious as to why single family homes are being considered a priority over multi-family homes.

She also wished to make a point that she wished Council would allow for public input prior to a vote being taken.

Ms. Lortie spoke in regard to the special needs equipment at the parks that Council is considering, and noted that while everyone loves parks and she herself enjoys them, she would like to see more public input and mentioned the workshop that took place in 2021 where money was allocated on the splash pad when there was not a lot of public participation. Additionally, she wants to make sure all needs are balanced and feels that Council is now prioritizing something that should have been in the Parks Plan.

Aleck Greenwood, 640 Brevard Ave., Cocoa, wished to share that he is tired of people showing up late to these meetings and demanding that staff and Council do things differently. He feels it is a waste of everyone's time and he is tired of people putting down staff and the City Manager.

Mr. Greenwood explained that his reason for speaking tonight is to speak on affordable housing and inquire about expanding the idea of each unit into a condominium. He would like to see Council consider this an option as well.

2. Brightline Train Station

City Manager Whitten talked about the Brightline Station, noting that he didn't want to expound too much on it so as not to give away any strategic information. Several years ago, the TPO commissioned a study to determine the best location for a Brevard station. The number one spot was in Cocoa and the second spot was the old FEC station that borders on both Cocoa and Rockledge.

He talked about the announcement that was recently made which is that Brightline will be opening a Treasure Coast Station in the City of Stewart and he shared what those numbers look like. He talked in furtherance about what the City of Cocoa's numbers look like at this time.

He is hopeful that an announcement will be made at any time announcing that Cocoa will be getting the station.

Councilmember Barringer pointed out that this is a very large scale, complex project and a large sum of money is being discussed and it would be foolish to think the City could do it alone. His added that his only threshold is that whatever the City is encumbering will not have a negative impact to whatever the City's bond rating might be in the next several years.

City Manager Whitten shared that this is in fact a commitment to Brightline that the City of Cocoa will earmark 5 million dollars within the next two to three fiscal years.

City Manager Whitten talked about the draw of the station and used the Port as an example.

* **MOTION by Mayor Blake; Seconded by Councilmember Koss, to authorize the City Manager and staff to build the earmark for five million dollars by FY25-26; to express concurrent direction to Brightline; and grant the ability to pursue grant opportunities.**

Councilmember Goins wished to add that Council will need to consider all sides of the project. The train will bring a lot of noise and there are some citizens feel that they will never ride the train, however their taxes will be applied towards this project.

Councilmember Koss wished to point out that one of the benefits of the station is that everyone's property values will increase.

There being no further questions or comments from Council, Mayor Blake opened the discussion to the public.

Aleck Greenwood, 640 Brevard Ave., shared that the Commercial Property Group is in support of the Brightline Train station. This is the biggest catalyst that the city could see that will help this area.

Kristin Lortie, complimented staff on bringing this project forward and thinks it is a great idea. She doesn't know enough about the dollar amounts to speak too much on that now but she thinks the city should continue to move forward. She is wondering how a partnership with the County could come into play.

She also reiterated the importance of public input and would like to see everyone be respectful to each other throughout the meeting.

AYES: Blake, Hearn, Barringer, Goins, Koss

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (5-0)

3. Priority Areas

Ms. Senger reviewed the City's priority areas. These include:

- Public Safety & Community Standards
- Public Infrastructure
- Economic & Community Development
- Community Outreach & Engagement
- Organizational Effectiveness

She provided a step-by-step on how to access the City's performance indicators on the City's website including budget information and the City's goals and objectives.

There being no further questions from Council, Mayor Blake opened the discussion to the public.

Kristin Lortie, talked about the strategic plan and shared that she went and looked at Tallahassee's online and found it is a very user-friendly tool. She noted that she objects to these priority areas because they were put forward by staff and adopted by Council without taking public input into account.

Councilmember Goins shared that there are always things that every city can work on to do better. He is at a loss because he feels there is no way to please everyone but he would like to see the city continue to move forward.

City Manager Whitten wished to announce that the city is hopeful to secure $1.5 million dollars in funding from the State to apply towards the old Dr. Joe Lee Smith Center as well as $4 million dollars towards the J&K septic to sewer project which has been added to the budget for Governor DeSantis to approve.

City Manager Whitten thanked the City's lobbyists and shared that he is very proud of these two significant projects. His last hope is that the Governor will not veto these items out of the budget.

Ms. Bowman shared that right now staff is in the early stages of preparing next year's budget. She shared the estimated increases in expenses and pointed out that Union negotiations will take place in 2025.

She added that staff is not anticipating a lot of new construction to hit the tax rolls until FY26 so they are looking at some shortfalls for this fiscal year.

Ms. Gemmati shared information about the upcoming Union negotiations that take place every three years. She noted that staff will keep Council apprised on those negotiations which include PBA, IAFF, LIUNA, Police Lieutenants and District Chiefs.

