



Duane Michael “Mike” Smith

Groveland City Council Member, District 4



Volume 2 - Issue #4

Contents

- Charter Amendments
- Parks & Rec Needs Assessment Survey
- Future Land Use
- Hydroponic Farm
- Advisory Groups
- Public Safety Building
- City Financial Update
- Building Inspection Services
- City Leadership Team
- Farmer’s Market
- Hurricane Preparedness
- Got a Question

Subscribe:
~~~~~

E-mail: [mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov](mailto:mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov)

Phone:  
352-429-2141  
ext. 814

Volume 2 - Issue #4

When I first ran for office, one of the issues I raised was that I believed there was a lack of transparency in city actions. I believe Groveland has made great strides to be more transparent in its activities and to more aggressively include citizens in addressing city issues. The whole intent of these newsletters is to increase transparency and to inform the residents of things that are happening in the city.

This is also election season in the city and there have been a number of issues raised that imply the city and the city council are trying to hide actions from the residents. While I cannot address all the issues raised in this newsletter, I do talk about some of the larger issues. These include: the city’s financial position and budget, tax milage rate, the new public safety building and the city’s building inspections services. In this issue of the newsletter I also talk about some of the advisory committees/boards of the city. These are a great way for citizens to be involved in shaping the future of the city.

## **Charter Amendments**

Groveland is proposing three amendments to its charter to be voted on in the November 3<sup>rd</sup> election. All three of these proposed amendments deal with filling of a vacancy on the City Council. These changes were prompted by issues encountered when the city had a vacancy in November of 2019 for the District 5 council seat. The charter currently requires that the city hold a special election in not less than 30 nor more than 90 days from the date the vacancy occurs. Due to changes to the charter in 2018 to provide for primary elections the city was unable to meet the time frames set forth in the charter. To de-conflict the requirements, the city is proposing a series of amendments that will remove the requirement to fill a seat by a special election. Instead, a vacancy would be filled through an appointment by the Mayor and Council to fulfill the remainder of the 2-year term, until the next election cycle for that seat. Specifically, the residents of the city will be asked to vote on three questions.

**Q1:** Should the charter be amended to provide that a vacant seat on City Council, except upon natural expiration of a term of office, shall be filled by the remaining councilmembers appointing a successor to fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term, regardless of the length of time remaining in the term of office, when the vacancy occurs and not by special election?

**Q2:** Should the charter of Groveland be amended to provide that the terms of office for an interim Council appointed by the governor be until the next regular election, rather than until the vacancies are filled by a special election and, after the special election for the new council to provide for a transition schedule to stagger the elections of the new council members to be in accordance with the requirements of Section 3.03 of the City's charter?

**Q3:** Should the language in Sec. 3.03 of the charter of Groveland be revised by removing language relating to special elections if the requirement for a special election is eliminated by other charter amendments?

For more information on the proposed charter amendments, please go to the city website at: [https://groveland-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5085/Ballot-Language\\_FV](https://groveland-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5085/Ballot-Language_FV)

## **Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey**

Groveland has started the development of a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This plan is being developed by Barth Associates, a nationally recognized parks planning and design firm. A key element in developing the plan is to engage the public to understand the need and priorities of the residents. This engagement is accomplished with a combination of public workshops, focus group meetings and surveys. Two types of surveys will be conducted: a statistically-representative mail survey, based on a random sample of City residents, followed by an on-line survey open to anyone. Your input is critical to the success of our master plan, so please participate in both the public workshops (dates to be announced) and the surveys.

## **Future Land Use**

One of my platforms has been the need for Groveland to adopt "smart growth" principles. Last year the city adopted a new logo and a catch phrase. Groveland is now known as the *City with Natural Charm*. On August 24, 2020, the city council passed a sweeping amendment to the city's Comprehensive Plan. This amendment totally revised the Future Land Use element of the plan for the city. This change is but the first of what will be many changes to the city's Comprehensive Plan as it completes the development of master plans for Parks and Recreation, Transportation, Public Works and Stormwater Management.

The goals of the Groveland's new Future Land Use Element of its Comprehensive Plan are:

**Smart and Sustainable Growth** - Ensure that the character and location of growth in Groveland complement existing neighborhoods; protect conservation lands and the City's natural and historic resources; attract a diversity of community types that allow for a mix of land use; focus development and redevelopment efforts at key nodes; encourage a range of mobility options; and promote orderly, compact development patterns.

