

WINTER HAVEN

The Chain of Lakes City

ONE CITY - ONE VISION

Creating the Destination – Where people will come to live, work, play, learn and raise a family. THIS is the Chain of Lakes City!

Explore

Connect

Achieve

MAPPING OUT THE FUTURE

November 28, 2012

Public Meeting Comments



One City – One Vision
Mapping out the Future
November 28 Public Meeting Comments

Citizens and staff met Wednesday, November 28 at the Chain of Lakes Complex to discuss government, infrastructure, finance, quality of life, economic prosperity, education and civic engagement. Staff documented ideas and thoughts of those involved. Below are the comments provided by the public.

Civic Engagement

Facilitator: Communication/Marketing Division Director
Donna Sheehan

Typical Information Dissemination

- Organize afternoon tea type meetings at condos and over 55 communities.
- Send individual invitations.
- Reach out to news agencies beyond Polk County.
- Place Winter Haven information in business publications and magazines.
- Use social network to attract the young, and traditional media to attract the older population.

Events

- Organize and offer a City-wide Latin Festival.
- Hold a regular and informal sunset festival event on Lake Howard.
- Offer “theatre on the streets” event.
- Engage the public through events.

Out of the Box

- Seek out unusual ways to promote Winter Haven.
- More discussion regarding quality of life at City Commission meetings. Balance business with the human side of Winter Haven.
- Find Winter Haven’s club/interest niche. (i.e. birdwatchers at Circle B Ranch)
- Create the connection as to how decisions will personally affect each resident.
- Go to the people. (i.e. go to a swim meet and conduct a survey.)

- Engage civic clubs and organizations by offering them networking opportunities to learn of similar and diverse club needs.
- Require a representative of an agency receiving donations to participate in the City's Citizen's Academy.
- Formally welcome new college graduates home! (i.e. job fair with apartment opportunities, clubs, activities and event displays)

Economic Development/Prosperity

Facilitator: Community and Economic Development Director
David Dickey

Economic Development is more than adding businesses - it is also about concepts

- There are enough banks and gas stations in the City. This does not look good, especially in downtown.
- Need venues and businesses that compliment Legoland. These venues and businesses should appeal to children and families.
- Need a list of 10 things that give visitors a reason to turn left when leaving Legoland. Some examples are a museum of Winter Haven or a large children's bookstore.
- City's biggest strength is its lakes. There is a need to take advantage of this with lakes related businesses such as water ski businesses. Also, need more celebrations focused on the lakes.
- There needs to be more historic preservation initiatives.
- We need jobs
- Recreation based activities and attractors needed.
- More activities after work are needed- i.e. sidewalk cafés, arts, outside restaurants, and live entertainment.
- More downtown activities are needed.
- More downtown housing is desired.
- More things for the younger generation to do; more jobs are needed for older generations.
- We need to be picky on recruiting new businesses; we should not pursue jobs that are not worth it, but we

should focus on high quality employment opportunities.

- State government is not helping us.
- Need to attract more young professionals to the City.
- There should be a balance between jobs and quality of life.
- We need to educate citizens' mindset; welcome people coming here.
- The City needs to do a better job of marketing itself.
- Schools.
- We need to focus on retaining our children.
- Interested in more than jobs/money.
- More diversity of jobs/opportunities.
- Need to bring more arts into the community and allow them to stay here.
- Jobs are dependent upon place- quality of life.

Education

Facilitator: Assistant City Manager Deric Feacher

- Local college students working with City government staff on special projects and initiatives.
- Utilizing the College Fine Art Students to select sculptures for our sculpture program and allowing for their art work to be on display in city facilities.
- Public School Art Show in City Hall.
- Partner with the school system and Legoland on a youth Robotics competition.
- Encourage more technology use at the library beginning with the Elementary school students. (Having individuals use more technology in the form of checking out books and locating items in the library.)
- Encouraging certain Academies in the Winter Haven Schools. (Classical Academies: Music, Dance, Theater, etc.),
- Encouraging educational programs in our library and summer camps that focus on how local governments work.
- Creating internships for students who are interested in local government.

- Tapping into the local schools morning broadcast to communicate City events and programs.
- Encourage and facilitate departments working with schools on special projects. Not just providing tours, but having hands on interaction with students.
- Encourage the formulation of a committee to pursue an IB Academy for Winter Haven High School.

Finance

Facilitator: Financial Services Director Cal Bowen, Assistant Financial Service Director Debbie Tate

- Proposed an increase in ad valorem taxes – viewed current rate as too low.
- Favored decent wages and pension benefits for employees – do not want to see these reduced.
- Suggested infrastructure replacement be included in annual budgets (similar to equipment/vehicles).
- Advocated advertising nationally to attract new residents/retirees.
- Questioned funding of non-profit organizations.
- Recommended economic development focus on business committed to community involvement.

