

**FRANKLIN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
WORKSHOP
COURTHOUSE ANNEX, COMMISSION MEETING ROOM
FEBRUARY 1, 2022
1:30 P.M.
MINUTES**

Commissioners Present: Ricky Jones-Chairman, Bert Boldt, II-Vice-Chairman, Noah Lockley, Joseph Parrish, Jessica V. Ward

Others Present: Michael Moron—County Coordinator

1. Call to Order

Chairman Jones called the workshop to order. He explained the order of the workshop in that there will be time for public comments, the ARPC presentation, and then Commissioner comments.

2. Public Comments

Ms. Joyce asked if there would be any comments after the presentation. Chairman Jones said no and explained there would be no action today. Ms. Joyce spoke in favor of code enforcement. She feels there could have been action after the fire in Eastpoint and Hurricane Michael. She said she was told there was no one to do code enforcement. She said that now we have a tragic fire of two young children, and it could have been prevented with code enforcement. This issue has to be addressed to save lives and make a decent community to live in.

Ms. Pat Thunderbird spoke in favor of code enforcement. She would like to add that she has become involved with the ordinances and the community is totally unaware. She is on the review for permits, and she has tried to learn, understand, and explain the ordinances. She said there was an issue that she reported but was shot down and the person went forward with their action which she felt was dangerous to the community.

Ms. Barbara Royce spoke in favor of code enforcement. She said she had worked with ordinances and tried to get the county to follow what they are. It is distressing that people do whatever they want and don't care if they encroach on others' property. There are many issues that need to be addressed and our requests fall on deaf ears. We have tried to enhance Lanark Village. We have had so many come in and do their best to make our community a community. There are others who throw garbage all over their yards, etc. and it's just not right. We need code enforcement throughout the county.

Ms. Barbara Sanders thanked the Board for making the effort to see what the people think about code enforcement. She said she believes the Board can enforce the codes for free, direct your planning and zoning employees to enforce the rules. It's a matter of health, safety, and welfare. Property values, if you start polluting and having Red Tide, then you are going to kill the goose that laid the golden egg. We do have poverty and housing issues, but those are things we are going to have to address. Code enforcement or anarchy? We don't want the word to get out that we have no code enforcement. We want the word to get out that this board will protect people.

Ms. Kelly said her concern and comment revolves around the timing of this workshop. Each of the six or seven

workshops was held in the evening. Out of courtesy for all of those people, it would have been a good idea to make this workshop available to them in the evening. Holding this hearing in the afternoon seems to do a disservice to those who chose to attend in the evening.

Mr. Moron explained this is a workshop for ARPC to provide the information they had compiled from the public meetings. I anticipate the Board will have another public workshop to discuss and address the public issues. There will most likely be another public hearing before the issue is voted on and put into law. This hearing is more between the board of county commissioners and ARPC. This is the time for ARPC to give their collected report. I wanted to clarify that for the public.

3. Code Enforcement Report Presentation

Ms. Carolyn Smith gave an overview of the Franklin County Code Enforcement Public Workshop Series from the Apalachee Regional Planning Council.

Overview

The Apalachee Regional Planning Council (ARPC) has partnered with Franklin County to provide technical assistance related to code enforcement. Specifically, ARPC conducted a series of six workshops on code enforcement in various locations in Franklin County, during which ARPC staff provided an overview of what code enforcement was, shared examples of success in similar communities, and provided an opportunity for public comment. The public input was compiled and organized into a summary of public opinion on code enforcement, which is located at the end of this document.

Background

The ARPC is an intergovernmental, not-for-profit regional organization that works on behalf of its 9-county region (including Franklin County) to provide technical assistance in the areas of economic development, emergency preparedness, transportation, housing, quality of life, and growth management. By providing technical assistance in the mentioned areas, the topic of code enforcement is encompassed. ARPC staff sought to assist Franklin County as a neutral third party to understand and document community perspectives on code enforcement.

Public Workshops

ARPC staff facilitated a series of six public workshops on behalf of Franklin County in various locations throughout Franklin County. Below is the list of communities that received a public workshop and their respective number of attendees.

