

MINUTES

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COMMISSIONER JEANNA MASTRODICASA UF STUDENT GOVERNMENT FORUM

DATE: Tuesday, April 8, 6:30 P.M.

PLACE: Reitz Union – Room 282, University of Florida Campus

RE: CITY OF GAINESVILLE HOSPITALITY DISTRICTS

I. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

II. CALL TO ORDER – 6:30 P.M.

III. WELCOME

Jeanna Mastrodicasa, UF Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, speaking to the forum as a Commissioner for the City of Gainesville and Chair of the Public Safety Committee, welcomed those present.

IV. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Commissioner Mastrodicasa asked the City staff present to introduce themselves:

Assistant City Manager Paul Folkers
Gainesville Police Chief Norman Botsford
Police Major Rick Hanna
Police Captain Ed Book
Police Captain Lonnie Scott
Police Corporal Carol Davis
Police Officer Courtney Roberts
Police Executive Assistant to the Chief of Police Rhonda Osborne - scribe

Commissioner Mastrodicasa made a presentation to the University of Florida Student Government Forum to open discussions on how to safely manage the City's two main hospitality districts: Downtown and College Park. The purpose of addressing this forum is to make them aware of what the City is working on regarding these safety issues. Most bars in the City are good. There are five bars who cause most of the problems.

The presentation included the proposed timeline for changes to be implemented, public safety challenges, transportation issues (taxi stands, Later Gator), proposing entertainment permits for bar entry for patrons under 21, using licensed promoters who would monitor public safety issues, prohibiting full bottle alcohol sales in bars, increasing the civil penalty for underage drinking and seeking additional criminal penalties for repeat offenders, intergovernmental lobbying and support, and asking for suggestions for ways to address the issues that are being discussed.

V. CITIZEN COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Q: Yooni Yi – Do the 5 problem bars have a timeline for reapplying for an underage permit and what are the standards for when they do apply? Do you think this would increase the number of fake IDs the students are using?

A. Mastrodicasa – We need to make this constitutional and fair. No specific time set, probably an annual permit to give everyone time to work out their problems. This should not be any news to any of the problem bars. Vendors should be more responsible.

Botsford – Fake IDs out there are real IDs, just not you. Of course there are some phony IDs, but it is more prevalent that students just borrow someone else's ID.

Q: Kellie Dale – There is not a lot of incentive for students to use taxis because they worry about the cost, which is actually relatively inexpensive. Have you spoken with the taxis and talked about some sort of advertising campaign for students to use them more. It is a matter of having students use them and know that it is not a very expensive way home.

A. Mastrodicasa – Taxis in this town are actually called Vehicles for Hire and they are regulated through the Public Safety Committee. We did tell them that this issue is on the table. I believe we will formally communicate with them once we have the information. They actually wanted the taxi stands. For them it makes sense as well.

Q. Matt Michel – Over crowding in bars and the number of safety exits is something that has been on my mind a lot (grandfather was a firefighter). Do you think that is a serious problem in Gainesville and do you think you should increase awareness about that?

A. Mastrodicasa – The Gainesville Fire Rescue is working on a project called "Operation Safe Club" and what they are doing is going to bars and doing specific outreach. They have shut some clubs down or told some bars they cannot let anyone else in without letting someone out. Clubs are supposed have counters at the doors to monitor occupancy and no chains on their exits. It is their responsibility.

Q: Alan Rezaei – How do we compare to other major colleges in similar situations like in the number of arrests, the ratio of cops to students?

A. Mastrodicasa – Not sure, but she is sure we have done some studies of other communities. Because we are a college town we would compare to other college towns.

Chief Botsford – The only one I know of that we have done some comparisons to is Tallahassee and that is where the Party Patrol concept came from due to the problems they were having there. We compare about the same with the incidents, even though they have two colleges there. The incidents of arrest are similar to what we have here.

Mastrodicasa – I have seen escalation in the number of incidents in the past couple of years and I want to kind of pull back in the future.

Q. Heshan “Grasshopper” Illngkoon - What are the regulations on taxi driver’s fees? Who regulates them? Some drivers charge \$50 to take students 8 blocks.

A. Chief Botsford – There are no regulations on the fees.

Captain Book – the one City Ordinance for Vehicles for Hire regulates that the fees have to be posted in plain sight, but not what the rates will be. But if the charge is not in line with the sign, yes, that is in violation of the City Ordinance. The Ordinance states the size of the letters.

