

ST JOHNS COUNTY CIVIC ROUNTABLE  
DECEMBER 12, 2016

At 9:08am President Lofgren called the meeting to order.

Treasurer's Report: Current balance is \$466.64 with 14 paid members.

Secretary's Report: The minutes of November 14 were accepted as reported.

President Lofgren introduced Andrew(Andy) Witt, Executive Director of the St Johns Cultural Council.

Mr. Witt said the mission of the council is to promote St Johns County as a premier arts destination and to enrich the lives of both residents and visitors through art and culture.

The Council has two parallel tracks:

Cultural Council /1.5 million dollar budget and the Local Arts Council / \$100,000 budget.

Andy commented on the restoration of the old city hall costing \$800,000 including a State grant of \$350,000. The second story is yet to be completed.

Some goals of the Cultural Council:

- 1) Support for the “creative community”
- 2) Foster a dynamic marketplace for artists, musicians, writers and performers.
- 3) Elevate the reputation of St Johns County as an artistically rich place in the S.E. USA.
- 4) Make it a quality destination for tourists.

Some S. J. County stats: Population 226,000 with 70,000 home sites yet to be built. We have Second highest per household income in the state (\$65,000) and 41.4% of adults with a bachelors degree or higher. Much room for further growth.

Mr. Witt pointed out that we must be exceptional and unique to compete for cultural tourism.

The arts community of about 350 reports that 46% of their sales come from outside the county bringing dollars to the community in exchange for the product.

There is a need for more space for artists (Arts Center?) and media help for cultural growth from both private and public sources.

Andy emphasized the enormous impact of tourism on the local economy that supports 29,000 jobs and reported that 97.3% of tourists report their needs are met or exceeded.

Many activities are planned both inside and out of the county in 2017. Leading artists are brought in for monthly workshops to enhance artistic talents and to improve marketing skills.

Notable is a “Downton Abby” exhibit at the Lightner Museum in October 2017. Many other activities too numerous to list were also mentioned.

The Cultural Council has 15 Board Members and a staff of two. Barbara McNeese is the President.

Cliff Skarr – Voiced opposition to proposed change to county billboard regulations that would allow digital signs that could rapidly change messages.

Pointed out they are distracting to drivers and add to the blight of billboards along our roads. Proponents arguments that they would also display public interest messages (Amber alerts etc.) just a duplicate of available county and state signs.

Several of our members had questions for Mr. Skarr after which Ellen Witmer made a motion. The Motion: St Johns County Civic Roundtable to send a letter to the County Commissioners that expresses our opposition to changes to the current county regulations regarding billboards, that would allow digital signage, especially noting those that can change or alternate messages. The

motion was seconded and passed. Tony Bosco offered to write the letter based on the motion passed.

Topics for 2017

A speaker from Emergency services was suggested.

Robert Olson - Beach access using condemned properties?

Tony Bosco – Route A1A threatened by future storms.

Jerry Cameron – DOT input regarding beach preservation and A1A vulnerability to storm damage.

Discussion on traffic problems at key intersections in county

President Lofgren adjourned the meeting at 10:45am.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dennis Froio, Secretary