**Agriculture and Economic Prosperity** - Support agriculture as vital to the City's economic prosperity, sustainability, and rural character.

**Conservation and Natural Charm** - Enhance the City's natural charm by protecting conservation lands and increasing resident access to recreation and open space.

**Community and Collaboration** - Foster a collaborative working environment that includes citizens and community partners.

The Future Land Use Element is also intended to advance the following principles:

**Conservation** - Retain over 50% of land within the City of Groveland/Lake County Interlocal Service Boundary Area (ISBA) as conservation and agricultural lands.

**Strategic Growth** - Identify areas for growth including planned development and targeted infill and redevelopment within close proximity to existing infrastructure.

**Complete Communities** - Foster the development of complete communities that allow residents to meet their daily needs within walking distance.

**Process Simplification** - Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective.

**Architectural Diversity** - Ensure that a variety of housing types and sizes can be developed to meet the needs of the entire community.

**Connectivity** - Connect all communities by providing a variety of safe and comfortable transportation options for residents and visitors including pedestrian and bicycle trails, transit, and vehicular roads.

**Economic Vitality** - Attract and retain industry and employment while minimizing barriers to entry.

**Natural Charm** - Celebrate a sense of natural charm by integrating nature into communities.

## Hydroponic Farm

In an effort to celebrate Groveland's history as an agrarian city and to increase local food options for its residents, Groveland entered into an agreement with Backyard Farm Express to develop the *City of Groveland Aquaponic Farm*. Aquaponics, the combination of Aquaculture and Hydroponics, involves an ecosystem-like indoor farm that raises both fish and vegetables in a symbiotic, soil-less system. The waste from the fish serves as nutrients for the plants, and in turn, the plants purify the water that cycles within the system.

The Farm can produce up to 14 tons of fresh, healthy food each year at full capacity. The City will market the *Farm* and farm products to its residents through social media platforms. Up to 50% of *Farm* products, based upon interest and demand, will be available at wholesale rates to the City or will be sold to a local charity or a non-profit organization of the City's choosing. Produce not designated for this purpose will be sold by Backyard Farm Express

to Groveland residents via the on-site farm stand and at one satellite location. All unsold farm products, or a minimum of two percent of the total annual yield, will be donated to local food pantries or food banks.

More information on aquaponic farms can be found online at:

<https://backyardfarmexpress.com/>

## **Advisory Groups**

Below is information on some of the advisory groups that the city has created or has currently chartered. I would encourage anyone who believes they have knowledge to impart or a desire to participate to make application to the city for positions within the groups in this newsletter. Then engage your district council member and inform them of your interest and, if applicable, your unique skill set.

Groveland looks to engage the knowledge of its residents through a variety of forums. Many are aware that they can make comments at city council meetings, raise issues and offer solutions to problems they see. The City also actively seeks to draw upon the diversity of its residents. This could be simple knowledge of an issue to understanding the lived experiences of individual residents in addressing issues. Below are some of the groups with which the City has enjoyed the participation of its residents.

### ***Planning and Zoning Board***

The City of Groveland Planning and Zoning Board consists of seven members, who reside in or work in the municipal boundaries of Groveland and are appointed by the city council. An additional member shall be a non-voting representative of the Lake County school district appointed by the Lake County School Board. The Board reviews and recommends to the city council approval, approval with conditions, or denial of land development plans or regulations. The planning and zoning board shall act in the capacity of the local planning agency as provided for in F.S. ch. 163, pt. II. More information on the Planning and Zoning Board can be found online at:

[https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOR\\_CH2AD\\_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG\\_DIV3PLZOBO](https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTIICOR_CH2AD_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG_DIV3PLZOBO)

As a note, until this board was formed about two years ago, the City Council served as the Local Planning Agency (LPA) and performed all the functions of the Planning and Zoning Board. The LPA would normally meet just before a council meeting and forward to the council for action during the council meeting. This process did not provide the level of review the city now enjoys through the Planning and Zoning Board.