Mastrodicasa – The Public Safety Committee meets fairly regularly with the taxi and limousine drivers. We may have to bring the rates into the discussion. On one hand we don’t want to over regulate them but on the other hand we may visit that to add that to the Ordinance. I think there may need to be a flat fee per person. I think we can have a constructive conversation with them.

Q. Kevin Riley – Is it double jeopardy for students who get in trouble with the police; are they turned in to Judicial Affairs?

A. Mastrodicasa – It is not double jeopardy because the judicial sanctions are for the educational process. We don’t have enough resources at the university as well. What I am interested in doing is to have an educational discussion if say you got an underage citation for drinking downtown, you would have to come in to a sit down and have a discussion with someone from Judicial Affairs. The only thing the Judicial Affairs has to do with outside behavior is really limited to DUI’s or some other egregious situation. I think there is a little more support the university could supply. I don’t anticipate turning everything that happens off campus into an on campus situation.

Q. Ryan O’Mara – Impaired sample – driving to bars, assuming people are rational and seek alternate transportation (taxis or buses). What kind of preventions does the City propose? The ones driving are getting just as intoxicated as the ones who don’t. In his study of the bars who had the minimum 21 years of age requirement there is a difference in the age of the patrons. Have you thought about what the consequence would be if they continue to allow underage drinking?

A. Mastrodicasa – What we have with our problem bars is that they are actually going in and finding excess amounts of underage drinking. Other bars are not. What I want to do is force the problem bars to deal with the situation. The data they have provided really shows the discrepancy in the two groups. Some bars allow 18 and up and they have massive arrests there or have problems with fights. What I want to do is try to keep it behavior related and let the police enforce behavior that is illegal. I am open to suggestions. I will follow up with you for some more suggestions.

As for interventions, I know we are doing more with DUI enforcement.

Captain Book – Last August we started doing some more efforts toward DUI's and underage drinking. As for DUI's, we retrained all of our cops. All officers got instruction on how to conduct the enforcement, how to use the cameras, and how to get out there. DUI's take an enormous amount of time. They take an enormous amount of resources. They take a lot of officers off the street. So we have been making more of an effort. In 2007 we made 271 DUI arrest, which was up dramatically from the previous year. And that is continuing; that and the underage drinking. Our underage drinking arrests for 2007 were 1009.

Q. Ryan O'Mara follow-up question – How is that different from UPD and the County? Is there a difference in UPD training from GPD training?

A. Captain Book – I don't know the answer to your questions. I am looking to one of the officers who is out there every night with the Downtown Unit. He says it is pretty similar to GPD and the university.

Mastrodicasa – I am actually in contact with one of the stake holders at the University Police Department as well to get their input on some of this.

Officer Courtney Roberts – The field sobriety tests are all standard with the departments.

Q. Jimmy Carlsen – For permitting purposes, what is the distinction of what is a bar and what is a restaurant? What is stopping an establishment from saying "hey, I'm not a bar" so I shouldn't have to have the 21 years of age or older regulation.

A. Chief Botsford – They actually have different licenses. There is an ordinance that states a restaurant must have a license and must serve a certain percentage of food per occupancy capacity. It distinguishes between a restaurant that serves alcohol and a bar that serves alcohol.

Q. Jim Martz – Do bars that allow over 21 year olds cause fewer problems than the ones that serve under 21?

A. Captain Scott – Typically, from our standpoint, older crowds create less problems than younger crowds. With the younger crowd there is also the problem of narcotics and underage drinking. It is very rare that we have any sort of physical disturbance with older crowds. With the under 21 crowd, that is when we have to step in to break up fights.

Q. Mary Grace Bell – What about insurance? Another aspect for being a responsible vendor is being insured, especially if the venue is being rented by student groups. However, venues are not always insured and students do not always know this.