4. Council Priorities

Councilmember Barringer shared his priorities which are:

- Markers at the Cocoa Conservation area
- Trail improvements and signs for existing paths at the Cocoa Conservation area

- Four education program grants (One for Endeavor, Cambridge, Saturn, and the Museum)
- Junny Rios Park and the bidding process
- Water delivery service to areas outside of Cocoa
- Single office space use for veterans in an existing City facility
- Continuing the enhancement of fleet maintenance
- Enhancement of trash cans and a possible partnership with SCAT to fund a bus cover in the area surrounding the library.

Deputy Mayor Hearn shared his priorities which are:

- Street paving in District 2
- Street calming devices to address speeding, specifically in the Pine Ridge neighborhood and Cocoa Modern Manor neighborhood north of Broadmoor acres
- Home paint beautification grant program
- A fishing dock or observation deck near the intersection of Dixon Blvd. and Indian River Dr.
- Blight of Dixon Blvd. and partnering with the County to beautify the area
- Blight of Fiske Blvd. and beautifying this area

* **MOTION by Mayor Blake; Seconded by Councilmember Barringer, to take a five-minute recess.**

AYES: Blake, Hearn, Barringer, Goins, Koss

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (5-0)

The recess began at 7:48 and the meeting reconvened at 7:56pm.

Councilmember Koss shared her priorities which are:

- Solar panels on the homes in the Michael C. Subdivision to make it a model project, including a possible partnership with the Florida Solar Center
- J&K septic to sewer conversion, including an outreach to sixty homes to share information about applying for SOIRL grants
- Homeless shelters – working with the County to find and fund shelters throughout the County
- Collins and Brevard Museums – organizing speaker events to create more awareness and visibility. To also provide funds to help sustain the Brevard Museum.

- Bus shelters
- High visibility crosswalks near the Pineridge neighborhood as that area houses a lot of students that attend Cambridge Elementary
- Beautifying the corridor that leads to Cocoa High School
- US1 and SR520 corridor maintenance and enhancement program
- Bracco Pond development to include benches and tree canopies
- Obtaining an ALA designation
- Street calming improvements at Westminster Dr. and High Point Dr.
- Developing another access point to the Cocoa Conservation area
- Police water ways vessel

Councilmember Goins shared his priorities which are:

- Vacant lot on Oleander behind St. Paul's needs paving and/or lighting
- Blake Ave. and Holmes St. need assistance with speeders
- Curb and gutter on select streets in Virginia Park
- Overlay the parking lot at Provost Park

* **MOTION by Councilmember Goins; Seconded by Deputy Mayor Hearn, to utilize contingency funds for up to $34,000 dollars to overlay the parking lot at Provost park.**

Mayor Blake opened the discussion for public input.

Kristin Lortie, Cocoa, shared that she is in favor of the idea, however she would like to suggest that Council bring this back as a formal agenda item to allow for more public input and to allow the public a chance to look at background information.

In response, Councilmember Goins noted that while he doesn't disagree with Ms. Lortie and understands where she is coming from, he does not want to delay the process any further because there is currently a contract on the table and if Council waits any longer, they could lose the opportunity.

There being no further comments, Mayor Blake closed the discussion to the public.

AYES: Blake, Hearn, Barringer, Goins, Koss

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (5-0)

- Installing lighting for the pickleball courts at Provost Park
- Fencing around the Collins Museum

- Parking needed adjacent to the fence on the Jackson St. side of the football field
- Enhancing Code Enforcement's budget to fund assistance for abatements
- Beautification for the median heading west on Rosa L. Jones Dr. from Fiske Blvd. to Aurora St.
- Maintenance on the diamonds in Diamond Square
- Working with the County to fix the pothole on Fiske Blvd. and Stone St.

Mayor Blake shared his priorities which are:

- Annexing the pockets from the St. Johns River to the Indian River along the SR520 corridor
- Hiring a cleanup crew to provide service throughout the City
- Expanding the Career works program

5. Public Input/Citizen Participation

Mayor Blake opened the discussion to the public.

Linda Dolphin, Cocoa, spoke about the septic to sewer conversion. She would like to request that Council go out to bid now so that if the Governor approves the bill on July 1, 2024 the City will be ready to move forward.

Kristin Lortie, Cocoa, complimented Council on their priorities. She further complimented Councilmember Barringer on his approach to his list with estimated dollar amounts.

She further talked about her love for green spaces and asked Council to consider smart growth planning and develop the trail head and walkways. She also talked about the Management Plan and while she was glad to hear it referenced in this meeting, she would like to see that completed.

Scott Billue, President of Matthew's Hope, talked about the issue of homelessness. He shared that the Senate passed a bill today criminalizing homelessness. While he appreciates Council's priorities, he feels that there are other issues that are more important that need to be addressed.

Deputy Mayor Hearn wished to add that he would like to be proactive during hurricane season and would like staff, Council and Matthew's Hope to sit down and have a conversation about a plan for the homeless if there's a state of emergency.

III. Adjournment:

* **MOTION by Councilmember Barringer; Seconded by Mayor Blake, to adjourn the Council Priorities Workshop of March 5, 2024.**

AYES: Blake, Hearn, Barringer, Goins, Koss

THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY (5-0)

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Michael C. Blake, Mayor

ATTEST:

Monica Arsenault, CMC, City Clerk