

MINUTES OF A **SPECIAL MEETING** OF THE CITY COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA, HELD IN THE CITY HALL COMMISSION CHAMBERS, 100 NORTH U.S. #1, FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA, AT 10:00 A.M. ON FRIDAY, **MARCH 27, 2020.**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Hudson called the March 27, 2020 Special Meeting of the City Commission to order at 10:00 AM.

**2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**3. ROLL CALL**

Present: Mayor Linda Hudson; Commissioner Jeremiah Johnson; Commissioner Thomas Perona; Commissioner Reginald Sessions

Absent: Commissioner Rufus Alexander

Staff Present: City Clerk Linda Cox  
City Manager Nicholas Mimms  
City Attorney Peter Sweeney

**4. COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Any person who wishes to comment on any subject may be heard at this time. Please limit your comments to three (3) minutes or less, as directed by the Mayor, as this section of the Agenda is limited to fifteen minutes. The City Commission will not be able to take any official actions under Comments from the Public. Speakers will address the Mayor, Commissioners, and the Public with respect. Inappropriate language will not be tolerated.

None.

**5. NEW BUSINESS**

a. COVID-19 Update

Introduction

Mr. Mimms thanked the Mayor and City Commission for coming together for this Special Meeting of the City Commission to discuss the important issues surrounding our community, our country, and our world at this time.

Emergency Management

Mr. Mimms introduced the Deputy Chief Robert Ridle, Emergency Management Director, to give an overview of the Emergency Management perspective and our current standing. Deputy Chief Ridle provided current local, state and national statistics for the COVID-19 virus. The EOC is at a level II activation and working as a unified command with the St. Lucie County Department of Health. The EOC has been inundated with requests for supplies. Police Officers are handing out flyers with COVID-19 prevention information along with phone numbers and online resources for the latest information. There are currently two testing sites in St. Lucie County: Cleveland Clinic at Tradition and the Florida Community Health Center on Delaware Avenue. The EOC is monitoring the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) who may put out a predictive model next week. The virus is here and it's all around us. Everyone must follow protocols and practice safe social distancing. Everyone must take personal precautions to protect themselves and their family or this will get much worse. At this point, social distancing is not enforceable by the police department. However, the officers will speak with and educate the citizens on the importance of social distancing and encourage them to follow protocols. The EOC will continue to monitor and follow protocols from local partners, the State of Florida, and the Federal Government.

Commissioner Perona suggested reaching out to the community through social media to convey the seriousness of this virus and the importance of social distancing. Commissioner Sessions witnessed approximately 100 – 150 youth congregating at the recreation center and would like to see the County shut the recreation center down. Mayor Hudson added that complaints have come in regarding the lack of social distancing at the Jetty.

Protective Measures and Operational Changes

Mr. Mimms outlined the protective measures and operational changes that the City of Fort Pierce has put in place.

- City Hall is currently closed to the public with appointment-only access to the building department.
- Sunrise Theatre is closed. No shows, events, or reservations
- Police Department facilities are closed to the public.
- City Marina is open, but no new reservations for slips will be taken.
- Indian Hills Golf Course remains open.
- Beaches are closed including Jaycee Park & South Causeway Park.
- Boat ramps at Jaycee Park and Fisherman's Wharf are currently open.
- Recreational Parks (except for Jaycee & South Causeway) are open.
- All public restrooms in our parks and green spaces are currently open.
- Jetty Park owned by the United States of America is open.
- April 06, 2020, City Commission Regular Meeting is scheduled to go forward.
- Employees remain on a regular schedule.
- Daycare is being provided by the County for essential employees and first responders.
- Admin leave has not been granted as a resource for employees.
- A hiring freeze is in place for all municipal employment except for the Police and Public Works.
- Budget reduction of 2.5% has been put in place for all departments for the current fiscal year.

### Building

Paul Thomas, Building Official, stated that the Building Department is encouraging any member of the public to submit applications and conduct permitting online. Scheduled appointments are running smoothly. There are some existing major projects which remain ongoing in the City of Fort Pierce, including Bent Creek, Celebration Point, Magnolia Square, Carriage Point, Crabby's Restaurant, Camping World, and Gander Outdoors to name a few. With residential developments, thousands of homes are being constructed. As a result, tens of thousands of inspections will have to be done. The inspections will continue as an essential service to the public and administrative staff is required to support the inspectors. New projects include three-phases of Lawnwood Hospital, KOA, Mayflower at Lawnwood apartments. Independent Classic Charter School is a time-sensitive project which is scheduled to be completed by the start of the school year. Projects such as Dunkin' Donuts, WaWa and 7-Eleven are projects ready to be issued but require administrative permit staff to keep the process going. Inspectors and support staff remain essential for emergencies that may arise, such as an air conditioning unit needing replacement at a residence. This will require permitting and inspections. Same with plumbing and electrical issues that unexpectedly happen. The Building Department also responds when there is a fire or structural accident or anytime there is an unsafe condition to the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

### Public Works

Mike Reals, Public Works Director, stated that the Public Works Department stands ready for the challenge ahead. All levels of service are being provided to the community except for leisure services. Riverwalk Center and the recreation resource facility have been closed. Changes within the department have been made to accommodate social distancing as much as they can, as well as the number of employees per vehicle. Public Works is operating in storm mode with a heightened level of service. The Public Works employees are working closely with the Police Department to provide the very best service. Commissioner Sessions commended Public Works and the Police Department for being visible to the public. Commissioner Perona also commented on how proud he is of the employees of the City of Fort Pierce. Public Works has increased the sanitizing of areas accessed by the public. Commissioner Johnson inquired about supplies. Inventory of cleaning and disinfecting supplies have been maintained. They need face masks which are hard to come by.

