

COLIN BAENZIGER & ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Section 14

Terry K. Suggs

*Islamorada Village Manager
Candidate Report*

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Cover Letter and Resume

TERRY K. SUGGS

133 Walton Road, East Palatka, FL 32131

Home: 352-283-4605

Email: teke00@msn.com

Credentialed Manager with a Master of Public Administration degree and more than twenty years of demonstrated progressive municipal experience with increasing levels of reputation, responsibility, and leadership combined with successful and consistent organizational development, excellent communication skills, and the ability to engage and build trusting relationships with staff, council, and community.

RELEVANT LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPERIENCE

Financial Management	Personnel Management	Growth Management
Strategic Planning	Public Policy	Education/Training
Economic Development	Infrastructure and Utilities	Enterprise Funds
Municipal Airport	Municipal Golf Course	Special Events

RELEVANT WORK HISTORY

**Putnam County Administrator
Putnam County, Florida**

September 2017 – Present

County Administrator responsible for general government, budget, capital improvements, public safety (fire, rescue, and emergency management), public works (roads, bridges, utilities, and fleet), enterprise funds (solid waste, water, and wastewater), economic and tourist development.

Major Accomplishments

Administrative:

- Restructured twenty-two general government offices into six departments/divisions
- Increased general fund unrestricted reserves from \$4.9M to \$18.6M
- Decreased millage rate and solid waste rate
- Provided consecutive salary increases for first time in 12 years
- Developed first county-wide comprehensive strategic plan

Economic Development:

- Established development project team to assist developers and contractors

- Seminole Power \$900M transformation from coal to natural gas
- Georgia Pacific \$500M upgrade to paper producing facility
- Comarco Production \$10M food processing facility relocated from New Jersey
- Public Safety \$1.6M fire station and 911 communication equipment upgrades
- Army Corps of Engineers assisting with securing funding for dredging plan within Barge Port of Putnam County to promote marine related businesses
- Secured inclusion of Putnam County Comprehensive Water Supply Infrastructure Modernization Project under the 2007 Water Resource Development Act

Enterprise Funds

- Increased solid waste fund more than \$2M annually with additional disposal contracts
- Secured \$3M in grants from St Johns Water Management District to install water and wastewater infrastructure to increase customer base transitioning from well and septic to public utilities

Special Events:

- Bass Master Elite Tournament televised on ESPN
- Wolfson Children's Hospital Fishing Tournament (30 years) 400 vessels

**Palatka City Manager
Putnam County, Florida**

July 2015 – September 2017

City Manager responsible for general government, budget, capital improvements, public safety (police and fire) public works (roads, utilities, and fleet), enterprise funds (garbage, water, wastewater, and gas distribution), economic development and community redevelopment agency.

Major Accomplishments

Administrative:

- Implemented city-wide fire assessment fee
- Reduced millage rate from 9.1749 mills to 6.4000 mills
- Improved bond rating from A- to A+
- Conducted national search that led to the successful appointment Police Chief
- City Police Department received Reaccreditation in 2017

Economic Impact:

- Development projects valued at \$35 million in Public, Private, and Redevelopment Projects
- Municipal Airport projects totaling \$5.8 million funded through FAA/FDOT grants
- City of Palatka Fire Department maintained ISO Rating 2

Special Events:

- Annual Blue Crab Festival (4-day event)

- July 4th, Veterans Day, Halloween, and Christmas Parade and Fireworks
- Azalea Amateur and Senior Golf Tournament
- Palatka Municipal Airport a Fly-In and Antique Car Show

**Keystone Heights City Manager
Clay County, Florida**

September 2011 – June 2015

City Manager responsible for general government, public works, economic environment and culture and recreation, municipal airport, special events, municipal elections, and community redevelopment agency.

