

**REVITALIZATION COMMITTEE
MEETING
JUNE 15, 2009**

MEMBERS PRESENT: John Magnin, Chairman
Paul LaFleur, Nancy Lisby,
Claire Phelen, Robert Rexroad

MEMBERS ABSENT: Janeen Weiler

OTHERS PRESENT: Mitchell Austin, Urban Design Planner
Vice Mayor Harvey Goldberg
Becky Bovell, Dawn MacGibbon, John Wright,
Roger Peterson, Edgar Parrah

CALL TO ORDER/ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A. Roll Call
- B. Next Scheduled Meeting - July 20, 2009
- C. Last Scheduled Meeting - May 18, 2009
- D. Election of Vice Chairman
 - Mr. Magnin announced due to the passing of former member Ms. Cathy Johnson, the Committee must elect a new Vice Chairman. He then opened the floor for nominations.
 - Mr. Magnin NOMINATED Mr. Rexroad for Vice Chairman.
 - As there were no other nominations, Mr. Rexroad was appointed Vice Chairman by acclamation.
 - Mr. Magnin confirmed the vacancy had been announced by City Council.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- A. Meeting of May 18, 2009
 - Ms. Lisby MOVED, Ms. Phelen SECONDED approval of the May 18, 2009 minutes. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

OLD BUSINESS

Note: Item A was heard following Item D.1.a and D.1.b.

- A. Revitalization Awards
 - Mr. Magnin announced photographs of the most recent award presentations would be in the June 17, 2009 Punta Gorda Herald.
 - Ms. Lisby requested clarification of the award process.
 - Mr. Magnin explained members had made recommendations for many years, adding the Committee had recently decided to accept nominations from the public. He clarified members were still welcome to nominate properties.

B. Façade Review

- Mr. Magnin confirmed the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) Incentive Program remained unfunded.

C. Property Maintenance Codes

- Mr. Magnin confirmed there were no updates on this item. He clarified Codes were in place to address the bulk of concerns relative to vacant, commercial properties.
- Mr. LaFleur stated he believed the most glaring violations had been addressed.
- Consensus of the Committee was to remove this item from future agendas.

D. Committee Projects

Note: Item 1.a and 1.b were heard following Approval of Minutes.

1. City Branding

a. "City of Hibiscus"

b. Wayfinding

- Mr. Magnin announced the Committee had discussed making an effort toward coordinating City branding efforts. He drew members' attention to a March 1, 2000 Resolution of the City designating Punta Gorda as the "City of Hibiscus," adding the Wayfinding System utilized the hibiscus in its signage.
- Mr. Rexroad stated Team Punta Gorda (TPG) and the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce (PGCC) were asked to attend this meeting to present their branding efforts and/or their position on branding. He commented there seemed to be a fair number of people who desired the hibiscus to continue to be used as the City's image.
- Ms. Becky Bovell, Charlotte Harbor Visitor and Convention Bureau (CHVCB) Director, stated branding was a critical issue for any City, adding there were several views as to what branding entailed; however, branding was most definitely a process requiring significant thought, a process involving focus groups and finding out what locals, visitors and business people thought of the City. She noted visitor traffic could be generated by creating a new visitor experience, adding the expectation of that experience is what was referred to as branding. She explained if branding was executed properly, significant visitor traffic could be encouraged and have a powerful economic impact. She recalled the former Enterprise Punta Group (EPG) vigorously pursued branding through the efforts of a nationally known consultant; however, circumstances prevented same from moving forward. She acknowledged the severe budget problems faced by the City; however, she suggested this could not be viewed lightly. She asserted if a branding effort was not undertaken by a professional organization, there was a risk of developing a slogan or "tag line." She pointed out the CHVCB expended hundreds of thousands of dollars creating its brand, "Charlotte

Harbor and the Gulf Islands,” which conveyed the area’s essence. She noted the CHVCB also had an advertising slogan, “Take Advantage of our Good Nature,” which may change from time to time. She opined the “City of Hibiscus” did not convey the essence of a destination in terms of what experiences could be found in Punta Gorda. She urged the Committee to strongly consider her comments and give serious consideration to engaging a professional organization in their branding efforts.