### ***Retirement Advisory Committee***

The Retirement Advisory Committee has two residents as members, who are appointed by the city council. These residents must have financial, business or professional training

and experience in retirement benefits. Specific information on this committee can be found online at:

[https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodetid=PTIICOOR\\_CH2AD\\_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG\\_DIV4READCO](https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodetid=PTIICOOR_CH2AD_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG_DIV4READCO)

### ***Charter Review Committee***

From time to time, Groveland creates a Charter Review Advisory Committee. The last one was chartered in 2018. This committee is tasked with making recommendations to the city council of any charter amendments the Committee believes would strengthen or otherwise improve on the City's charter. The Committee is normally comprised of seven members, with one resident from each of the four council districts and the remaining members coming from the city at large.

### ***Auditor Selection Committee***

Groveland elected to change its financial audit company after the audit of the 2017-2018 fiscal year. This Auditor Selection Committee was comprised of one council member two members of the public, who had prior experience in financial auditing. City staff served as advisors to the committee. The results of the work of this committee led to the city entering into a contract with Carr, Riggs and Ingram CPAs and Advisors. A copy of the audit reports, including for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019 can be found on the city website at: <https://www.groveland-fl.gov/142/Finance>.

### ***Recreation Advisory Committee***

The Recreation Advisory Committee (RAC) consists of not less than seven members nor more than nine members. Members include a representative from the Lake County School District, one resident from each of the four council districts, three members coming from city residents at large, and one at-large member who is not required to be a resident. This Committee serves to advise the council and City Manager on matters pertaining to public relations, parklands and related facilities. They also advise on matters pertaining to art, literature, music, theatre and other related activities. More information on the RAC can be found online at:

[https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code\\_of\\_ordinances?nodetid=PTIICOOR\\_CH2AD\\_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG\\_DIV2READCO](https://library.municode.com/fl/groveland/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodetid=PTIICOOR_CH2AD_ARTVIBOCOCOAUAG_DIV2READCO) (NOTE: This ordinance was amended on June 15, 2020 and may not yet be updated at this site. The major change deals with membership and terms of that membership. Duties and responsibilities did not change.)

## **Public Safety Building**

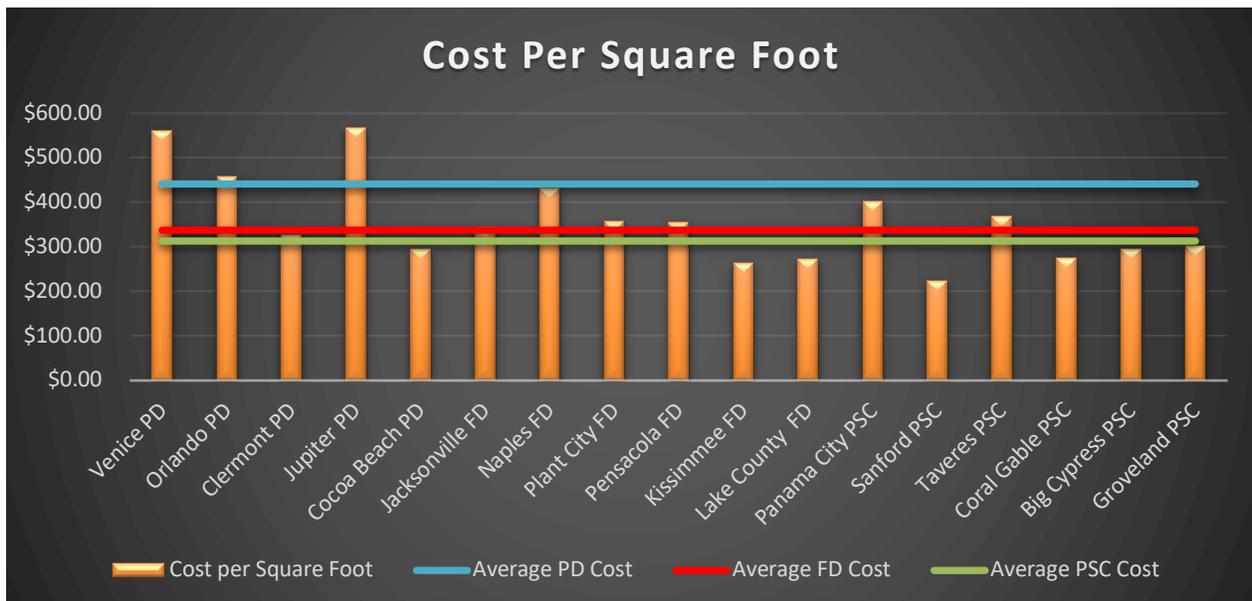
Our Public Safety Complex is currently under construction and nearing completion. If you have not seen it, the building is located on SR 50 just to the east of Tractor Supply. The complex is 35,000 sq. ft. in size and our current construction estimate is \$10.1 million in

total. This structure was designed to handle the growing needs of both our police and fire departments for 20+ years. This will allow Groveland to have a resource that will serve not only its current population of approximately 18,255 residents, but its forecast population in 2040 of nearly 49,000 residents. At present, the city expects to have a ribbon cutting in the Spring of 2021.