Major Accomplishments

Administrative:

- Conducted three municipal elections
- Developed comprehensive strategic plan
- Implemented street preservation plan to extend the life of roadway network by an additional 20 years and saved an estimated \$11M
- Secured Community Development Block Grant
- Secured Florida Recreational Development Assistance Program
- Secured municipal airport grants from Florida Department of Transportation and Florida Aviation Administration

Special Events:

- Wreathes Across America
- Movies in the Park
- Annual July 4th, Halloween, and Christmas Festivals

**Public Works Operations Supervisor
Alachua County, Florida**

May 2005 – September 2011

Public Works Supervisor responsible for the management of enterprise fund for multiple environmental solid waste facilities, collection and disposal solid waste, budget, and public/private contracts.

Major Accomplishments

Administrative:

- Turned program around from an initial budget deficit to a reserve fund balance of more than \$1M
- Implemented a fee-based user permit designed to allow neighboring county residents to participate in program
- Reduced county resident user fee rate 36% following implementation of neighboring county program

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- Awarded designation of Transfer Station Manager from Solid Waste Association of North America

**Zoning Inspector and Waste Inspector
Alachua County, Florida**

October 1997 – May 2005

Inspector responsible for interpretation and enforcement of land development and solid waste environmental code.

Major Accomplishments:

Administrative:

- Received Police Service Award for work in blighted neighborhoods
- Served as Board President of Florida Association of Code Enforcement
- Served on the Board of Directors of Recycle Florida Today

Education

- Master of Public Administration, Barry University: 2013
- Bachelor of Science Public Administration, Barry University: 2011
- Certified Public Manager, Florida State University: 2010

Professional and Civic Organizations

- International City/County Management Association - Credentialed Manager
- Florida City/County Management Association
- Rotary International - Past President
- Kiwanis International

Candidate Introduction

Terry K. Suggs

EDUCATION

Master of Public Administration, Barry University
Bachelor of Public Administration, Barry University
Certified Public Manager, Florida State University

EXPERIENCE

County Administrator, Putnam County, FL	2017 – Present
City Manager, Palatka, Putnam County, FL	2015 – 2017
City Manager, Keystone Heights, Clay County, FL	2011 – 2015
County Public Works Operations Supervisor, Alachua County, FL	2005 – 2011
County Zoning Inspector/Waste Inspector, Alachua County, FL	1997 – 2005

BACKGROUND

Putnam County is an active and diverse community on the St. Johns River with a population of 73,723. The three main industries in Putnam County are eco-tourism, manufacturing, and agriculture. Putnam County is a popular angler’s destination given our natural resources including the St. Johns River, its many tributaries, and lakes. We host many well-attended bass fishing tournaments, including hosting the ESPN Bass Master Elite Tour. Anglers routinely fill our hotels and restaurants, while our riverfront is crowded with spectators, families fishing, and shrimpers along municipal marina piers. Georgia Pacific Corporation is our largest employer in Putnam County and is one of the world’s leading manufacturers of household paper products and building materials. Georgia Pacific employs 800 people locally. And much of the area in the more rural parts of the county are agricultural with everything from livestock to cabbage and potatoes to ferneries.

Putnam County’s General Fund budget is \$160 million comprised of a \$68 million Operating Budget and a \$32 million Capital Budget. In 2002 and 2015 voters approved a one cent sales tax to fund the Better Place Plan. These sales tax currently generates \$6 million annually designated for road projects, debt service, and purchase of equipment. The county has 690 employees of which 311 work under the supervision five departmental executive directors reporting directly to the county administrator.

THE THREE MOST SIGNIFICANT ISSUES FACING PUTNAM COUNTY ARE

- Hurricane Preparedness/Recovery Cost. Putnam County is considered a coastal community due to storm surge from the St. Johns River during hurricane activity and the county’s proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. Hurricane Irma caused significant flooding and

Terry K. Suggs

property damage resulting in FEMA reimbursement of more than \$6 million.