- Mr. Rexroad agreed the Committee did not wish to make any quick decisions, thus the reason for inviting participants to this meeting.
- Ms. Dawn MacGibbon expressed respect with regard to Ms. Bovell’s comments, acknowledging the difference between a brand and a slogan. She commented on a May 2009 Wall Street Journal article on branding in general and on Providence, Rhode Island’s branding in particular, stating Providence’s brand was changed from “Renaissance City” to the “Big P” at a cost of \$100,000. She mentioned there was much difference of opinion as to whether that money was well spent, especially in light of these difficult economic times. She stated there was also concern relative to going outside of the area to find someone to “tell you who you are.” She described another problem wherein the same consultant developed the same brand for two different communities, adding that situation had occurred more than once. She asserted Punta Gorda was officially named the “City of Hibiscus” in 1926; however, she had not been able to find the resolution designating same. She stated Punta Gorda reaffirmed that designation in 2000, adding in the 1940s and 1950s, Mr. Harry Goulding, who resided on Retta Esplanade, hybridized hibiscus and became the premier hybridizer of hibiscus in the world. She contended the hibiscus was not just a nice slogan and/or a pretty flower but rather represented the history of Punta Gorda. She stated she believed the hibiscus could be used as a brand which informed visitors of Punta Gorda’s beauty, its deep past, its history and its roots. She reiterated the hibiscus had been incorporated into the Wayfinding System at a fair amount of expense. She then stated Main Street Punta Gorda (MSPG) was a historic preservation program. She advised Main Street at the State level was an integral part of the State’s historic preservation program, adding the State program and national model on which same was based were applicable only to communities with historic resources sufficient to create a well defined sense of place and a tangible link with the past. She continued the Main Street revitalization process was one of rediscovery rather than recreation, stating the program did not deal in marketing themes other than of honest acknowledgement of a community’s heritage and did not engage in recreating or fabricating traditional commercial centers as such recreation was not historic preservation. She thanked the Committee for their time.

- Mr. John Wright, PGCC Director, announced the PGCC had inherited the branding issue from EPG, stating this was a \$65,000 project if a decision was made to proceed as originally recommended. He advised 30 to 35 written requests for financial support had been issued, with 1 response to date. He noted the PGCC business development sub-committee was desirous of promoting the City externally to bring business to Punta Gorda. He clarified the PGCC fully supported the “City of Hibiscus” as a community, adding the objective of EPG’s consultant, North Star, was to attract business. He stated the PGCC continued to wrestle with whether expending \$65,000 would achieve that goal. He explained it was difficult, especially during these troublesome economic times, to realize the possibility of raising \$65,000 and whether or not same was a good investment to economically drive the business community. He pointed out whatever branding had been done regionally did not seem to have proven beneficial. He confirmed the PGCC wished to remain involved in this process; however, they did not feel the time was right.
- Mr. Magnin asked how the community could ensure this process did not stall.
- Mr. Wright replied due diligence had already been conducted. He opined North Star was the best choice; however, funds were simply not available.
- Mr. LaFleur expressed skepticism on the value of branding in general. He stated the City of Hibiscus did not need to be a brand but rather perhaps a symbol, commenting favorably on the aesthetic appearance of a hibiscus. He questioned the wisdom of retaining an outside firm to establish a brand, adding he would not have a problem with referring to Punta Gorda as the City of Hibiscus.
- Mr. Magnin stated he felt a brand gave visitors an impression of a certain area. He clarified he had no problem with maintaining the “City of Hibiscus.”
- Mr. Roger Peterson, TPG President, suggested the community must first ask itself why they wished to undergo a branding process, adding Punta Gorda must then determine its identity. He agreed a consultant was necessary, recommending the City seek input from previously branded cities. He then commented on the use of branding in the corporate world, providing a detailed review of same.
- Mr. Magnin pointed out TPG went out into the community when they first formed following Hurricane Charley in August 2004 to determine what its residents desired. He opined that same process could be utilized again.
- Ms. Phelen commented she had conducted internet research on branding, stating she believed same must be pursued professionally. She continue she also felt resident input must be sought.

- Ms. Bovell cautioned against seeking input from the community for branding ideas, citing several examples of problems associated with same in the naming of the Charlotte Harbor Event and Conference Center.
- Mr. Magnin acknowledged same; however, he opined community input should be sought.
- Vice Mayor Harvey Goldberg stated MSPG recognized the eventual need for possible branding of Punta Gorda, adding their focus was the Main Street district. He noted if MSPG pursued a branding initiative, it would be for that district only as opposed to the entire City. He explained any branding, municipal or corporate, was a rigorous process and discipline which must permeate every aspect of a community or business, i.e., letterhead, signposts or outwardly disseminated information, thus the reason why a professional company was utilized. He agreed the hibiscus was a symbol; however, "Punta Gorda" was a brand in and of itself as evidenced by comments from impressions of visitors, albeit each was evidence of their own personal experience.
- Mr. Magnin asked if members wished to move forward and investigate branding further.
- Consensus of the Committee was agreement with same.
- Mr. Rexroad stated he wished to continue to meet with various organizations interested in branding, adding perhaps this was the time to re-implement fund raising efforts.
- Mr. Magnin expressed appreciation to those in attendance for their participation.

