

**CITY OF GRIFFIN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP
ONE GRIFFIN CENTER, W. ELMER GEORGE MUNICIPAL HALL
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2015**

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Chairperson Doug Hollberg presided, calling the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Commissioners attending included: Ryan McLemore, Cora Flowers, Joanne Todd, Cynthia Reid-Ward, Rodney McCord and Dick Morrow.

Also present were City Attorney Andrew Whalen, III, and Teresa Watson to record minutes.

Discuss and consider the preliminary draft of the landscape plan, project description and location for the submittal of a Roadside Enhancement and Beautification Grant to Ga. DOT. Transportation Consulting Engineer B. J. Martin will address.

Mr. Martin advised that City Manager Kenny Smith had approached Paragon Consulting a few months ago regarding this gateway landscape improvement grant, and Mr. Martin provided a drawing for Commissioners to reference. This plan is for beautification of the City's gateway entrance that currently exists and is a reimbursable grant for \$50,000. GDOT will continue to maintain the area as it does now, provided the City does not enlarge the designated area. Should the City enlarge or change this gateway area, such as with this grant, it could become the responsibility of the City to maintain. The project location looked at is on the North Expressway corridor where the overpass is just west of UGA. It is not an appealing area at all and the City is looking at doing plantings on the sloped areas; this is the first focus of visitors entering the City at this gateway.

Mr. Whalen noted that GDOT will require the execution of a maintenance contract for the area. The design is for a simple and easily maintained area, and the timeline is to bring it back before the City since the deadline for the grant is November 16. It should be on the agenda for the City's November 10 meeting; this will be finalized for that packet but he wanted to bring it to the attention of the Board in order to make them aware of the plan and still keep to the timeline. The plantings should be self-sustaining and not require irrigation; the City, by receiving this grant money, may be responsible for maintenance. This is natural landscaping in this plan fed by rainwater, but it may occasionally require some pruning, as well as liter pickup. Outside of this grant, we may be able to work out with GDOT maintenance of unwanted weed and use of herbicides. We can identify the area that the City would like to landscape and maintain in order to keep it manicured.

Discuss a proposed housing program that offers homeownership options to City of Griffin residents. Toussaint Kirk, Director of Planning and Development, to address.

In 2010, Griffin obtained the Affordable Housing grant, and this program is an extension of that effort. We now are trying to add another layer to options offered to local homeowners.

The Housing Authority Chief Executive Officer, Bob Dull, explained to the Board that the Open House yesterday saw over 75 people in attendance in spite of inclement weather. Chairman Hollberg and the Board complimented his efforts at the Open House and for the Oaks at Park Pointe neighborhood project. The Housing Authority (HA) is stepping up and selling these last few houses and searching for other homes with the remaining resources.

We began this conversation about home ownership several years ago. The HA can no longer concentrate high poverty in certain areas of the City without adverse impact, without a negative outcome. The cycle of poverty is driven partially by housing. This program is an extension of the HA mission, and the HA is more than capable of administering this program. He attended a recent HUD conference which was very beneficial. At the conference was one of HUD's designated contractors for home ownership. With the home ownership program, the right policies and checks and balances are critical. Linda Brockway from HUD visited and now we have an outline for moving forward. They came out of this session with 100% confidence that the HA could adequately handle the program. The HA will bring Ms. Brockway on to build policies and procedures. She has already been successful in other areas, is familiar with NSP and its requirement criteria, and understands that some folks who want to qualify may not have high credit scores. She references a 2% or less default rate, so there is a way to make the program work. We lack a homeowner counseling component, but her program references what happens after the sale, i.e. managing mortgages, maintenance, etc. She will be here to help walk through the first ten home sales and provide home ownership counseling. Many banks won't finance notes

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for less than \$30,000 and the banks won't touch these type sales, but she is already working on financing mechanisms. We will deal with local banks in this process and utilize CRA credits for the homeowner. It is a key component for building wealth in the affordable income range. Tax digest enhancement, building wealth, eradicating poverty, and enhancing neighborhoods are all positive impacts. We do not see any major barriers, including neighborhood opposition. We want to brand this as a program specific to Griffin. We need to put signs in yards of homes we sell, and we need to celebrate the successes of these purchases. The celebration process, of course, would not be intrusive for the homeowner but rather is designed to highlight this program's successes. Sometimes the little things matter. HUD, who deals with FHA, looks at Griffin as a depressed market with not as much momentum as Henry County, for example, and they are excited about this program and will support it, along with DCA. The housing market is incredibly insecure right now and is part of the fear that is pervasive. Discussion followed and the Board thanked Mr. Dull and his staff for their efforts.

View demo of the new I-Cloud phone and online credit card system showing the new and added features of automatic credit card transactions. Electric Director Bill Bosch will address.