There has been a lot of talk about Groveland’s financing of this project, of spending too much money on it and that it is over budget. When the building was originally planned and talked about with the City Council, it was developed as a building that would meet the present needs of the police and fire departments. The estimated price for that was approximately \$5.0 million. As the council considered the future needs of the city, they expanded the size of the building to meet the needs for the Public Safety departments within the city and the revised estimate to build the facility came in close to \$10.1 million. Of this \$10.1 million, the original loan of \$4.5 million has been supplemented by impact fees and discretionary funds.

Additionally, the Community Development Department will rent space in the building for the next few years, until the space is needed by the police and fire as they expand their ranks. The ability to use this space will prevent the city from having to find and lease additional space to house that department.

Below is a chart comparing our public safety complex (PSC) to various other projects based on their size and cost for an unfinished building. These charts are not an exhaustive comparison of exact requirements; however, they do demonstrate our building’s size and cost are comparable to other cities.



Overall the cost of our Public Safety Complex in total and cost per square foot are within the range of costs of other jurisdictions. Additionally, this project will set-up our public safety departments for the coming decades and assist the Police Department in its efforts to become and accredited agency.

## City Financial Update

With all the issues being raised by the COVID pandemic and the talk of lost revenues, it seems this may be a good time to look at the City's financial picture. This is especially true as there has been a variety of information being put out, especially on social media regarding the financial picture of Groveland, its budget and the ad-valorem tax rates. Below are some facts and supporting information on those topics.

### ***Overall Financial Position***

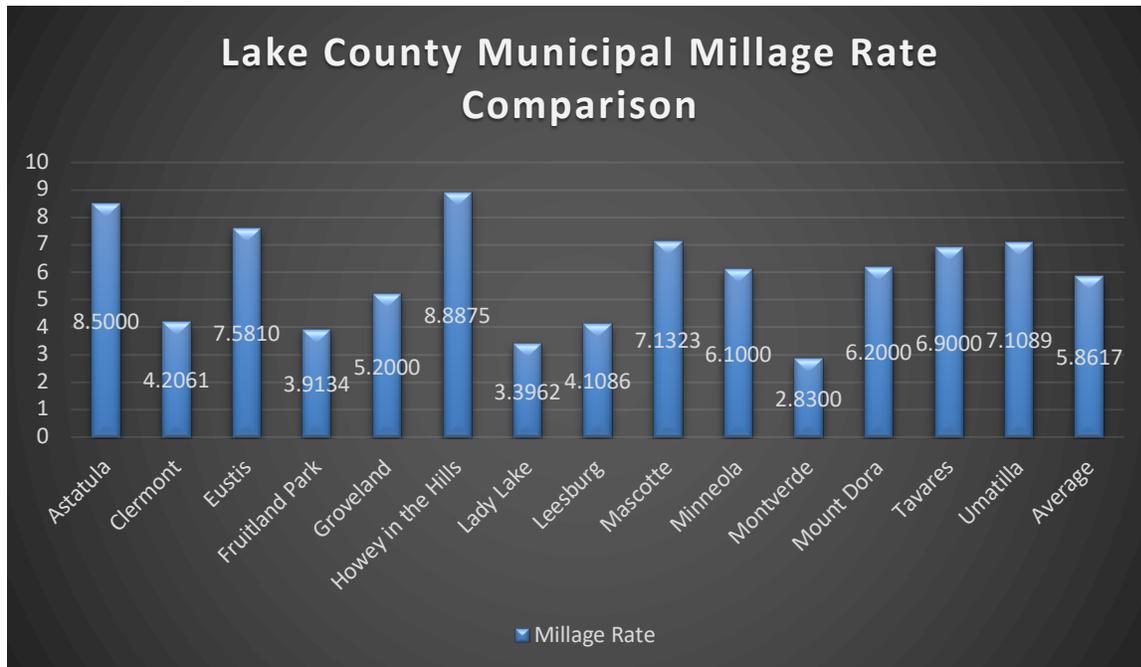
This year the City, with the recommendation from an Audit Selection Committee of mostly citizens, engaged a new auditing firm; Carr, Riggs and Ingram (CRI). During the audit, CRI did an in depth review of all processes and procedures in the City which is typical of a first year audit. Some highlights of the audit include the following:

- The assets of the City exceed its liabilities at the close of the most recent fiscal year by \$71,614,753 (net position). Of this amount, \$9,451,575 (unrestricted net position) may be used to meet the City's ongoing obligations to citizens and creditors.