- Eastpoint – 20
- St. George Island – 46
- Unincorporated Carrabelle – 19
- Lanark Village – 39
- Unincorporated Apalachicola – 12
- Alligator Point – 22

Summary of Public Opinion

The series of workshops were attended by a total of 158 residents, including County Commissioners Bert Boldt and Jessica Varnes Ward. At each workshop, the attendees were asked whether anyone was against having code

enforcement in Franklin County. Within each workshop, there was unanimous support for having code enforcement in the form of two or more code enforcement officers. The greatest takeaway from the series of code enforcement workshops held throughout Franklin County was that the residents of Franklin County wanted code enforcement officers. The residents of Franklin County wanted a fair-handed approach to code enforcement that addressed the most flagrant offenses. The second greatest voiced concern from the citizenry was a desire for a county code refresh potentially based on model codes from other counties crafted to take the specific needs of the different Franklin County communities into account. Some specific codes in need of update included the Sea Turtle Lighting ordinance and the Leave No Trace ordinance. Moving forward, many residents asked for a citizen’s advisory board to outline code enforcement needs and the code enforcement officer position as well as set fines for non-compliance. The residents also requested that complaints be accepted in writing as well as via phone call if the county pursued hiring a code enforcement officer. The public also expressed that they would like the officer(s) to go out and patrol the county.

A few issues that were mentioned across the county were the need for mandatory garbage pickup and the need to address illegal dumping. Another issue that was brought to attention numerous times was the issue of persons burning trash since the fires distract the sea turtles during their nesting season. However, the biggest concern across the workshops was (and has been) the need to address abandoned and derelict buildings pose a public health and safety concern.

Franklin County Citizenry Code Enforcement Priorities

Franklin County residents verbally assigned priority levels to a preselected list of common code enforcement issues, as outlined in the table below:

ISSUES RANKED BY FRANKLIN COUNTY PUBLIC ACCORDING TO PRIORITY LEVEL

Code Enforcement	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Overgrown grass and lot mow violations			X
Trash and nuisance accumulation	X		
Inoperable, unlicensed, and abandoned vehicles on private property	X		
Buildings without permits/ expired permits	X		
Signs in the right of way/ Road obstruction		X	
Zoning violations/ Illegal Land Use	X		
Building maintenance (Derelict)	X		
Unlicensed contractors	X		
Dock and Shore Violations	X		
Environmental Violations	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority

Landscaping non-compliance			X
Tree protection regulation			X
Sea turtle protection		X	
Zoning conditions (environmental violations)	X		
Protected species management plans and monitoring reports	X		
Indigenous preserves	X		
Exotic removal	X		
Development order requirements	X		

Franklin County Citizenry Code Enforcement Index of Issues

Below is the supplementary index of other major code enforcement issues that were mentioned throughout the public workshops.

- Concerns about open fires to burn yard debris – creates a great risk to houses and properties if gets out of control.
- Zoning violations – having numerous structures/houses on one property.
- Garbage Issues – Garbage in the yard, junk cars, and appliances
- Travel trailers should not be allowed on lots or limited for a time frame on a new build.
- Campers – living in three trailers without hookups.
- Houses that are not built to code.
- Hwy 98/commercial corridor needs clean-up via code enforcement.
- Get rid of abandoned and derelict sand fencing, mosquito-infested pools and properties, and hazardous houses and buildings.
- Individuals renting out their homes and not paying taxes.
- People who remodel and/or expand their homes’ occupancy levels without increasing the capacity of their septic systems, which leads to failing septic systems and environmental hazards.
- Franklin County does not have an Environmental Department. The public would like to see one or have the county address environmental compliance.
- Lighting Ordinance is not followed re: safe turtle lighting, unnecessary bright house lights, and architectural lighting that destroys SGI’s dark skies.
- Residents want to see enforcement of the critical habitat ordinance.
- Put on the county’s website a list of the features that code enforcement covers and then link each specific item to the County code that deals with that issue.
- Streamline the code enforcement process so issues can be resolved quickly.
- Yard debris on properties along Hwy 98 doesn’t get picked up by the county because owners are advised that yard debris is too dangerous for county employees. However, waste management companies pick up trash along Hwy 98.
- Since the Code Enforcement Officer position deals with law enforcement and could be a dangerous job, consider putting it under the Sheriff’s Department.