- A. **Mastrodicasa** – Is there a regulation through Building Permits? We will have to look into that.
- Q. **Kyle Huey** – I find it disturbing and embarrassing to have Student Judicial Affairs go after students for underage drinking, DUI's yes, but not for minor infractions outside the university jurisdiction.
- A. **Mastrodicasa** – I appreciate that comment. You aren't the first to say that. But in fact, the university administration is interested in that input. What you are saying is Student Judicial Affairs would be too heavy of a punishment as compared to a fine or something else. You are more concerned with student judicial problems? At this point we are just in discussion.
- Q. **Cain Norris** – Thinks Gainesville is over regulated. You brought up two proposals that perplex me: first allowing venues to have underage entertainment – a wonderful idea. But you then predicate that by making them advance the time. Which seems to me that all you are doing is creating an incentive for them to NOT admit underage patrons. That is really undoing the whole purpose. The function of the City government is to make things safe, not to regulate children's bedtimes. There is a balance to be struck there and I think our City may be going a little too far with what they are considering. The other thing which troubles me much more, with your suggestion to the increase of civil penalties – I think that underage drinking is something you have to understand – the law is never going to eliminate. The law for underage drinking function is to disincent responsible excessive drinking and to maintain public safety. I simply can't see any way that increasing civil penalties will really change the incentive structure; they simply make the hammer bigger in case you get caught. Unless the Commission believes that a couple of extra hundred dollars added to a fine is actually going to keep kids from drinking; I just don't see what the benefit is.
- A. **Mastrodicasa** – I appreciate your commentary on that. You make some good points. Let me jump back to the under 18 situation – currently we don't let anybody do this now. The reason I propose this is if we were able to this at a few establishments, in my head I am envisioning a live musical it would be early enough that parents would feel comfortable with sending their child there and knowing there are not staying out until 2 in the morning, not being dropped into the streets in all the insanity. Our Black on Black Crime Task Force is very concerned about mixing young people who don't need to be in bars at all with the bar crowd; and so that would be, in my opinion, I would have to have the comfort level of the community to even to do this. If we are able to do this, it would be on an earlier time frame. In theory, they could have an early show and then have a later show for the 18 and up. They do that in other cities. So that is one I am interested in seeing if can do this. But it would really have to be the consent of the community who are really concerned about this issue. It is one of the things on the table.
- Q. **Mark McShera** – You said you wanted to limit the density of bars, I just fail to see how that would make it any safer. It would be harder to enforce DUI's and harder to monitor the establishments if they were distributed across the City. It actually seems that having a Midtown and a Downtown within a few blocks of each other helps us enforce.

A. **Mastrodicasa** – The Police actually say generally the same thing. At least we know where everybody is and if we need a perimeter, we can set it up. That proposition came up from one of my other colleagues. Their point was should we actually have bar districts. Norfolk, Virginia for example has scaled back on the number of bars that they can have per block. It was getting too much of an element. I don't think this will go forward but I did want to take one of my colleagues concerns and put it out there. A community that is trying to redevelop itself, that is one of the avenues they took and Norfolk was the example that was used.

Q. **Thomas Cockriel** – What is the status of the Stadium Club? When will 18th Street be opened back up?

A. **Mastrodicasa** – The Stadium Club has run into a couple of financial difficulties but they are expected to resume construction shortly and then we will be able to reopen 18th Street.

Thomas Cockriel – Do you have any idea how long that will be?

Mastrodicasa – I don't. There was an article in the *Gainesville Sun* within the last week where someone wrote in to the "Since You Asked" column with that same question. From my understanding it is going to resume soon and finish up soon. I don't remember what the end date was. If you go to the *Gainesville Sun* website, you can find the official answer there.

Q. **Julia Smith** – Why are parents in Gainesville different from other parents in other cities about their kids going out to these entertainment venues? Why is it so much more of a concern in Gainesville?

A. **Mastrodicasa** – Actually the people I am referring to are the City leaders who are concerned about this issue are probably more grandparent's age than parents. If you read today's *Gainesville Sun* this is public school spring break week and if you hadn't noticed, traffic around town is a lot better. They are all at Crescent Beach and St. Augustine. The Alachua County Sheriff's deputies are over there assisting in the same thing we are talking about and they have busted some monstrous parties. Nothing new. Whenever you have a major college or university in the community, you always worry that your school kid doesn't need to hanging out with the college kid. They should be hanging out with high school kids. Personally, I don't think it is fatal to have a young person out really, really late. We just want to make sure that we are able to do an "all ages" show that we do it in a way that makes people content with the situation.

Thank you for coming. If you want to follow up with anything with me, please do. I am happy to hear from any of you. Work with your student government leaders. They will be very involved in this situation throughout the summer. This is why they have lot of coordinators and all sorts of folks out here listening. Come join us anytime. We have an open, 3 minute Citizen's Comments portion to each meeting, every 2nd and 4th Monday at 6:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT – 7:25 P.M.