- High Millage Rate. Although the millage rate has been lowered from nearly 10.0000 mills to 9.4404 mills during my tenure, the county needs alternative funding sources to further reduce the millage rate. Reducing the millage rate is a defined goal and objective in the newly adopted strategic plan.
- Bridge Repairs. The county has more than 20 bridges over outlying tributaries that will require upgrades and maintenance due to scouring. The county is currently performing maintenance on two bridges at a cost of more than \$6 million, and we are working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for alternative funding sources.

GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE

I have applied for the position of Village Manager after having worked in both city and county government. I find my passion for public service more closely aligns with that of city management. Given their scale engagement, city council members can more effectively evaluate and establish goals for home rule and meeting the needs of their immediate community. I began my role as a city manager in 2011 after a long career in municipal government. As my experience has grown, I have stepped into roles with greater responsibility in each of my appointments as manager. It is my goal to now step into a role that my experience merits. I wish to stay within Florida as I have lived here my entire life, and I welcome this opportunity and would enjoy working in a community where I have family and friends, that presents outdoor activities my family enjoys, and where I can engage in local organizations and activities.

My management style is one of inclusiveness, team approach and ownership. I am an extrovert who thrives in engagement with my council members, staff and citizens alike, and personally enjoy direct contact to engage and build trusting relationships. I believe in empowering those in leadership to make the day-to-day operational decisions to provide outstanding customer service to our community, while also accepting the responsibility for those decisions. I believe in nurturing the growth and development of employees to create viable continuity. I lead by example because the most effective manager is one that is willing to get his hands dirty alongside those that he or she serves. I have helped move fallen trees off roadways, waded through storm water during hurricanes to assist with the rescue of nursing home patients in a flooding facility, and have walked the streets of my community searching out those in need following critical storms. I have spent many Saturday mornings walking through blighted neighborhoods picking up trash in organized neighborhood cleanup efforts.

My current staff is my greatest asset. They would say that I treat each employee with respect and equal fairness. They would communicate that I have created a positive culture within the organization and an environment favorable to success through empowerment rather than one of micro-managing. They enjoy the open-door concept I maintain and say that it promotes collaboration and unity when seeking solutions to pending concerns. I have encouraged them and lead by example in working together to combine talents and experience. Several employees

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followed me from my prior appointments because they enjoyed working with me and appreciated my commitment to their growth and development. Recognizing talent and skill sets in existing staff members has allowed me to successfully reorganize 22 departments into 5 major areas of responsibility. This has effectively streamlined communication and improved internal and external customer service.

Most of my elected officials will say I am a committed manager who is available 24/7, willing to meet with individuals, and groups alike, to discuss their needs and concerns. I have brought about a welcomed change of culture in our county offices. They will say I am a manager who leads by example and exhibits professionalism. They will express that we as a team exhibit hard work, a focus on customer service and results, and that my tenure here has brought celebrated success financially and culturally.

There is one commissioner who will no doubt respond negatively, and I have learned to anticipate this and move forward. I have tried to improve this relationship, but it is not in his interest as his goal is simply change and challenge whether warranted or not.

I believe that one my greatest strengths is my commitment to goals and expectations. I enjoy my cordial engagement with council members, employees, and the community at large. I operate with transparency and accuracy. I believe in positive management and coaching, valuing the employee and developing them as assets to the organization. I am trustworthy and fair. I enjoy community engagement and involvement with my team. I am at ease communicating with government officials, lobbyists and representatives whether it be local, state, or federal issues from my hometown to Washington, D.C.

A weakness is that I am not a huge risk taker. I understand that there are times when a quick, shoot from the hip decision is needed, and I will absolutely take ownership and make that decision. However, I prefer to limit the city's exposure to risk at all times and will utilize a risk versus reward concept of decision-making.