Note: Item 2 was heard following Item C.

2. Pedestrian Friendly Downtown

- Mr. LaFleur announced he recently attended a meeting with DeSoto County and a pedestrian friendly consultant, adding DeSoto County's concerns were similar to those of Punta Gorda such as increased walk light timing, more appropriately placed and delineated crosswalks and use of cones and signage, for example. He commented much effort was related to tree planting, shaded areas, etc. He acknowledged pedestrian friendliness had been incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan; however, he opined no action had been taken as a result of same since its adoption. He pointed out Punta Gorda/Charlotte County's population was one of the oldest in the nation. He expressed frustration with regard to the amount of red tape required to simply increase walk time from 15 to 25 seconds. He further stated nothing had been done to reinstall the walk light at the corner of East Marion Avenue and U.S. 41 North, asking why a crosswalk could not be installed simply by painting a contrasting color to give the appearance of same.

- Mr. Mitchell Austin, Urban Design Planner, responded he would contact the Public Works Department again to have the signal timing verified for all of Punta Gorda's signalized crosswalks. He clarified the City did not actually control those traffic signals but rather the service work for same was contracted with Charlotte County. He acknowledged capital improvement projects (CIPs), including pedestrian and bicycle friendly projects, took time to develop into work programs.
 - Mr. Magnin asked if statistics were available on incidents and/or accidents at the various intersections in the City.
 - Mr. Austin replied he believed the Police Department or Charlotte County Sheriff's Office (CCSO) would have that information.
 - Mr. LaFleur mentioned businesses on the east side of U.S. 17 suffered due to the difficulty in crossing same.
 - Vice Mayor Goldberg suggested the Committee's concerns and recommendations should be documented and provided to the City Manager in a form other than only in their minutes.
 - Mr. LaFleur confirmed he would follow through with same.
 - Mr. Magnin agreed; however, he expressed hope the City Manager reviewed the Committee's minutes.
 - Ms. Lisby suggested members document their observations when traveling throughout the City, particularly in areas such as the Charlotte State Bank location and between the City Marketplace property and Dean's South of the Border restaurant. She asserted those two areas in particular were waiting for fatalities.
 - Ms. Phelen commented on the walkway being installed on the east side of U.S. 41 in the area of Burnt Store Isles (BSI), asking if consideration had been given to install a crosswalk across U.S. 41 from Monaco Drive or Madrid Boulevard.
 - Mr. Austin replied crosswalk signalization was part of the design plan for that project.
 - Vice Mayor Goldberg added that crosswalk would be timed where in the count-down time would be depicted in seconds.
 - Mr. Magnin mentioned a crosswalk in the area of the Ringling Brothers of Art Museum in Sarasota utilized ground lights which lit up when the traffic light was red.
3. Brick Street Maintenance
- Mr. Magnin acknowledged there had been little movement on the brick street project; however, he opined this should remain on the agenda in the event funds became available. He clarified existing brick streets were not being maintained but rather two new brick streets were being laid. He commented on the speed during which new brick was being laid on Marion Avenue.

- Mr. Austin agreed, stating the grant funding provided for same was contingent upon completion by a specific time.
- Vice Mayor Goldberg commented on the additional funds available through that grant and the issue of pedestrian friendliness, stating tree grates would be installed around the new trees to include “up-lighting” within same, thus providing more lighting for pedestrians.
- Ms. Phelen recalled that project had been on the Beautification Committee’s agenda for a very long time, commenting favorably this was finally moving forward.

4. Business Incubator

- Mr. Rexroad reminded members of the grand opening of the Four Points Sheraton Hotel this date.

Note: Mr. Rexroad left the meeting at 10:35 a.m.

5. Blight of County Located Residential Property

- Mr. Magnin displayed before and after photographs of the two mobile home properties which prompted this agenda item, providing a detailed review of the extensive discussion of same at Committee meetings over the past year. He advised the accessory structures had finally been removed; however, the question of the agency which had jurisdiction over situations involving mobile homes remained unclear. He explained Mr. Randy Cole, Building Official, indicated the blight conditions on the outside of the home would be addressed under the property maintenance code, while permitted repairs to the structure itself, were governed by the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) as these units were built to Department of Housing & Urban Development’s (HUD’s) specifications as opposed to the Florida Building Code. He continued property maintenance issues would be brought before the Code Enforcement Board if voluntary attempts to bring the property into compliance were unsuccessful. He concluded he would continue to follow up with the State.