- The government's total net position increased by \$3,509,138 or 5.2%.
- At the close of the current fiscal year, the City's governmental funds reported combined ending fund balances of \$23,654,490, an increase of \$4,927,955 in comparison to the prior year.
- At the end of the current fiscal year, unrestricted fund balance (the total of the committed, assigned, and unassigned components of fund balance) for the general fund was \$2,283,788 or approximately 17.5% of total general fund expenditures.
- The City's total outstanding long-term debt, not including compensated absences and other post-employment benefits, decreased by \$1,412,148 during the current fiscal year.
- As of September 30, 2019, the City was able to report positive balances in all reported categories of net position, both for the government as a whole, as well as for its separate governmental and business-type activities. The same situation held true for the prior fiscal year.

### ***Millage Rate***

One of the most prominent revenue streams for Groveland is its ad valorem tax revenues. These revenues are based on the appraised values as certified by the Lake County Property Appraiser's Office. There was no increase in the City's millage rate this year. It remains at 5.2. In fact, the City's millage rate has been consistent since 2017 and was only lower in 2010. The rate was raised in 2011 and again in 2014, reaching it highest rate of 5.99. In 2016 the rate was reduced to 5.6 and in 2017 to 5.2, where it remains today.

The City also been compared to its Lake County neighbors, with various postings indicating how much higher Groveland’s rate is compared to other cities around it. Below is a chart of the proposed 2020 millage rates of the Lake County municipalities.

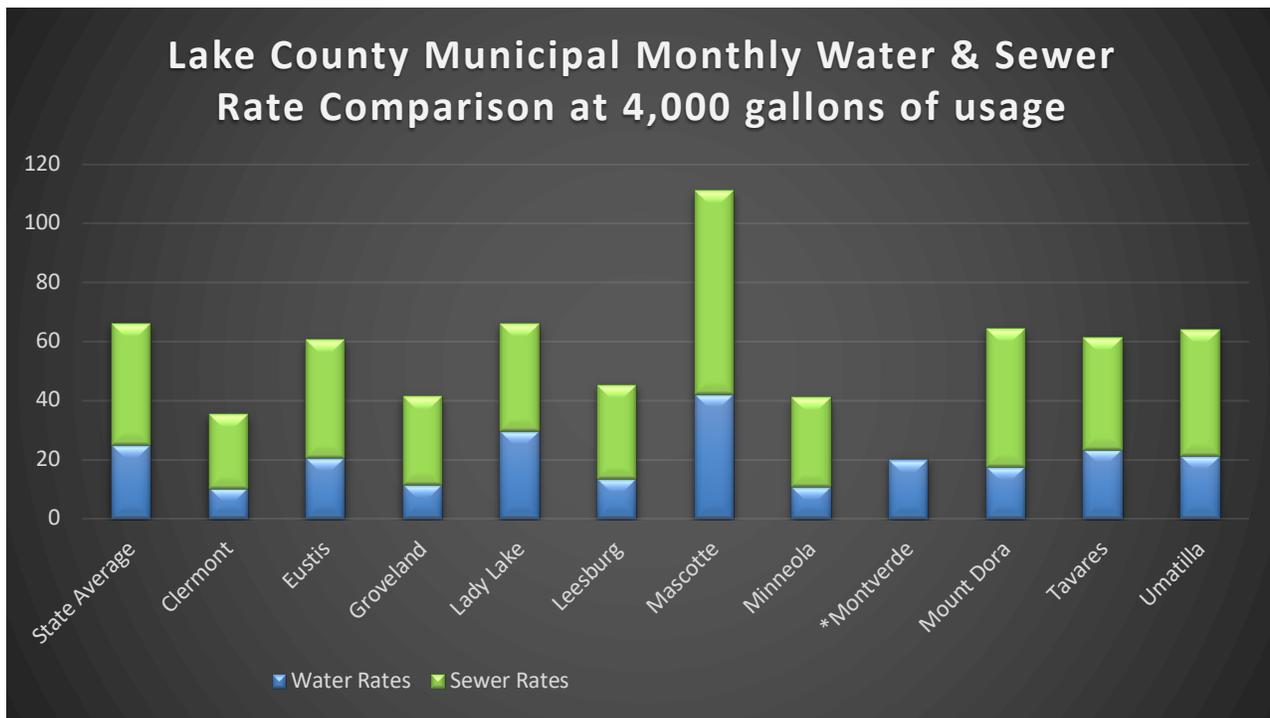


As the graph above shows, Groveland’s millage rate is below the average of Lake County municipalities and only 5 of the 14 municipalities have a millage rate lower than the City and most of those have a large commercial business community.