Government

Facilitator: Executive Services Director Michele Stayner

- Relative to government funding non-profits, the following was shared:
 - Non-profit organizations awarded government funding should be held accountable for how the funds given are spent. (Note: The visitor was informed that the majority of the non-profit money awarded by the City is channeled through United Way, an agency that has accountability measures in place.)
 - Monitoring of the non-profit spending of funds awarded should occur, not unlike the way the City has in the past closely, and overly so, scrutinized Neighborhood Grants awarded.
 - Funding of non-profits should not occur unless and until it is assured City services and staff are fully funded.

- The City Commission this year should have restored Library revenue that was lost, so as to properly staff the facility, instead of granting funding to non-profit organizations; or if other City departments needed additional money it should have been given there and not to a non-profit agency. (Note: The visitor was informed that incumbent Library staff members were not eliminated, but vacant positions were. Additionally, it was relayed that the Library hours were changed to align with the results of a public use/traffic study that confirmed the optimal hours of operation and when the public would be least adversely impacted by closure. The visitor asked if there had been complaints regarding the Library operating hour change; it was stated that to the best of staff's understanding the number of complaints, if any, have been nominal; the visitor added that interactions with others suggest there are a number of people who have a problem with or are opposed to the operating hour change, in particular working mothers with small children who are now limited in their ability to access the Library after 6 p.m.)
- The current City Commission dabbles too much in day to day operations, instead of focusing more on the big picture and their role as policy makers.
- The City Commission should follow the same channels as it requires of citizens when one or more has a complaint, instead of jumping on directors in meetings and other public forums.
- There is no clear vision, plan, or identifier of or for how the City should be now or in the future. (Note: When asked, the visitor declared no preference for what the vision should be. Additionally, the visitor acknowledged the Aspire process and having participated in same; the visitor said the process and session attended was displeasing, because many of the participants presented pie in the sky ideas or suggested things that have been considered but not

pursued, considered and now being done, or that which has already been completed. According to the visitor, among those present at the Aspire session attended it was obvious they were not connected or truly engaged in what the City has done, is doing, or intends to do.)

- People who live outside the City should be better educated about their locale within the County and discontinue leeching off of the City and complaining about what the City does do or in their perception doesn't do.
- Government leaders have a tendency to focus too much attention to self-serving interests of themselves, residents, or others, versus focusing on the big picture; they lose sight of what truly needs to be done, i.e. that which is the greater good.
- Governments, in particular at the local level, should maintain good communications, network frequently, and learn to work together better, for the benefit of all.
- Communication and outreach is critical, to ensure the message regarding government services, transactions, and accomplishments is transmitted; most of what governments do is intangible, so it is important to utilize all avenues of communication, print, personal, technological, etc., as well as evolve with the times and situation, to adequately keep others abreast of what is planned, underway, or completed.
- Consider means to better educate others about the City, what it is and what it is accomplishing, to minimize criticisms and complaints. Many are ill-informed and some do not even realize that they are not actually City residents.
- Among the three cities lived so far, Winter Haven is the best when it comes to customer service; when contact with the City has been made, the reaction and response has been almost immediate and not a six-hour or multi-day process experienced with other entities. Continue to make customer service a priority.

- The City Splash is a good publication. Consider developing a quarterly version containing notice of events planned, classes available, etc. and mail the document to water customers.
- Make good use of public gathering times, i.e. special events in the park and elsewhere, to get the message out about what is happening or planned.
- Consider establishing a central location (band-stand maybe) where unique events can be consistently scheduled and held; for example, a concert every Tuesday, ballet on Thursdays, etc. and make announcements about items of interest, upcoming events, etc.
- During public gathering sessions or events, consider the use and display of information boards, like those used in Gainesville, to better inform others of City doings, things planned, etc.
- Make communication a priority and do all possible to better educate those served about the City, what it is, what it does, and what it offers.
- Regarding a vision for the City, the preference would be to have big City accommodations while sustaining a small town feel.
- There should be some sense of balance between the issues the City has before them or involves themselves in, i.e. greater balance in quality of life efforts, economic development, new or revitalized business, jobs, etc.
- The City is a good place and provides good service. The only real concern I have in the immediate is in the potential for privatizing solid waste; the service is good and it would not be a good thing to eliminate this operation.
- During City Commission meetings it would be helpful to have a segment where project updates and happenings are presented and shared with the audience, to give them a better understanding of what is on the horizon, underway, etc.
- Provide and/or make available more nature oriented parks and/or trails.