Prior to, and since, becoming a manager, I have viewed strategic planning as the barometer to which organizational performance is measured in the public sector. My capstone for my Master's Degree in Public Administration was titled "Organizations: Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail." Another important factor I have learned is that all organizations need to discourage what is commonly referred to as "silo thinking." It takes a focused team approach to find the right solutions to meet the greatest and most widespread community needs and manage assets. I value each employee and share in their successes, accomplishments, and professional development.

In my last two manager positions I inherited budgets funded with high millage rates and with extremely low general fund reserves. During my tenure with the City of Palatka, I increased reserves from 9% to 16% and reduced millage rate from 9.1749 mills to 6.4000 mills and improved the bond rating from A- to A+. It was this success that brought encouragement from community leaders to apply for the appointment of county administrator. Since my appointment

Terry K. Suggs

as county administrator, I have increased reserves from \$4.9 million to \$18.6 million. This has taken place without layoffs or diminished services to the community.

I perceive the inability to overcome the doubt and criticisms of the one commissioner I mentioned above as a personal failure. I do not expect to be close personal friends with every commissioner, but I do expect professional respect and courtesies, and require that of my staff when it comes to interactions with our commission members. I have learned that I must set aside abrasive communications and criticisms of myself and/or staff and continue to direct my team to fulfillment of the expectations of the commission, without exception. Although his approach can be unsettling for some, he often brings well thought out ideas to the team. I have had to learn to get past the delivery and hear the idea, and then work with staff to put his ideas into action when they align with the commission as a whole.

As a manager I have had to make difficult decisions regarding termination of employment. Terminating employees is a function of the job that is best handled with dignity and respect. I always attempt to manage to performance if it a performance issue. If it is a violation of employment terms, policies, or a criminal act, I work quickly to gather the facts, engage HR to ensure protocol is adhered to, and all documentation is in place should there be inquiries going forward. Even in the worst of circumstances my goal is to remain professional, protect the municipality and other employees, and to be fair and transparent in decisioning.

CHALLENGES I SEE FACING THE NEXT VILLAGE MANAGER

- Developing long terms plans to address:
 - affordable housing availability
 - returning support and services staff to the area that were lost or displaced during COVID-19 closures
 - attracting viable business opportunities that are sustainable and environmentally safe
- The intricacies of this locale and its vulnerable environment:
 - sea level rise and flood risks
 - completion of canal cleaning and long-term care
 - pending 2023 building permit moratorium
- Traffic flow issues and threats:
 - the single ingress/egress with the Overseas Highway posing delays of emergency services during high traffic periods,
 - the height of the drawbridge over Snake Creek stopping traffic for high profile boats to pass
 - continually updating evacuation plans with county and state agencies

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DURING MY FIRST SIX MONTHS MY EFFORTS WOULD INVOLVE

- Establish communication with Village Council and discuss goals, visions, and objectives
- Meet with staff and become familiar their roles, tasks, and duties
- Schedule meet and greet meetings with community members, local and state officials
- Review existing projects for funding needs and timelines to prioritize resources
- Shop for new home

Establishing a mutually respectful relationship with the local media is imperative, especially in a small community where news travels fast. I have found during my management career that one can build a positive rapport with the local media by simply returning calls and taking time to form a meaningful response. Working with the media for the purpose of informing the public of an issue, or more importantly a solution, will build community trust. My goal in media relations is to maximize positive coverage and to always bring forth the truth. I always take the time during responses to ensure that a reporter understands the topic, the role and limitations of the municipality, and what can and cannot be done from within the legal confines of local government.

With the advent of social media and 24/7 access to breaking news and critical incidents, Public Information Officers play a critical role in communicating with the community. As County Administrator, I implemented the first Public Information Office in Putnam County. With creation of this role, we have had the opportunity to get to know community members and the media in greater depth. It has afforded us an avenue for building stronger relationships and better serving our public, as well as assisting commissioners with a current snapshot of the public's perception, clarifying misinformation. Social media has connected local government and community during the COVID-19 pandemic and has become a go-to for locals to gather information on this and other topics.

