

**TOWN OF LAUDERDALE-BY-THE-SEA  
TOWN COMMISSION  
WORKSHOP MINUTES  
Jarvis Hall  
4505 Ocean Drive  
Tuesday, June 29, 2021  
5:00 PM**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Chris Vincent called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. Also, present were Vice Mayor Alfred “Buz” Oldaker, Commissioner Edmund Malkoon, Commissioner Elliot Sokolow, Commissioner Randy Strauss, Interim Town Manager Linda Connors, Assistant to the Town Manager Neysa Herrera, Town Attorney Susan Trevarthen, Director of Finance and Budget Lucila Lang, Town Engineer Jay Flynn, and Public Information Officer/IT Administrator Steve d’Oliveira, Town Clerk Tedra Allen.

**2. PUBLIC COMMENT – (Comments regarding the Proposed Reconfiguration of the Downtown Parking Area and Visitor Center will be accepted)**

Howard Goldberg, Vice Chair of the Lauderdale-By-The-Sea Chamber of Commerce, characterized the Town’s Visitor Center as a focal point of the community. Eva Marissa, Chair of the Chamber of Commerce, noted that the Chamber’s membership includes over 133 community businesses. She emphasized the importance of the Town’s businesses as a symbol of its uniqueness and noted the unprecedented difficulty and uncertainty of the current pandemic era.

Mark Stern, General Counsel to the Chamber of Commerce, noted that the property on which the Visitor Center lies was deeded to the Town by the community’s developers as a civic center. The Chamber operates this facility in partnership with the Town, with the Center’s operational costs subsidized by both the Chamber and the Town for at least seven years. Their intent is to establish an agreement in which the Chamber does not have to constantly come back to the Town and ask for funding.

The Chamber currently has a contract with the Town for the operation of the Visitor Center, which outlines \$26,700 in annual compensation. This amount has remained consistent for the last 10 years, although operations have become more expensive during that time. Mr. Stern noted that the contract is set to expire in September 2021.

Ms. Marissa advised that the Chamber has 152 members at present who come from Lauderdale-By-The-Sea as well as surrounding communities. They have 66 business

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members from the Town and seek to retain a small and unique profile, unlike the Chambers of nearby larger cities.

For 62 years, the Chamber has been headquartered at 4201 Ocean Boulevard, and has partnered with the Town for nearly 26 years to operate the Welcome/Visitor Center. The building was constructed by the Town's business owners, funded by the Woman's Club, given to the Town for civic use in 1954, and dedicated to the Chamber of Commerce in 1968.

In 1995, the Chamber opened the Welcome Center and funded its renovation. They funded a second soft renovation in 2007, with the Town providing facilities consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 2020 and 2021. The Chamber wishes to retain its small size and uniqueness.

The strength of the Center's success is its volunteer operation by the Chamber, which provides a public-private partnership with a common agenda, shared goals, and a successful model. The Town, Center, and Chamber are partners with the Greater Fort Lauderdale Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). The Town receives a quarterly report from the Chamber of Commerce regarding its activities and expenditures.

Mr. Stern stated that the Chamber hopes to continue managing and staffing the Visitor Center as it has done for the last several years. He suggested that a portion of the Town's parking revenue or its business tax receipts could be allocated to the Center. The Chamber continues to seek additional sources of capital, so they do not have to rely heavily on the Town for funding. While they once received \$20,000 per year from the CVB, these funds were not available during the pandemic.

Ms. Marchetti added that the Town maintains the Center, including utilities and grounds. This would not change with an updated plan between the Town and the Chamber, as the Town owns the property. She provided the Commissioners with a memo showing these figures.

Ms. Marchetti noted that the Center has one full-time and one part-time employee at present. Should the Town assume operation of the Welcome Center, they would be responsible for any benefits, pensions, or other ancillary expenses. Because the Chamber is a not-for-profit entity, their liability insurance and workmen's compensation are bundled, with a share going to the Center and a share to the Chamber for Board oversight and liability.

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The Chamber requests increased funding from the Town, including multi-year payment of a 3% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for 10 years. The Town will continue to maintain the property. The Chamber seeks to work with the Town to create a strategic plan for the next three years that will allow them to be brought up to speed with the Town's marketing approach.

At this time Mayor Vincent opened public comment.

Barbara Cole, resident, stated that she felt there is a lack of understanding among residents regarding what the Chamber and Visitor Center are expected to accomplish. She recalled that in the past, the Town received grants to fund the operation of the Visitor Center. She felt there were aspects of all three options for the Center's operation that would benefit the Town.

Ellen Zavell, president of the Lodging Association, observed that returning visitors to the Town's hotels, restaurants, and other businesses appreciate the consistency of the Town's small-town atmosphere. She emphasized the importance of this customer loyalty and repeat business.