**Utility Rates & Operations**

Another area which has been discussed in various areas is how does Groveland’s water, sewer and reclaimed utility rates compare to other jurisdictions. Below is a graph of the rates as published by Raftelis Financial Consultants, Inc, an independent financial company who has focuses in rate, charge and fee studies across the United States, for 2020, which can be found at the following web address: <http://www.raftelis.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/2020-Florida-Water-and-Wastewater-Rate-Survey.pdf>

As the graph below shows, the City’s rates for water and sewer are comparable to most of its neighbors, with only Clermont, Minneola and Montverde having lower rates than Groveland.



A noteworthy point is that this year is the first in many years where the Water & Sewer Utility fund is budgeted to be self-sufficient, with no subsidy being provided from any general fund or discretionary revenues. At one time, Groveland was using approximately \$1.2 million per year to subsidize water rates. This put a burden on the city residents and provided subsidized water and sewer to users outside the municipal boundaries. The City was able to close this shortfall with the rate increase last year and better operational management through our partnership with Woodard & Curran.

### ***FY-21 Budget***

There has been a lot of talk about the budget not being prepared in a transparent manner and how hard it is to find information regarding the budget. Groveland, in accordance with state law, develops its budget in an open forum, with public workshops. These workshops are publically noticed, just as are the council meetings. This year, the City had public workshops dealing with the budget on July 2<sup>nd</sup> and a second one on July 10<sup>th</sup>.

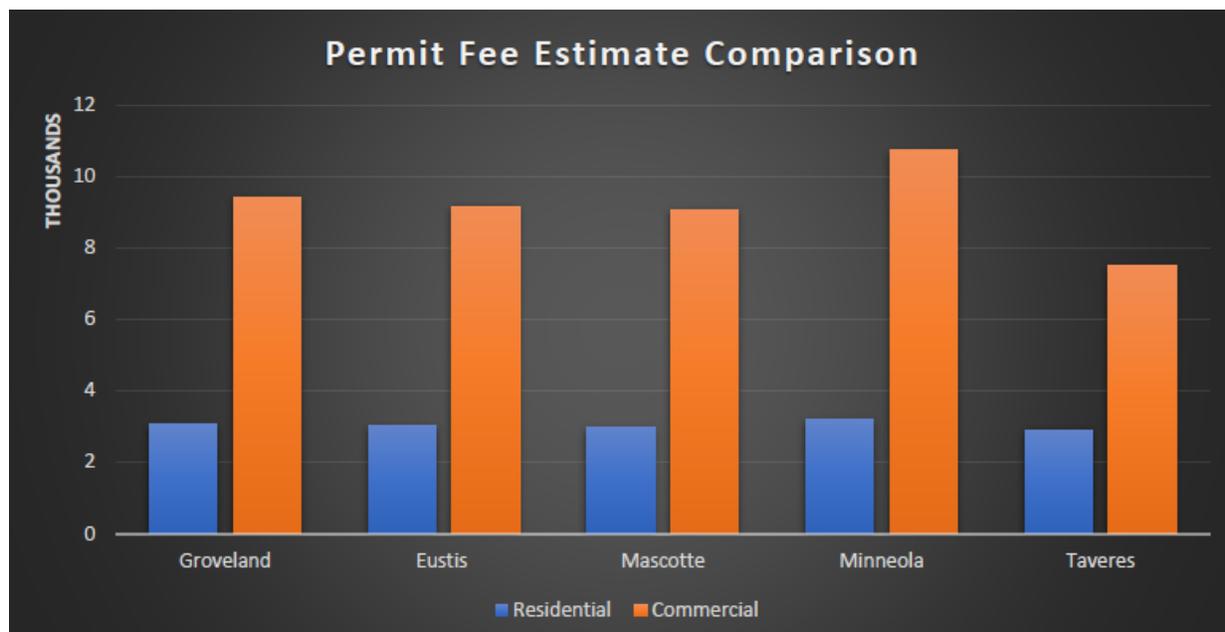
The City Council held its first Public Budget Hearing on September 8<sup>th</sup> and the Final Public Budget Hearing and budget adoption is scheduled for September 21<sup>st</sup>. For those seeking a copy of the final proposed budget, you can find a draft on the city website at: <https://groveland-fl.gov/DocumentCenter/View/5070/Fiscal-Year-2020-to-2021-Proposed-Budget-PDF>. Copies of previous years are also available on the city website at: <https://www.groveland-fl.gov/142/Finance>.

## Building Inspection Services

It seems that in most every election cycle the issue of Groveland using an outside company to provide services to enforce the Florida Building Code is raised. While it is true that some cities have elected to do their building code inspections in-house, Groveland is not unique in its utilization of an outside company. In fact, a number of our neighbors such as Minneola, Mascotte, Montverde and Lady Lake also utilize an outside agency.