6. Downtown Tax Inequities

- Mr. LaFleur reminded members Mr. Frank Desguin, Property Appraiser, indicated he was not interested in redrawing lines in the downtown area; however, he was amenable to more discussion.

7. Wi-Fi

- Mr. Magnin reminded members of the presentation made at their previous meeting, stating an informal meeting had since been held with Mr. Wright, Ms. Linda Dobson of MSPG, Vice Mayor Goldberg, Mayor Friedman and Mr. Carlton Hughes of Matthews Construction. He explained Mr. Wright, Ms. Dobson and Mr. Hughes compiled a list of business owners in the community to whom they would speak to determine their

interest in a Wi-Fi program; however, the business community's buy-in and support were crucial.

- Mr. Edgar Parrah, PGCC's business development sub-committee Chairman, announced they had surveyed the community and learned there was very little acceptance relative to Wi-Fi as it was felt technology would exceed any product once installed. He reported area banks had reported they had no use for Wi-Fi.
- Mr. Magnin pointed out the issue of outdated technology was the same as that relative to home computers where in some became "outdated" almost immediately.
- Mr. Parrah countered the availability of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) and Blackberry's essentially negated the need for Wi-Fi.
- Mr. Magnin expressed dismay at utilizing such rationale in that technology would always be improving.
- Mr. Parrah reiterated hand held devices would continue to become more available, thus negating the need for Wi-Fi.
- Mr. Magnin pointed out the financial advantage to a business owner if Wi-Fi became available in that they would no longer need to pay for their monthly internet service.
- Discussion ensued with regard to the benefits of Wi-Fi.

8. Waterfront Revitalization

- Ms. Phelen announced the Best Western project continued to move forward, stating a 62 slip marina was proposed. She advised Mr. John Shattuck, Waterfront Development Advisory Committee (WDAC) member, made a presentation to City Council proposing a sailing center at Shreve Park. She noted Mr. Shattuck had been directed to work with staff on development of a business plan.

NEW BUSINESS

A. New Project Suggestions

- No discussion.

B. Fiscal Year (FY) 2010 Strategic Plan Discussion

- Mr. Magnin announced Mayor Larry Friedman had requested input from various stakeholders, including the City's advisory boards/committees, noting a copy of the Strategic Plan was provided in the Committee's agenda material. He explained members could submit suggestions either individually, as a committee or both.
- Mr. LaFleur clarified he must have Comcast Cable to be able to view televised City Council meetings.
- Ms. Phelen pointed out meeting videos were available through the internet.
- Mr. Magnin commented favorably on the format of the Strategic Plan.

STAFF COMMENTS

- A. CRA Status Report
- Mr. Austin announced the parking garage was nearing completion, adding playground equipment near the interactive fountain was fully installed with the exception of landscaping and a shade structure.
 - Mr. Magnin commented favorably on the aesthetic appearance of the parking garage.
 - Ms. Phelen questioned the funding source of the recent brick placement on Marion Avenue.
 - Mr. Austin replied primarily grant funding, with a very small portion paid by the City.
 - Vice Mayor Goldberg noted the parking garage had been officially christened “Herald Court Centre.” He announced the City was entertaining two proposals for retail businesses in the parking garage, adding a third letter of interest had been submitted by a commercial business for the retail portion of the structure. He commended Mr. Terry Yonker of Thomas Ryan & Associates for their marketing efforts.
 - Mr. LaFleur confirmed Herald Court would remain a two-way street.
- B. City of Punta Gorda Parks & Recreation Master Plan
- Mr. Austin announced three sections of the Master Plan were complete, reminding members the Master Plan was available on the City’s web site. He urged continued input and comments, stating he believed the draft of the Master Plan’s implementation was anticipated to be available shortly.

OTHER BUSINESS

- A. New Ideas
- No discussion.

MEMBER COMMENTS

- Ms. Phelen commented favorably on this meeting, particularly on the discussion relative to branding.
- Ms. Lisby asked if timelines should be set with regard to the next joint meeting regarding branding.
- Mr. Magnin replied he believed Mr. Rexroad had accepted the responsibility for coordinating same.
- Ms. Lisby then commented the off-season, i.e., summer, may not be the right time to approach businesses on Wi-Fi. She suggested a professional presentation may be more well received.
- Mr. Magnin agreed a good understanding of the Wi-Fi program and its potential benefits to the community were critical.

ADJOURNMENT

- Meeting Adjourned: 11:08 a.m.

John Magnin, Chairman

Mary Kelly, Recording Secretary