Town of Orange Park Strategic Goals for 2019-20
Goals, Background, and Descriptions

1. Public Safety

   Goal: To provide the highest level of public safety to Town residents by ensuring all programs are completed, running efficiently, and that the departments are staffed and equipped appropriately.

   Background and Description
   The Orange Park Fire Department (OPFD) provides ambulance service not only for areas inside of the Town limits, but also in primary and secondary service areas outside of the Town that contain several thousand residents. About half of all fire and ambulance responses made by the OPFD are outside of the Town limits. This has placed Town residents at a disadvantage by not being served by the unit based here. It also created a revenue disparity as 100% of revenues were collected by Clay County, while expenditures were paid by both agencies.

   After application by the Town, the Clay County Board of County Commissioners voted to grant a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (COPCN) to the Town. This will allow the Town to fully operate its own EMS unit. The Town appropriated funds to start the program, secured the services of a medical director, and is in the process of purchasing equipment. The next steps include securing a state license, hiring a medical billing company and starting service. This is expected to take place in late spring or early summer 2019.

   In the last four years, the Police Department has grown by six positions: an investigator, code enforcement, and school resource officers have all been added. The evidence and storage is growing exponentially. The building and parking lot were completed in 2003 and did not contemplate these changes. A review should be done to ensure that the staffing levels, building space and parking space are adequate to meet the needs of the department as it functions today.

   Action Steps
   (a) Purchase all vehicles and equipment and secure all contracts for EMS services.
   (b) Obtain State EMS license.
   (c) Begin providing EMS service and coordinate a smooth transition with Clay County.
   (d) Evaluate staffing levels in police and fire departments to meet regulatory standards and Town goals.
   (e) Evaluate Town facilities to determine if changes are needed to accommodate employees, vehicles and equipment, and storage needs.
   (f) Make appropriate capital projections to achieve results.

   Time and Budget Impact
   The budget has been amended in the 18-19FY to account for all EMS start up expenditures and revenues. Revenues of $487,000 and expenditures of $946,000 have been planned. Evaluations of and recommendations for staffing levels will be conducted by the department directors and financial impact will be determined by the Finance Department. No outside expenditures are
expected for this step. The Town should consider hiring an architectural firm to conduct space planning, a needs analysis, and recommended improvements. These professional services could be several thousand dollars and would result in project proposals that are feasible based on the current facilities and translate easily into the Town’s Capital Improvement Plan.

2. **Waterways & Infrastructure**

   **Goal:** To continue addressing stormwater and infrastructure needs in the Town to provide mitigation from storm events and to improve the condition and safety of the natural and manmade environment.

   **Background and Description**

   Storm drainage in Orange Park is carried through a system of creeks, ditches, pipes, and ponds which drain into the St. Johns River, Doctors Lake and other facilities. The manmade structures were built during development of the Town over many years by residential and commercial developers. Some of these systems are aging and need maintenance or further development. Additionally, the urbanization of property in Orange Park has reduced the natural pervious surfaces which allow stormwater to drain into the ground. These reasons, coupled with intense storms and sea level rise, have placed more of a burden on the Town’s stormwater system.

   Following Hurricanes Matthew and Irma, the Town started the process of evaluating the current system’s condition and function. The system assessment is complete. It reflects current conditions, areas in need of repair and recommended maintenance and inspection timelines. A flow model is underway. This will determine if the system is appropriately sized and where improvement dollars would best be spent. The Town Council allocated $500,000 for storm clean up, $500,000 for stormwater improvements, and implemented a Stormwater Management Utility. The storm clean-up funds will be refunded through FEMA. The stormwater funds were utilized to purchase equipment, fund temporary positions, conduct engineering, and leverage for grant dollars. The utility created capacity for additional projects and three full time positions dedicated to cleaning and maintaining the Town’s stormwater system including waterways. These positions have been filled; employees are in place and working.

   The Town received a $1 million grant from USDA for the dredging of Dudley Branch. This work is underway and will be completed in April 2019. Several additional FEMA grants were applied for through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. In addition, FDOT has begun the process of evaluating its drainage right-of-way and designing a project to clear it. The flow model underway will help the Town decide where improvements will be most effective and create a master plan.