One of the concerns raised in using an outside building inspection service is the amount of money paid to that outside organization versus electing to have the services done by a city employee. The inspectors are paid by a city's building fund, which is financed by permitting fees charged by the city. In the case of a city employee, one would have the salary, benefits, and overhead expenses. With an outside agency, the city normally pays a percentage of the fee charged to the permit applicant for that job. Additionally, the use of a private company provides greater flexibility to the city to ramp up to increasing demands for services or to scale back if development activities fall off.

As the outside contractor receives a percentage of the permitting fees collected by the city, it would be good to see if Groveland is charging significantly more for its permits than other municipalities in Lake County. While the below chart is not all inclusive, it does include cities that do in house as well as cities that use an outside agency.



As can be seen in the above graph, the City of Groveland is charging similar amounts as other cities and has costs similar to cities for both internal and external departments.

Some may wonder why Clermont is not on the chart. In developing this data, it was found that Clermont uses a process that is based on the square footage of the development instead of valuation of the property to determine their costs for building permits. Leesburg does use a process similar to the other cities noted above, but is currently discounting its fees in order to reduce the amount of surplus it has in its Building Fund. As you may remember, Groveland elected to provide a refund to the citizens of the Building Fund excess. Additionally, the City took steps to revise its rate structure and is looking to revising it again in the near future.

In the end, it is what model provides the best value to the citizens of the city. To date, Groveland has found that using a contracted inspection service provides the best value. As the city continues to move forward and grow, there will be continuing assessments of whether this model remains the best value to the city or if some other model provide greater value.

### **City Leadership Team**

The city has greatly changed in the past few years. Many of the issues that plagued the city have been addressed and others are being addressed. The key to all the positive changes is a direct result of the change in the senior leadership within the city. I am extremely proud of the leadership team the city has assembled and know that it has the skills and drive to take the city forward and make it a model for other small cities. Below are the names and a brief bio on the city's senior leadership.

**City Manager** – The City hired Mr. Michael Hein in April of 2018 to serve as its city manager. Mr. Hein came to the city with over 25 years of experience, including four years as the City Manager for the City of Tucson, AZ. The benefits of his knowledge and understanding have allowed the city to move forward in a very positive and constructive manner.

**City Clerk** – Ms. Virginia Wright came to Groveland from the City of Brooksville. She is certified by the International Institute of Municipal Clerks as a Certified Municipal Clerk. She is also a member of the Florida Association of City Clerks.