Code Enforcement in the Apalachee Region

Six out of the nine counties that constitute the Apalachee Region currently have code enforcement officers. In the counties that have code enforcement officers, officers are housed either under the Planning and Community Development Department or under the Building Department. These counties have budgeted for two or more code enforcement officers into their general budget for the Board of County Commissioners.

4. Commissioners' Questions and Comments

Commissioner Ward asked Ms. Smith to reiterate how many of the nine counties that they represent have code enforcement. Ms. Smith said six out of the nine counties. Chairman Jones thanked Ms. Smith and said the intent of this was so that when the Board got to the point to discuss the issue, we would have the input from our communities that we were elected to serve. Chairman Jones said he found it interesting to note that of the six counties who have enforcement the most have this position under the planning and zoning and/or building department. If it is put under law enforcement, and they go in to address an issue, there are matters of an illegal search, etc. Mr. Moron asked if there was a preference as to how the public wanted code enforcement. Did they say they wanted it done through the sheriff's department or the county staff? Ms. Smith said we didn't explicitly ask what form would be best, but it was mentioned at workshops. We did take note of any suggestions. It was mentioned to have two or more code enforcement officers. Chairman Jones said he could see where more than one would be a valid undertaking due to our county being so wide. Mr. Moron asked if a lot of repeat attendees attended the meetings. Ms. Smith said she didn't attend the meetings personally. Commissioner Ward said of the people in the room, a lot of them were at all of the meetings. Chairman Jones said this is an issue that we have to find a way to put a stop to it. I know that my district may be different than other districts. But we have people buying homes that are two bedrooms and turning into nine bedrooms. We've got to find a way to get a handle on it. Mr. Moron said he would like to have some public workshops. He would like to see if the public would consider doing this in phases. Is it an all-or-nothing deal, or do they mind starting on the high priorities? I would like to have some public hearings to get a true feel of the idea. Chairman Jones said he feels he will know how the public feels about it after this workshop, just in how they respond. Commissioner Ward said her district is challenging, and she agrees we will continue to have to brainstorm and come up with ideas. She said most of the calls she receives are in response to ordinance violations. The process needs to be streamlined so that people know who to contact. This is the first of many meetings we are going to need in order to come up with a plan. Maybe we should have someone actively going out looking at these houses, moving forward we need to have some kind of recourse. Mr. Moron said we have to explain to the public and the best person to do that is building official, they are tied to the building codes. A lot of times in the past they've been called to look at building violations, but they aren't authorized to do that. We have to educate the public as well as ourselves. Commissioner Boldt said he thinks we need to look at what matters most in the code enforcement hierarchy. He said he believes there is a process in code enforcement, that it should be educational followed by verbal notification, enforcement, and action. He said that he can see code enforcement increasing property values and feels that insurance rates can be buffered by this proactiveness. Commissioner Boldt thanked ARPC for their report and the public for their input. Chairman Jones said this process is growth management. I think some of it has been brought on by Covid because people are looking for smaller places to move to. Chairman Jones said it may not be easy and may not be comfortable, but it is needed. He said he believes this is a forward step for the Board. He said there will be ample opportunities for people to give input to the Board and the County so that we know all voices have been heard in making the best decision. Mr. Moron said there is a lot to do here and thanked ARPC again. Commissioner Parrish said he did attend the workshop in Apalachicola, but he did not sign the sign-in sheet. He said there is a lot to be worked on, when it comes to camper trailers on lots, there is an ordinance against that. Some people living in campers are doing the best they can, but county ordinance says you can't live in a camper trailer. He said he feels for some of

these people especially the older people, we will have to enforce it across the board regardless of where you live. If we don't then it will be discrimination. It is going to impact a lot of people if we enforce it. Where are these people going to go? I don't know how it is all going to work. What are these people going to do and my heart goes out to them? There is a lot to be worked through, but we can't do code enforcement for individuals only. It has to be applicable to everyone. Ms. Smith said we really do have a diverse community and they are here to support the Board as they try to figure out what is the best route to go for the county.

5. Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned.

Ricky Jones – Chairman

Attest:

Michele Maxwell – Clerk of Courts