   The Council has discussed other goals related to this focus on stormwater systems including: conservation lands, a greenways system, resiliency efforts, discharge elimination, septic tank elimination, a stormwater master plan and additional creek dredging. Two potential dredge sites have been identified. Sea grass studies have been completed. Muck surveys have been scheduled. This information will lead to a recommendation on whether dredging will provide stormwater relief to these areas and at what cost.
Other infrastructure areas of focus include the Town’s street resurfacing and reconstruction programs. A great deal has been accomplished since the streets were analyzed in 2012. The Town should update the Pavement Condition Index (PCI) for all streets to plan for the next several years of capital projects. The Transportation Planning Organization has undertaken three studies that include the Town: Bicycle & Pedestrian Study and the Traffic Circulation Study which are complete. The Greenways & Regional Trails Study is underway. The Town should review the recommendations from all three studies and rank the projects for capital funding. Coordination should take place between the Town, Clay County and FDOT for recommendations that fall within their right-of-way. The Bicycle and Pedestrian Study identifies several gaps in the Town’s sidewalk system. The Town should have a GIS layer created to identify the current system, the needed connections, and the areas that need improvement. The Town recently outsourced the management of its GIS. Additional mapping is needed, along with web access for Town employees, to make this a truly integrated system.

**Action Steps**

(a) Complete current projects including: Dudley Branch Dredging, flow modeling, annual maintenance program, FEMA submissions, FDOT clearing, and future dredge site analysis.

(b) A stormwater master plan should be prepared using the GIS mapping of the Town’s stormwater system and assessment of the condition of that system. Prioritization for future maintenance and upgrades including cost estimates should be completed.

(c) Provide educational opportunities related to resiliency programs.

(d) Set aside funding or apply for grants for conservation land preservation.

(e) Conduct a feasibility study for a greenways study.

(f) Update the Roadway Pavement Condition Index (PCI).

(g) Create a sidewalk inventory and condition layer in GIS.

(h) Prepare cost estimates for all septic tank elimination projects.

(i) Rank all capital projects for prioritization.

(j) Coordinate with other agencies to prioritize projects from recent studies.

**Time and Budget Impact**

Action items under (a) are already budgeted and underway. No additional expenditures related to these items are anticipated. Items (b), (e), (f), (g), and (h) all involve the work of consulting engineering firms. Creation of the master plan and a greenways study may be quite involved, while updating the PCI and sidewalk layer will be smaller projects. Concept designs for septic tank elimination will vary based on the site and conditions. Educational opportunities for resiliency can be provided by the State and other agencies. Funding for conservation lands will vary based on land opportunities. Ranking of capital projects for prioritization and coordination with other agencies will involve staff time, but no additional expenditures.

3. **Strategic Planning & Visioning**

**Goal:** To engage the public in a major visioning process; to set long-term goals and direction for the future of the Town that extends beyond a 5-year CIP and sets the tone for long term priorities and development.
Background and Description
The Town is at a crossroads in its future. Many similarly sized cities are facing shrinking populations and lack of growth. The Town is surrounded by Clay County which has grown tremendously in the last 20 years. Additional county growth is expected now that the First Coast Expressway is slated for completion. Neighboring Jacksonville also attracts many Town residents with its restaurants, shopping, and other entertainment opportunities.

Tensions have developed over the future of the Town, along with the programs and supporting budgets provided by the local government. Is a central shopping and dining district desired? Should the Town be focused mainly on retirees? Is high-rise development desired here? Are there enough cultural and recreational opportunities? Should the Town be predominantly residential, with little focus on commercial development? All these questions could be resolved through a lengthy community engagement visioning process.

As the Town is nearly built out, most potential developments will be re-development. Police, fire, public works, recreation opportunities, and special events are all topics that have been raised. While some of these topics are covered in the Town’s Comprehensive Plan, particularly the Future Land Use Element, other topics are not addressed at all.

The Council discussed the need for a lengthy, citizen-engagement process to develop a long-term vision for the Town that looks beyond the annual preparation of the Capital Improvement Plan.

Action Steps
(a) Review visioning results from other communities.
(b) Pursue grants that could offset the cost of visioning services.
(c) Develop the scope and an RFP for visioning services.
(d) Award a contract for the services and begin the process.