Laura Stewart advised that Invoice Cloud came about because after holidays, which are often handled with skeleton crews, customers really tax the Customer Service system. After a particularly trying Easter holiday, there was a perfect storm of events which made Customer Service operations very trying. Customers like being able to pay by phone, but even if paying over the phone previously, you had to physically talk with a phone representative who assists and passes it off to a cashier. When you are short-staffed it is challenging and often you are in place until 8:00 p.m. which really overloads the system. After this Easter holiday with lines out the door all day, the experience was very overwhelming and negative; they didn't finish until 8 p.m. and still had 78 voicemails which could not be returned. The next day they could not run a delinquency report or a cutoff report and had to call all those people back which backed up another day. She realized that the pay-over-the-phone option really needed to be automated, and our current system certainly was not that. IT has been wonderful and found Invoice Cloud for Customer Service which will integrate with Cogsdale. The web payment options have been wonderful with all kinds of options, but the phone payment option really needed updating. She wanted the IVR portion to be updated, so customers could actually pay their bill over the phone. This will effectively handle the technology and free up customer service representatives in the process. IT and Todd Pratt in particular have been critical, and Todd Pratt is present to provide an overview of Invoice Cloud.

Mr. Pratt presented slides detailing this direct integration with our existing customer web service and took it to a new generation of technology that would integrate with Cogsdale. He showed a list of features that would be added onto the customers' options. With the previous customer web service, there was a 3% fee assessed, but with Invoice Cloud, there is a flat fee of \$3.75 and a disclaimer does appear on the page that provides an option to terminate the option if the customer does not accept the fee. This is a pass-through fee assessed by Invoice Cloud and is not assessed by the City of Griffin. There are two prompts that accompany this payment by phone with IVR (interactive voice response). A customer still has to be certain to pay before the deadline time of day if their cutoff time for service is imminent. A customer could still be placed on the cutoff list if payment were made after 6 p.m. on the date due. Some discussion followed.

When the system is activated, there are measures that need to be taken to educate everyone. Policies and procedures will need to be updated. Of course, there will still be conversations to be had and processes to be put in place. The Board is ultimately in charge of protocols. Mr. Pratt showed Commissioners what the portal would look like and played the actual recording that customers will hear on access. Invoice Cloud allows also for partial payments but the customer service fee would be assessed for each transaction. Additionally, the bill must be paid in its entirety before the cutoff date, and the system electronically sends reminders which was not the case with paper billing. Salient points of this system include ease of use, fast and easy access, secure data, paperless billing and an eco-friendly aspect. The convenience fee for use will be per transaction. An end user for Invoice Cloud can set up an account or use the one-time pay option without having to sign up.

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Markus Schwab, Chief Financial Officer, addressed customer fees for use of the system. Finance can determine the budgetary impact and provide information over the next couple of months.

Brant Keller, Director of Public Works and Utilities, noted there would soon be a study beta test for water cutoffs electronically, which would eliminate having to roll a truck to accomplish this task. Extensive discussion followed regarding the customer service fee being separately assessed versus being incorporated into the rate structure.

Commissioner Todd exited the meeting at 9:52.

Discuss Ordinance amending the Unified Development Code of the City of Griffin, GA at Article 12, SIGNS, by repealing the current ordinance and adopting a comprehensive revision of sign regulations in lieu thereof. Second reading of this Ordinance Amendment is scheduled for October 27, 2015 at 6 p.m. City Attorney Drew Whalen will address.

City Attorney Drew Whalen addressed the Board, noting second reading of this Ordinance would be heard tonight. A couple of additional changes from first reading deals with home premise versus off premise. The Ordinance reads a freestanding sign on a commercial property is allowed with few limitations on premises. Billboards would be the only type commercial sign that could advertise off premises. Non-commercial messages would be allowed.

The other change was for improved residential properties, such as real estate signs, increasing 4 square feet to 6 square feet, with a cap of 30 square feet total per property. Staff is comfortable with the draft as it will be presented tonight. The one thing that came up was that we took out of the current Ordinance discretion to allow non-commercial sandwich-type boards. This would eliminate the boards we currently allow in the median downtown along Hill Street for truly non-profit groups such as Kiwanis, Boy Scouts, Dance Studio, etc. Perhaps we can allow this through a sign kiosk mechanism rather than allowing the sandwich boards. GDOT allows the blue sign boards along the interstate in this manner for commercial/institutional concerns. Wayfinding signs have now been utilized by the City, as well. Every type signage on City property will be eliminated with this Ordinance revision outside the kiosk option. Some of the non-profit signs could be placed on private property with permission of the property owner, of course.

Consider a motion to enter into Executive Session, pursuant to O.C.G.A. Sec. 50-14-2, for the purpose of meeting with the City Attorney under attorney-client privilege to discuss a potential lawsuit against the City. City Attorney Drew Whalen will brief the Commission in the executive session.

Motion/second to enter into Executive Session at 10:21 by Commissioners Morrow/McLemore carried 6-0.

Motion/second by Commissioners Morrow/McLemore to exit Executive Session at at 10:33 a.m. carried 6-0. Motion/second by Commissioners Morrow/Flowers to return to Open Meeting at 10:34 a.m. carried 6-0.

ADJOURN

Motion/second by Commissioners Morrow/Flowers to adjourn at 10:34 a.m. carried 6-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kenny L. Smith, City Manager/Secretary

Accepted:

Douglas S. Hollberg, Chairperson