

**Minutes of City Council Workshop  
Public Safety and Vagrancy  
Wednesday, March 6, 2013 – 6:30 PM  
City Council Chambers**

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Mayor Charlie Latham called the workshop to order at 6:32 PM.

The following City Council members were in attendance:

Mayor Charlie Latham	Chris Hoffman
Mayor Pro-Tem Tom Taylor	Phil Vogelsang
Keith Doherty	Jeanell Wilson
Steve Hartkemeyer	

Also present were City Manager George Forbes, Interim Police Chief Pat Dooley, Commander Steve Corbitt, and Commander Gene Paul Smith.

**Purpose of Workshop**

The purpose of the workshop is to discuss public safety and vagrancy in the downtown area.

**Discussion**

Mayor Latham gave a brief introduction. He stated that he wanted to gather as a community to discuss problems. Mayor Latham acknowledged the department directors who were in attendance.

Mayor Latham stated that public safety is one of the top five priorities of the City Council. He said another top priority is building community. Mayor Latham stated that the workshop was set up to exchange information and share ideas. Mayor Latham acknowledged that representatives from BEAM, Mission House, the Sulzbacher Center, Jacksonville Beach Police, and the Chamber of Commerce were in attendance. He stated that each group will address the audience. Following the groups, there will be an open mic period for questions and discussion. Mayor Latham asked the audience to try to mix up the groups so each table has a variety of participants. He asked everyone to take five minutes to introduce themselves at whatever table they were seated. Mayor Latham asked that everyone be respectful and hear all voices and opinions. He stated that homelessness is a condition that needs a solution. In contrast, vagrancy is a choice to live that way. Mayor Latham continued saying everyone has rights and we need to find a way to work together.

Mayor Latham read a memo from the City Manager (copy attached). The memo references three strategies adopted by the City to assist with the problem: the Community Services Center, the downtown community policing team, and the HOPE program. Mayor Latham stated the City also needs to enforce the laws.

## **BEAM**

Susan King from BEAM addressed the audience. Ms. King stated that BEAM is a private agency that provides assistance to families to stay in their homes. She stated they serve a five zip code area. They provide rent and utility assistance. BEAM also operates a food pantry. Their employees and volunteers provide counsel with issues as people go through their organization. In addition, they assist people with food stamp assistance. They try to keep families in homes to prevent homelessness. Ms. King answered several questions from the audience. BEAM is a faith based organization. They receive funding through grants, which account for approximately 20% of their funding, individual donors, and corporate donations. Ms. King stated BEAM provided \$120,000 in utility assistance and \$100,000 in rental assistance. She stated it has been extremely difficult for the working poor. They have low paying jobs while costs have gone up. If needed, BEAM refers people to a financial mentoring program.

## **Mission House**

Lori Anderson from Mission House addressed the audience. Ms. Anderson stated that a lot of people don't know what Mission House does. Mission House is not a soup kitchen any more. Mission House was started in 1997. They used to be housed with BEAM until BEAM moved to the Community Services Center. Mission House is a faith based organization. It is the only homeless day facility. Their number one goal is to get people off the street and into housing. Last year they got 66 people into housing. The year before, it was 44. They provide active case management. Clients who come in more than a couple times then have to see a case manager. They provide a clinic twice a week. Mission House serves all of Duval County at their clinic. They have a veteran's representative every other week. Everything is free in the clinic. They had a \$30,000 medicine bill last year. Every doctor, nurse and intake person is a volunteer. They provide a doctor for mental health and psychologists. 80-90% of their clients do not have identification. They assist clients with obtaining IDs. There is no overnight shelter at the beach. They provide two meals per day Monday through Friday. All their teams are volunteers. Clients can take a shower and are given a new set of clothes. Mission House has an agreement with Goodwill to provide vouchers for free clothing. They help clients look for jobs. Mission House has standards for safety and requires clients to follow two rules or be banned – no weapons, drugs or alcohol; and no physical violence. Mission House gives clients the tools to make their life better. They try to get people off the streets. Mission House has seven paid employees and 400 volunteers. Number one funding source is individuals. They also receive funding from churches, civic and corporations. They served 2,200 meals in January 2013. Statistics on the number of homeless at the beach is not exact. The number of the last count had 76, but the year before had 276. Ms. Anderson answered questions from the audience.

### **Sulzbacher Center**

Dr. Richard Christensen, Director of Mental Health Services for the Sulzbacher Center, addressed the audience. Dr. Christensen stated HOPE teams were created, one in downtown Jacksonville and one at the beach, in an attempt to engage people outside of care. He said the homeless at the beach are unsheltered and often resistant to services. The Sulzbacher Center was created in 1995 as a 350 bed shelter and provides primary care, mental, and addiction services. The HOPE team has made 3,300 contacts at the beach. Clients can stay at the shelter as long as they are working towards getting out of homelessness. Dr. Christensen answered questions from the audience. He stated that the HOPE team is out every day, usually twice a day.

### **Chamber of Commerce**

Sonny Bikha, who owns several hotels at the beach, spoke on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Bikha stated that the homeless present a safety issue to staff and visitors to the City, panhandling, making remarks, urinating and sleeping on the boardwalk. He said if we don't find a solution, it will cost jobs.

Mayor Latham recognized Officer Dan Watts, who works a lot with the homeless at the beach. He also recognized the Citizen Police Academy program and explained that a person can learn a lot about what the police department does. Mayor Latham encouraged the audience to participate in the program and noted another class will be starting soon.

Interim Police Chief Pat Dooley stated the police can make arrests but don't control how long they are incarcerated. Most of the arrests are for misdemeanors and the person is in and out quickly. Chief Dooley explained the downtown CAPE program has four full time officers. He stated Officer Watts was personally involved in housing 33 people last year. Chief Dooley said people living on the street also become victims. He said the police try to connect with people who want help getting the help they need. They enforce the rights of citizens and visitors. When people are found sleeping on the beach, they are first given a warning and a contact card. The beach is checked every night. A photo is taken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> time. It is an ongoing process. Chief Dooley said they need the help of the public to call when they see violations of the law. He outlined a program that they are working on to have persons with repeat arrests brought before a judge in the hope it would force the individual into a treatment program. Chief Dooley explained that property owners can sign a Trespass Agreement which allows the police to go on their property and automatically arrest any trespassers after a one time warning. Chief Dooley answered questions from the audience. He stated that 20% of the annual arrests involve the homeless. Commander Steve Corbitt went over a breakdown of the cost of each arrest and estimated the average cost in 2011 at \$15,578.46. In 2012, the estimate is \$14,000.

Mayor Latham stated that there would not be any solutions tonight. He then opened it up to the audience for any questions or comments.

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Mayor Latham said the next step is to do additional research. He will bring this issue before the City Council. Mayor Latham stated this was a very informative meeting and thanked those who attended the workshop.

The workshop was adjourned at 8:46 PM.

Submitted by: Sheri Gosselin  
Assistant to the City Manager

Approved:

/c/William C. Latham

William C. Latham, Mayor

Date: March 18, 2013