Time and Budget Impact
Other communities have taken one to two years to develop the vision. Costs range from $60,000 to $200,000, depending on the scope of services.

4. Economic Development
Goal: To increase the Town’s focus on economic development by creating long-term development goals, understanding development drivers, and implementing tools to create the desired development environment.

Background and Description
Many items have brought about a new interest in economic development:
- Completion of several long-term projects like EMS services, a Stormwater Utility, and enhanced Code Enforcement have created space for new ideas.
- Recently completed new businesses have increased interest in business placement, size, style, and impact.
- Growth in other areas of Clay County has sparked an opportunity to look inward and improve Orange Park’s standing as a desirable community.
- Pass through traffic of 80,000 vehicles per day on Park Avenue offers incentive to business development.
- Residents frequently complain of inadequate dining options, often leaving the Town or the County for restaurants.
- Recently completed Traffic Circulation Study showed that 88% of residents leave the area for work; while 83% of the jobs in the area are filled by workers from other areas.
- Declining sales tax revenues create a need to discuss alternative revenue sources including improved property values.
- A grassroots committee of local business owners has started a dialogue about economic development drivers and tools.
- Council has recently updated the Town’s Comprehensive Plan through the EAR process, amended Planned Unit Development criteria, streamlined zoning fees and site plan review processes, and added mixed use development to our commercial land use categories.

Several items discussed at the Council’s strategic planning session could fall under the heading of Economic Development:

- Annexation of adjacent lands – the Town offers an increased level of service in many areas. Neighboring property owners may find value in becoming part of the municipal limits. Several paths to annexation exist including: voluntary, enclave, and referendum.
- Property acquisition – many local governments acquire property for developing it or holding it for desired development goals. The Town has not pursued this path previously.
- Creation of a Community Redevelopment Agency – a CRA is a statutorily defined district that uses tax increment financing to fund specific improvements to that area. Once an area is defined and needs identified, a feasibility study is conducted to determine if the statutory criteria are met. The CRA must be agreed to by the Town and the County as both contribute portions of new ad valorem to the fund.
- Mixed-use zoning – this popular zoning category allows for a mixture of uses, typically residential and commercial, to exist on the same parcel. Tapestry Park in Jacksonville, Park Avenue in Winter Park, and European Village in Palm Coast are all popular Florida examples. The goal of these districts is often to provide walkable commercial, dining, and retail establishments within close proximity to residential uses thereby enhancing the use, value and sustainability of the area.
- Redevelopment opportunities – nearly all the Town’s land is currently developed. Very few vacant commercial or residential parcels remain. Future development of the Town will involve infill development of these remaining pieces or redevelopment of current ones. What are the implications of this type of development? Are parcels limited in size and access? Does sufficient area exist for stormwater and parking requirements to be met under current codes? Is municipal water & sewer accessible to all parcels? Do current codes hinder development in any way?
**Action Steps**

(a) Provide education about CRA’s, determine possible zones and desired improvements. Conduct a feasibility study to determine eligibility.

(b) Develop communication tools for adjacent land owners who may want to consider annexation.

(c) Council discussion on land acquisition goals, possible locations, establish initial funding.

(d) Continue dialogue with the Planning & Zoning Board about mixed-use zoning goals in the Town. Implement any ordinance changes to achieve this goal.

(e) Interface with real estate brokers to determine best fit opportunities for vacant properties.

(f) Communicate with developers about Town codes and available parcels to support redevelopment goals.

(g) Utilize visioning results to adjust Comprehensive Plan, Land Development Regulations, or other policies that lead to the desired long-term outcomes.

(h) Pursue grants that could achieve any of the economic development goals.

**Time and Budget Impact**

Steps that involve education, communication, and workshops are free and only involve time commitments on the parties involved.

A feasibility study for a CRA was estimated at $20,000 to $25,000 in 2013 when the Town previously discussed this option. The redevelopment of the Town will be a gradual process over many years. Implementation of the Town’s vision and related regulations to meet these goals will achieve results slowly; however, an absence of action on these items will result in developer driven goals based on today’s lack of a cohesive vision.