Infrastructure

Facilitators: Technology Services Director Hiep Nguyen;
Technical Services Division Director Joey Murphy

- Sidewalks are needed in the area of Quintin Avenue.
- Provide fiber optics in the downtown area, so area business can provide wi-fi for customers.
- Upgrade older neighborhoods with sidewalks.
- Ensure that level of service requirements are not being exceeded (e.g. water/sewer capacity, police dept., fire dept., roadways, etc.)
- Can the City handle the growth?
- Has the City considered round-a-bouts?
- City needs to plan ahead, not behind.
- Expand on reuse availability.

Quality of Life

Facilitator: Community Services Director Michael Stavres

- Grow leisure services with parks and entertainment.
- Would like to see bike trails and parks similar to Circle B Bar.
- Would prefer to see a park with social activities rather than the Landings in that particular area.
- Quality of Life importance rating: City growth is #1, jobs #2, quality of life #3 (health related).
- City should devote more funds to parks.
- Does not care for Trail Head Bike path (not enough natural scenery).
- Appreciates the Chain O'Lakes Complex and Theatre.
- Appreciates the City's cleanliness (streets, etc)
- Appreciates the ball fields (the City should have worked harder to keep the Indians baseball team – feels the City dropped the ball).
- Appreciates garbage collection.
- City staff is always helpful and courteous.
- Understands that more funding is needed to grow and get more.
- Quality of Life means low crime, parks and outdoor activities.
- Would like to see more destination parks and cultural arts.

- “Clean is a given” in Winter Haven – not at the top of the list because it is not an issue.
- Quality of Life importance rating: Low crime rate #1, Economics #2, Parks, etc. #3.
- Would like to see destination parks and activities (places to go) that are local, safe and convenient to get to.
- Feels the City is doing well with open spaces (park and trails) but would like more parks and longer trails.
- Would like to see a dog park.
- Appreciates the sculptures in Central Park.
- Feels the City should have more social activities for a more active community.
- City needs a taxi service and easier public transportation.
- Prefers Winter Haven to other areas because it is quiet.
- Transportation availability is important.
- Would like City to seem less “Mom and Pop” and get more modern.
- Appreciates the Downtown Parking Garage.
- Would like the City to promote Downtown more and include more modern businesses.
- Likes Winter Haven as a retirement area – not congested.
- Winter Haven is somewhat rural and remote but has access to activities.
- Looking forward to retirement in Winter Haven.
- Likes having Legoland in Winter Haven.
- Would like to have more opportunities to play and observe sports.
- Would like to see a mall or a central location for shopping, eating and theater which would bring in more people.
- Would like to see more social activities
- Would like to see more parks and trails.
- Like the Farmer’s Market.
- Winter Haven has everything – just spread out.
- Likes Cruisin’ Winter Haven – just like Old Town with the cars.

- Likes Pickin' in the Park and other Friday night activities.
- Transportation i.e. bus services should be improved to reduce travel time.
- Likes that there are a lot of sidewalks.
- City has good balance.
- City should focus on young entertainment spot. Teens and young adults need places to go that are safe.
- Would like to see more live entertainment either sponsored by the City or private establishments.
- Quality of Life means leisure activities both City and private.
- Likes Winter Haven's aesthetics – beautiful trees and scenery.
- Quality of Life means safety, health, education and leisure opportunities.
- Winter Haven needs more City services.
- Quality of Life means community transportation with the ability to move easily and safely.
- Quality of Life means adequate roadways, quality services and reliability of City provided services with transportation options.
- Priorities for Quality of Life – Low crime is #1.
- The City does well in the areas of: Friday nights in Central Park, weekend activities, Farmer's Market, Parks, Library, Healthcare, Cultural Events, diverse activities and is clean and well kept.
- Quality of Life in Winter Haven means recreation availability, small town vs. big town feel, peaceful, recreation and thing to do.
- Likes the Library.
- Winter Haven should focus on quality not quantity in regards to housing development.
- Some housing developments/areas have a "disconnect" between their areas and the City (not close to activities).
- Winter Haven has beautiful ball fields.
- Quality of Life rating – Education #1, Low crime #2, Quality of Life #3.

- Winter Haven needs better access to mass transportation.
- Would like Winter Haven to enhance transportation, social venues, Downtown activities, perhaps a hotel.
- Service industry in Winter Haven needs upgrading and more high tech industries.
- Winter Haven should look into more “green” structures and ecology.
- Winter Haven needs to keep lakes clean and healthy.