While I do not anticipate anyone contacting the Villages of Islamorada once my name surfaces as a potential candidate, I can proudly say there is no "dirt" on me. I have known for many years that you cannot please everyone, and that personal feelings are sometimes hurt when outcomes do not align with individual goals. I work for the council as a whole and my goal has always been to fulfill and implement their objectives despite personal opinions on my part or on the behalf of community activists.

In our downtime, my wife, Julie and I love the sun and water. We currently live on the St. Johns River and enjoy boating and fishing. Our community is adjacent to St. Augustine, so we spend a good deal of time at or around the beach and ocean. Our family vacations are spent exploring beaches locally and abroad. I have family on Big Pine Key, so we have spent many long weekends and vacations snorkeling, fishing and lobstering. We enjoy cooking and dining with friends and neighbors. We are also involved in several non-profit and community organizations serving as members, on the board of directors, and in general support.

Terry K. Suggs

SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES TO DESCRIBE MYSELF

- Approachable
- Effective
- Ethical
- Friendly
- Loyal
- Professional

REASON FOR DEPARTING CURRENT POSITION

I have accomplished a great deal of success since my appointment as County Administrator nearly four years ago and have a viable succession plan in place. I have also met many of my personal goals and those of the commission in improving the financial situation of this county which was much like that of the City of Palatka before my appointment there. I truly miss city government and the challenges in this role that allow me to be more deeply engaged at a personal level in the day-to-day activities of my community. I would welcome a return to city management and know that is where my talents and experiences are best utilized. I also seek to find a community where I plan to stay for many years and that will bring mutual benefit by putting my talents to work and being my home. I view this opportunity in the Villages of Islamorada as a long-term opportunity to settle in and be part of a community that I serve in and for. I have not been asked or told to leave and will not until I find a position that is worth making a move for reasons of being closer to family and friends, but also where my talents and skills align with the needs of the community.

CURRENT/MOST RECENT OR RELEVANT SALARY

Current salary is \$143,942.

Section 14

CB&A Background Checks

**Background Check Summary for
TERRY K. SUGGS**

Criminal Records Checks:

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Record Found
County	
Putnam County, FL	No Record Found
Clay County, FL	No Record Found
Alachua County, FL	No Record Found
State	
Florida	No Record Found

Civil Records Checks:

County	
Putnam County, FL	No Record Found
Clay County, FL	May 2012 – County Civil Monetary Lawsuit filed against Mr. Suggs Disposition: August 2012 , Closed
	<i>*See Next Page for Candidate Explanation for Records Found</i>
Alachua County, FL	No Record Found
Federal	
Florida	No Record Found

Motor Vehicle	
Florida	No Record Found

Credit	Excellent
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Bankruptcy	No Record Found
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Education	Confirmed
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Employment	Confirmed
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Social Media	Nothing of Concern Found
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**Background Check Summary for
TERRY K. SUGGS**

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

From: TERRY SUGGS [mailto:teke00@msn.com]
To: Lynelle Klein
Cc: TERRY SUGGS
Subject: RE: Background Check Records Found that Require an Explanation

Ms. Klein,

In response to The American Database Report:

The civil matter surfaced during a difficult time. I was in the process of a divorce when the pending civil notice was presented to me. I immediately cashed out a small retirement fund, with great penalty, to correct this matter prior to established court date. In fact, all combined marital debt was assumed by me after the divorce much to my attorney's dismay. I am proud of this decision and with much discipline I have paid off every creditor to date. I am current and have no derogatory comments that I am aware of in my individual credit report today.

Respectfully,

Terry Suggs

**Background Check Summary for
TERRY K. SUGGS
Personal Disclosure**

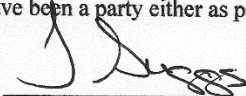
Personal Disclosure Questionnaire

Name of Applicant: TERRY SUGGS

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

- 1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?
Yes No
- 2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?
Yes No
- 3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?
Yes No
- 4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
- 5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?
Yes No
- 6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated?
Yes No
- 7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?
Yes No
- 8. Please list all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one. FACEBOOK
- 9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?
Yes No
- 10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.