**Fire Chief** – The city recently hired Chief Kevin Carroll for the position of Fire Chief, replacing Chief Morgan, who is retiring after 42 years. Chief Carroll brings over 25 years of experience and came to the city from his position as Deputy Chief for Hernando County, Florida, where he was responsible for managing 272 employees and 14 fire stations.

**Police Chief** – Chief Shawn Ramsey came to the city in March of 2017. He is a strong proponent of Community Policing and brings over 25 years of law enforcement experience. Prior to taking on the role of Chief of Police for Groveland he was a Deputy with the Lee County Sherriff's Office, in Florida.

**Human Resources** – Deo Persaud brings over 15 years of HR experience to the city. He came to the city from the Lake County EMS, where he was the Chief Human Resource Officer.

**Community Development** – Tim Maslow joined the city in April 2019. When he came to the city he was serving as Chief Planner for Orange County, Florida and served on the Sustainability and Smart Growth Task Force. Prior to that position, Mr. Maslow was the Sustainability Manager for the City of Winter Park. He brings over 14 years of experience in community development and smart growth practices.

**Parks and Recreation** – Mike Walker brings over fifteen years of experience as a municipal parks, facilities and recreation professional. He came to the city from the City of Brooksville, where he served as the Director of Parks, Facilities and Recreation. Mr. Walker was a professional baseball player from 1986-1999 and was a small business owner of a sports retail store. He is a certified by the National Recreation and Park Association as a Certified Park and Recreation Professional.

**Transportation and Public Works** – T. J. Fish comes to the city of Groveland having served for over 15 years as the Executive Director of the Lake-Sumter Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). As an urban and regional planner, certified by the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), his duties included the coordination of regional transportation planning for two counties and 19 municipalities in the Lake-Sumter region.

**Finance Director** – John Ter Louw brings over 12 years of Public Accounting Experience to the city. He came to the city from the Georgia Municipal Association where he was the Director of Budget and Financial Reporting, managing \$2.5 billion in assets with annual expenses of about \$200 million.. Prior to that he worked for the State of Florida. He is a member of the Government Finance Officers Association, Florida Government Finance Officers Association.

**Procurement Manager** - Christine Coghill is an accomplished procurement professional with over 16 years of experience. Ms. Coghill has held several managerial positions with various organizations. Most recently she was with the Town of Longboat Key, where she managed requests for proposals and bids. She is a Certified Public Procurement Officer (CPPO) and a Certified Professional Public Buyer (CPPB)

## Farmers Market

The city is scheduled to host a Farmer's Market on the second Friday of each month from Friday, October 9, 2020 through Friday, March 12, 2021 at Lake David Park in downtown Groveland. The market will run from 5:00pm till 9:00pm. In addition to fresh produce from local farms, there will be home-made crafts, live music and food trucks.

## Hurricane Preparedness

The Atlantic Hurricane Season runs from June 1 to November 30. Already this season we have had a number of named storms and recently Hurricane Laura, a Category 4 storm, came ashore at Cameron, Louisiana. The damage caused by Laura will leave that area without power and water likely for weeks. Here in Florida, the recommendation is to have a seven (7) days of supplies. It is never too late to make your preparations and, if you have not done so, now is the time to prepare your home for a hurricane. You can find all the information you need to guide your preparedness online at:

<https://www.floridadisaster.org/planprepare/preparing-for-the-2019-hurricane-season/>

## Got a Question?

While this newsletter comes out multiple times during the year and I try to pass on information that I believe most residents would find of interest, I also realize I may not be answering all your questions. If you have a question on something going on in the city, please feel free to email it to me at [mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov](mailto:mike.smith@groveland-fl.gov). I will not only answer it for you in an email, but I will also consider adding your issue to a future edition of the newsletter.

## Subscribe

If you would like to receive future copies of this newsletter, please subscribe for notifications by going to the Notify Me page on the city website at <http://groveland-fl.gov/list.aspx>. When you get to the website, enter your email address in the box and click "Sign In". Next click the envelope icon next to Councilman Smith's Newsletter. You will get a verification email and then a confirmation email after you have subscribed. Once subscribed you will get notification any new newsletters or news bulletins I post. The current and past newsletters are also available online at <http://groveland-fl.gov/468/Councilman-Smiths-Newsletter>.

**Thank you for your interest in the city**

Newsletter Vol.2, Issue No.3

This newsletter was created by G. L. Coleman