Stuart Dodd, resident, noted that during his tenure on the Town Commission, the Chamber received free use of the Visitor Center without having to contribute to its overhead or maintenance, and could operate the Chamber from other premises. He felt the Town's Marketing Department should take over operation of the Visitor Center using Town Staff for one to two years.

Philip Lomenzo, member of the Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors, advised that marketing and operation of the Visitor Center are two different tasks with separate responsibilities. He felt if the Town assumes control of the Center and incurs greater costs, this would be problematic to both the Town and the Chamber. He suggested that the agreement be modified to benefit both the Chamber and the Town.

Howard Goldberg, Vice Chair of the Chamber of Commerce, asserted that the Chamber deserves the opportunity to continue its relationship with the Town into the future, and pointed out that the Center's volunteers continue to do a good job for both entities.

Teresa Mangini, resident, stated that the Welcome Center demonstrates the Town's charm and the agreement between the Town and the Chamber represents a "win/win." She felt the Town should support the Chamber by giving them the funding they need to continue to support businesses.

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Ron Piersante, resident, advised that he has volunteered at the Visitor Center for 24 years. He noted that Chamber employees and volunteers provide information to residents and visitors and recommend both member and non-member businesses alike. He felt the Chamber should continue to operate this facility and was not certain that Town Staff could improve its operations or save a significant amount of money.

The following comment was sent via email:

- Ruth Stilwell, resident, encouraged the Commission to continue funding the Chamber's operation of the Welcome Center.

With no other individuals wishing to speak at this time, Mayor Vincent closed public comment.

### **3. DISCUSSION ITEM**

#### **FY22 Funding Request for the Lauderdale-By-The-Sea Visitor Center**

Commissioner Malkoon commented that he was aware of the Visitor Center's history in the Town and emphasized that there are areas of separation between the Chamber and the Center, including finances. He stated that any change to the operation of the Center would not mean the Chamber cannot continue to use the building, or that the value of the Chamber and its work is not clearly understood. He added that he would like to review the numbers provided in relation to the different options discussed, including the cost of Staff time.

Commissioner Sokolow noted inconsistencies in the figures provided in relation to the options. He felt the major reason for today's discussion is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Town businesses and did not feel the Town's relationship with the Chamber should be changed, as it is less expensive to have the Chamber continue to operate the Center. He was in favor of Option 1 with greater discussion of this option's real costs.

Commissioner Strauss observed that as a resident of the south end of Town, his top priority upon joining the Commission was to address the former Holiday Inn property, which had been an eyesore. Since improvements have been made to that property, the first building visitors to the Town see from the south end is the Visitor Center. He emphasized the importance as well as the charm of this building.

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Commissioner Strauss continued that he felt there would be an increase in available CVB funding for the Visitor Center in the future and suggested that the Chamber consider fundraising events in partnership with the Town. He was in favor of a hybrid program, such as Option 2, with greater Town involvement while the Chamber continues to operate the Center. He also did not oppose a greater contribution from the Town to the Center to bring its operations to a higher level.

Vice Mayor Oldaker felt he would need to be convinced to select either Option 1 or Option 2, as he was not comfortable with the numbers or the level of detail presented; however, he pointed out that the funds requested by the Chamber could easily be appropriated. He did not feel that having Staff assume some of the Visitor Center's functions would be a large burden for them.

Vice Mayor Oldaker emphasized, however, that the Town needs to extend its contract with the Chamber beyond July 2, 2021, which is the current expiration date. This would allow for further consideration of the proposed options. He concluded that he had some level of preference for Option 2, as he felt there was some duplication of funds and responsibilities between the Town and the Chamber.

Mayor Vincent noted that the issue at hand is not one of funding the Chamber of Commerce, but more accurately a reimbursement of additional Chamber funds to cover the direct costs of operating the Visitor Center. He asked if there has even been an instance in which the Chamber has reimbursed the Town for any funds in excess of costs incurred by the Center. It was confirmed that this has never happened.

Mayor Vincent observed that the Chamber had signed its contract with the Town with the understanding that there would be a deficit in operating the Center without Town dollars. In return, the Chamber's operation of the Center would increase business and membership for the Chamber. He continued that at present, there is not a true partnership between the Town's Marketing Department and the Chamber, and the two entities are trying to build this partnership.

Mayor Vincent also noted that the agreement between the Town and the Chamber is not a contractual obligation that entitles the Chamber to a COLA increase, but an agreement that the Chamber would operate the Center and be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses in doing so. He hoped that the Town would continue to fund the Visitor Center and Chamber so there is no deficit. He also felt there should be a mutual understanding of collective goals, particularly with respect to marketing.

