

# **Observer Reports**

**April May 2025 Voter**

## **Ormond Beach Commission**

**Submitted by Susan Bayley**

### **December 19, 2024**

No meeting, but there was a swearing in of two new members to the Commission: Jason Leslie, mayor, and Kristen Deaton, zone three.

### **December 3, 2024**

This was the first meeting that Mayor Leslie ran, so it wasn't surprising that he was corrected a few times on how to handle procedures. During resident comments, one resident complained about non-governmental organizations in Ormond Beach, such as Marxists and socialists, complaining that there is no nativity scene at city hall. Later Shanahan reported that there is a nativity scene outside Salty Church as well as a minora. Commissioners decided to allow a tattoo parlor at Destination Daytona but not elsewhere in the city. The county allows these parlors throughout the county. A new hotel on A1A will have a new beach access with sidewalks that will be maintained by the county. Flooding and impacts on wetlands were often mentioned, particularly for the new development Ormond Crossing

### **January 7, 2025**

In the OB business is on the calendar year, there were 34 items on the consent agenda to set up volunteer boards and services for the year ahead. However, a few items were pulled from this agenda, one of which was the re-naming of a street. The county wants Hammond St. to be Baltic Avenue because there are many Hammond Streets in the county. Commissioners pushed this item back to the county because there is only one Hammond St. in OB. There was a lot of discussion about a proposed new coffee shop (Ellianos, a franchise) and its parking at the Winn Dixie center on west Granada. The ordinance passed on the first reading.

### **February 4, 2025**

The former commissioner, and now member of the Volusia County Council, praised commissioners for deciding not have water fluoridated in the city, saying that he had wanted such to happen years ago when he was on the commission. There were no resolutions or comments about this matter at the meeting. Commissioners appreciated a resident who brought up the issue of homeowners' responsibility for taking care of old trees

and when they should be cut down. In that the city calls itself a “city of trees,” permits are needed to cut down old trees. City attorney Hayes will look into this matter.

### **February 18, 2025**

Comments by commissioners at the end of a meeting can sometimes offer insights into how commissioners view their responsibilities. This meeting was actually rather “explosive” when Tolland read aloud a long, prepared statement addressed to newly elected Mayor Jason Leslie, who is in his first year on the commission and doesn’t have much institutional knowledge. She called immediate attention to their oath of office: integrity, professionalism and collaboration. She said that commissioners are not to act independently, noting that in their orientation they were also told about media relations. It appears that the OB Observer and News 6 had reported inaccurate information that could damage the reputation of the commission and staff. Also, commissioners are not to use their business at public forums. Later Sargent said that “someone on the dais tried to get the city manager fired.”

Sargent also has doubts about the city continuing its funding of the First Step shelter that the city was instrumental in supporting when it was first being planned more than 10 years ago. He also wants to address paper straws, noting president Trump’s wish to end this practice.

### **March 4, 2025**

The meeting began with seven residents castigating commissioners Tolland, Sargent and Deaton for their criticisms of newly elected mayor, Jason Leslie. A former Holly Hill commissioner criticized the “squabbling” among commissioners. At the end of the meeting Tolland took offense when a resident called her being a communist.

All commissioners, except Briley who was absent, passed an ordinance amending its code so that fluoridation is removed from the city’s water. They noted that Ladapo, state public health official, encouraged this decision. Commissioners reported that residents and some city dentists support this decision. Two commissioners mentioned that some dentists reported that fluoridation had been “pushed” on them in dental school. They said, anyway, it might not have been necessary because DeSantis seems to be asking the state to disband fluoridation.

Mayor Leslie suggested that the current threshold of \$25,000 for requiring commissioner approval of an expense be increased because this threshold has not been changed for the past 30 years. Commissioners agreed that it should be raised, to be addressed at a forthcoming meeting.

# **Ponce Inlet Town Council**

**Submitted by Amy Legare**

## **February 20, 2025**

Several proclamations were made: World Encephalitis Awareness Day is February 22, Black History Month is February, Flood Awareness Week is March 3-9, Historic Racing Legends Day is February 20, Jim Hinson (lifetime resident, active member of Lions Club and Veterans group) Day is February 20.

The Council is considering partnering with ERAU on a “living seawall” pilot project along the ocean boundary of Ponce Preserve. If grant funding is received by ERAU from the National Science Foundation this pilot project will move forward. If the pilot project is successful the technology will be repeated at other locations.

The mayor and town attorney spoke against the State’s sovereign immunity bill that was recently passed and proposed reduction/elimination of property taxes bill. Both bills are very detrimental to small communities like Ponce Inlet.

The mayor reiterated the town’s position against bear hunting, stressing better community education and waste management practices as well as advocating for non-violent wildlife management practices.