### Police Department

Chief Diane Hobbey-Burney stated that the Fort Pierce Police Department is operating at a business as usual level. Because they are on the front line, it is imperative that the administrative support staff remain intact because this is a fluid situation. They are working on protocols for responding to residential calls such as having the caller meet the officer outside. Calls are being prioritized which puts more responsibility on the essential Community Service Officers (CSO). The officers currently have personal protective gear, but more needs to be ordered due to the uncertainty of the duration of this health emergency. The City of Fort Pierce Police Department does have a mutual aid agreement with the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office in the event backup or support is needed. Orders have been placed with the EOC for supplies for the officers. Officers are given guidance on social distancing. This is also why calls are being screened to determine if an officer needs to respond or if the call can be handled over the telephone by a CSO. This allows the Police Officers to respond to priority calls. Domestic calls seem to be rising during this crisis. Commissioner Perona inquired about the possibility of a shelter-in-place order being issued and the enforcement of such an order. Chief Hobbey-Burney stated they are in the process of preparing for such a situation. The officers' will be well-informed on how to handle violations if such an order is put in place.

The school resource officers have been re-assigned to patrol when there are no scheduled activities at the schools. The Commission inquired whether the type of calls has changed with the pandemic emergency. Chief Hobbey-Burney stated that domestic calls have increased while traffic incidents have slightly decreased.

Information Technology

DeVoshay Johnson, IT Manager, provided an update on information and communications for the City of Fort Pierce. Updates on the COVID-19 status are being sent out via multiple platforms. FPTV is being utilized to push updates out to the public. We are using other platforms to push information to the City of Fort Pierce employees' mobile devices, desktop computers, email, and social media. Because we were able to transition to Office 365 last year, the City was prepared for employees to access their Microsoft Office suite of programs remotely from the cloud. The IT Department is extra vigilant in scanning for viruses and being alert for potential internet threats and scams. The IT Department is reviewing the fiscal impact for obtaining laptop computers to allow employees to work remotely from home not only for this emergency situation but also in the event of a weather-related closure for City Hall. All options are being reviewed and considered.

City Commission

Nick Mimms, City Manager, commended the City Commission for their efforts in working with the various departments to ensure the smooth transition to this new way of working. The City Commission will continue to provide video messages, recordings, and updates for the public. The public is most interested in hearing from the Mayor and Commissioners during this time.

Safer at Home Order

Nick Mimms, City Manager, was contacted by St. Lucie County for a possible shelter-in-place, stay-at-home, or safer-at-home order which has not been issued. The draft has not yet been received by the City Attorney or City Manager's office. While these sound intimidating, there are many exceptions to the potential order. Under the terms, the public would be allowed to leave their homes for basic necessities, physical activity, travel related to basic needs and physical activity, or travel-related to receipt of essential services. Essential services are included on an extensive list of services such as pharmacies, food stores, doctor's offices, banks, restaurants, hardware stores, farm and produce stands, etc. We are prepared for any order that may be issued. The staff and charter officers are prepared and have designated the essential employees. The City of Fort Pierce will partner with Port St. Lucie and St. Lucie County. City Attorney Peter Sweeney stated that this City Commission has the power to govern within the city limits of Fort Pierce as they see fit. We are not in a charter county where we are bound to follow the County's direction. However, it is in the best interest of Fort Pierce to act uniformly with our partners.

Mr. Mimms is seeking consensus by the Commission for the command staff to enter into an agreement with the County if such an order is proposed. The City Commission agrees that it is important to work in conjunction with our partners including the County. Commissioner Perona stressed the importance of including the homeless and addressing their needs as part of any decisions made. Commissioner Johnson expressed concern about keeping the boat ramps accessible. Mr. Mimms asked the Commission to consider the sensitive areas such as the Jetty (exclusive of Jetty Park), boat ramps, and the Indian Hills Golf Course. The Commission agrees these areas should remain open to the public as long as everyone practices social distancing and that social distancing is strongly monitored.

Commissioner Perona said he has received numerous complaints regarding the scooters. Mr. Mimms stated that the scooters are a privately owned business. People who use these scooters must take personal responsibility for themselves. Mr. Mimms said the company has assured him that they are sanitized daily.

The City Commission is urging citizens to practice social distancing. We do have these wonderful amenities that people can utilize for approved recreational purposes. This current situation changes daily if not hourly.

**6. ADJOURNMENT**

Mayor Linda Hudson adjourned the meeting at **11:57 AM**.

ATTEST:

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CITY CLERK

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MAYOR COMMISSIONER