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Mayor Vincent pointed out that the current location of the Chamber at the Visitor Center is a win/win agreement for both parties. Ms. Marchetti explained that part of the burden placed on the former Chamber official was a lack of receptivity from the Town when the Chamber requested additional funds. This had contributed to the decision to separate the Chamber and the Town.

Ms. Marchetti continued that the Chamber would welcome the opportunity to operate the Center in a better way. It costs approximately \$70,000 to operate the Center alone. There is space used by the Chamber at the Center for its board meetings, as well as some Chamber responsibilities overseen by the full-time employee. These are kept separate from the Center's budget.

Commissioner Sokolow commented that he saw no benefit to the Town providing additional part-time positions in this manner and pointed out that the Town's costs would increase with any option other than Option 1. Mayor Vincent reiterated that there should be some mutual consent on the operation of the Center by the Town and the Chamber, as both entities have an interest in the facility.

Mayor Vincent stated that Town Staff would reach out to the Chamber's Board of Directors as well as the Town's business community for further discussion of this issue and would address it again at a regular meeting in the future.

Mayor Vincent asked if the Commission may make a motion with respect to extension of the contract between the Town and the Chamber during a workshop. Town Attorney Susan Trevarthen advised that this will depend upon the Chamber's willingness to extend the agreement. There was consensus from the Chamber representatives present in favor of an extension of 30 days.

Ms. Marchetti recalled that several weeks ago, she made a presentation on behalf of the Downtown business district to request potential reconfiguration of the Downtown parking area in the post-COVID-19 era. The businesses requested a workshop with the Town in March 2021 to identify potential solutions that will provide customers with more outdoor space and dining.

Ms. Marchetti continued that there have been significant hardships experienced by Town businesses, which used their own funds to provide tables, chairs, umbrellas, and other amenities associated with outdoor seating. She emphasized that the businesses are grateful for the actions taken by the Commission to help them adapt during the pandemic. They are now asking for an extension to the current outdoor dining and

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sidewalk café configuration, as well as for assistance by an engineer and planner to review and consider proposals for this space.

At this time Mayor Vincent opened public comment.

Ellen Zavell, president of the Lodging Association, stated that visitors to the Town feel safe here with its many open-air options and lack of crowding or congestion. She noted that most hotel guests ask if the Town's restaurants provide outdoor seating.

Bill Ciani, resident, was not in favor of using the remaining spaces for outdoor dining by private restaurants. He also felt the pavilion should be restored to its previous use rather than providing seating that did not benefit all businesses.

Barbara Cole, resident, advised that she remains supportive of the continued use of outdoor space for dining to assist restaurants and other businesses.

Mark Falsetto, co-owner of Taco Craft restaurant, advised that the habits of dining consumers have changed, with more guests seeking outdoor space. He recommended extending the current configuration through the end of the year at a minimum.

Eva Marissa, Chair of the Chamber of Commerce, recalled that in May 2020, the Chamber, the Town, and the Lodging Association entered into a partnership to support Town businesses as they prepared to reopen. She requested that the Commission listen to these businesses when making their decision.

Stuart Dodd, resident, suggested that Aruba's restaurant be permitted to clean and maintain part of the pavilion in exchange for outdoor dining space there. He added that the current solution does not appear to adequately address businesses that do not benefit from the removal of parking spaces and recommended further consideration of a suitable charge for outdoor seating space to make up for the loss of parking revenue.

Scot Sasser, resident, pointed out that the pandemic has resulted in changes that are unlikely to be rolled back, and cited the desire for outdoor dining as one of these changes. He was in favor of expanding the outdoor seating area and suggested that the Town appoint a Staff member to work with the Interim Town Manager and Town businesses to resolve issues related to these changes, such as additional costs to make up for the loss of parking revenue.

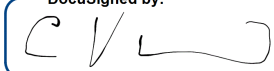
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Ann Marchetti, representing the Chamber of Commerce, reiterated the request made at the previous Commission workshop, which asked for at least a 90-day extension of sidewalk cafés and use of the Plaza. Businesses must adhere to existing Code and be willing to pay for uniform colors, tents, and umbrellas, and must be willing to lease parking spaces in the Plaza during the extension. The Town is asked to provide concepts and develop a plan, possibly using a portion of the \$1.8 million expected from the federal government for COVID-19 recovery. The businesses would like to see these concepts before the September 14, 2021 meeting, with possible renovations to begin in October.

It was noted that this issue will be discussed further under Item 17a at the regular Town Commission meeting. The Commission agreed to consider moving this Item to an earlier position on the regular Agenda.

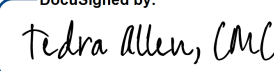
#### **4. ADJOURNMENT**

With no other business to come before the Commission at this time, the workshop was adjourned at 6:46 p.m.

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Mayor Chris Vincent

ATTEST:

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Town Clerk Tedra Allen

8/3/2021

Date