# **Orange City**

**Submitted by Rhiannon Riegel**

## **January 28, 2025**

Curb Appeal and Good Citizenship awards were presented.

City Manager Dale Arrington presented the State of the City address to the council. This included details on the city’s Strategic Action Plan, a recap of all the successes and challenges from 2024, updates on each department resources, needs, and budget, and grants received or applied for.

The Consent Agenda included 8 items. Notable were the approval of the permission granted for special construction work, the contracts and work orders approved, and the approval of the amendment to a work order to ensure FEMA funding assistance, as all were related to repairing damage that occurred during Hurricane Milton.

Ordinance No. 686 regarding the amendment to the Parks and Recreation Use Regulations was passed after the council heard citizen input.

## **February 25, 2025**

This meeting was substantially shorter than most, with few citizen comments, no first readings, no second readings, no resolutions.

Volusia County Summer Camp will be permitted to use Valentine Park for their program, which will serve 60 children each week of summer break.

The City Manager's report included information about the upcoming Stormwater Workshop and Strategic Planning. When asked for an update on the repairs to damaged roads from Hurricane Milton last October, we learned that there are special guidelines which must be followed for FEMA to reimburse the city for the repairs, which are expected to total almost \$3 million. After the design and bidding processes, the work should begin by late Spring.

Graves Avenue is prone to flooding, and a grant was received from the County for a study to determine the source of the flooding. A \$3.5 million federal grant to elevate the road was denied twice, but the City appealed twice and is in the process of reapplying. There is also work beginning to build a dam-like structure for \$200,000 in the meantime.

Council & Mayor's comments included a suggestion from Lisa Richardson to use a billboard or a highly visible sign to inform residents of the availability of the OCConnect app, hoping that more people will put it to use. Mayor Marks brought up the Historical Preservation Board, as she had received comments from citizens regarding requests which were properly made to the Historical Preservation Board but never acted upon. If quorum is not reached at the 3/6/25 special meeting of the Historical Preservation Board, then the council will take action on the pending requests at the 3/11/25 meeting.

## **Deland City Council**

### **Mara Whitridge reporting**

The council decided to join the class action legislation for PTSA along with Deltona.

Also heard that old cleaners downtown next to the Axe throwing place will be a marijuana store possibly canopy which owns a processing plant in the DeLand.

## **South Daytona**

### **Olga Hernandez reporting**

South Daytona's motto is "Small city... Big possibilities".

The city has a population of about 13,000 residents. It only encompasses 4 square miles but has several parks, amenities and activities for citizens.

It has been hard hit by several recent hurricanes in the last few years which has brought flooding damage. The council has worked hard to be debt free and attend to the issue by cleaning up the city and dredging the ponds, canals and replacing pipes so the water has a place to go. They have installed or replaced lift stations to deal with flooding. They are bound by the Halifax River, Daytona Beach to the North, Port Orange to the south and Nova Road to the west.

The council is currently worried about Florida proposed legislation that could take away their ability to control development within their boundaries.

## **School Board of Volusia County, Florida**

**Ann Harrell, Reporting**

### **March, 2025**

The Volusia County School Board met in regular session on March 11, 2025, with Chairman Haynes presiding. All Board members in attendance

#### **Highlights:**

- Comments on the ½ cent sales tax project included a need to rebuild the relationship within the volunteer oversight committee that oversees the spending of this tax initiative which is scheduled to end December 2031 (unless it is extended by voters). New volunteer committee members will be added. The meetings are open to the public.
- Update from previous news: The ½ cent sales tax may only be used for capital expenses, such as construction, reconstruction, improvement of school buildings, retrofitting and providing for new technology, upgrading HVAC systems, and upgrading surveillance systems and other security and communication enhancements. It is not used for salaries, books, materials, or general operating expenses.
- One board member's concern addressed the Turie T. Small Elementary School model. The space for the lunchroom is very limited. The District will review the space situation at Turie T. and make recommendations.
- Stetson University is offering a program for ESE certification. To help address the ESE teacher shortage, Stetson is starting an ESE Cohort group in May for anyone interested in earning an ESE degree. Scholarships are available.
- A special announcement to all Board members to keep tabs on the House and Senate bills impacting education introduced in Tallahassee this 2025 Legislative session. A delegation consisting of Board members and other staff will journey to Tallahassee next week to attend the Florida Legislature sessions, engage with the representatives, and advocate for our schools.
- Regular school board meetings are open to the public and generally take place on the second and fourth Tuesdays of the month at 4:30 p.m.

- The next Regular meeting is March 25, 2025, at 4:30 p.m. Administration Complex, 200 N. Clara Ave., Deland, FL 32720, phone: 386-734-7190.
- **DID YOU KNOW? Ice coffee is available at the Middle and High Schools in Volusia County School Way Café.**