Attested to: 
Signature of Applicant

Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to Lynelle@cb-asso.com or via fax to (561) 621-5965 *no later than 5:00 PM PST 04/19/2021.*
(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)

**Background Check Summary for
TERRY K. SUGGS
Personal Disclosure Explanation**

Explanation of question #5

The following information is contained within the final investigative report conducted by Marks Gray, P.A. Copy of the report is available if needed.

In June of 2017 I submitted my resume and application for the position of County Administrator of Putnam County. My application was public having been published on the front page of the local newspaper, Palatka Daily News. Interviews were conducted and an offer of employment was made during an advertised County Commission meeting on August 15, 2017.

Subsequently, Ms. Young applied for the position of Executive Assistant to the County Administrator in October 2017. Ms. Young was not selected for this position and remained employed with the City of Palatka.

Ms. Young submitted letter of resignation to City of Palatka on December 11, 2017 sighting the need to provide care for her mother. On January 18, 2018 Ms. Young send a text message to Matt Reynolds, Interim City Manager of the City of Palatka requesting an advance of \$1000 against her retirement, stating she was broke. The request was denied.

On February 12, 2018, a Claim of Discrimination was filed. Upon conclusion of the investigation, February 19, 2019, the EEOC issued the following determination “*Based upon its investigation, the EEOC is unable to conclude that the information obtained establishes violations of the statute.*”

For additional comments related to this issue I request that you contact Ms. Susan Erdelyi at 904-398-0900 or 904-807-2126. Ms. Erdelyi was lead attorney/investigator representing the Law Firm of Marks Gray, P.A.

CB&A Reference Notes

**Reference Notes
Terry Suggs**

Buddy Goddard – Former Commissioner, Putnam County, FL 386-227-0013

Mr. Goddard has known Mr. Suggs since 2015. Mr. Goddard ran for office because he did not like the way the County was being run. The Board wanted to raise taxes and was selling the landfill to build reserves up because they had depleted them. Mr. Goddard won the election and pushed for the Administrator to resign, which happened in 2017. Mr. Suggs was one of many applicants. He was hired and has been a great asset. He saved the County a pile of money, beyond what Mr. Goddard has researched. What he did with the staff and administration was excellent. Mr. Goddard has nothing but praise for Mr. Suggs. Working with him was a joy.

Many employees are highly qualified but in the wrong positions. Mr. Suggs pays attention to the staff. When employees find the right job, they excel – even when it is a position that they had not considered but Mr. Suggs realized they had talent in that area. He builds a staff that can operate with or without him. When he realizes that a department has some repetitive work, he does not fill openings, he just shuffles the work responsibilities appropriately. The staff is not short-handed, everyone is doing the job they like and they are doing a great job.

In making as many decisions as Mr. Suggs has made, eventually you will make a bad one. However, his scoreboard for good decisions is excellent.

Mr. Goddard first met Mr. Suggs in the community and it was an attribute that Mr. Goddard appreciated. Mr. Suggs attends parades, festivals, and more. He asks questions to the attendees about what they enjoy and how it could be better. He takes that input to improve future events.

Even when Mr. Suggs had the authority to make the decision, he still brought it to the Board for their input when he had the time. He told him what solution he came up with and listened to their opinions. When they presented an alternative solution, he had already thought it through and could explain the negative consequences and why he did not go with that solution. He is timely in completing assignments. He becomes agitated at times, but only when the stress has reached a point when anyone else would have exploded. He is very calm and cool.

One of the County's biggest problem occurred with the Fire Rescue and EMT departments that both had a mix of volunteers and paid employees. Neither side liked the other and both departments had ongoing problems. Mr. Suggs brought everyone together and then created a position to put one person over both areas. He discussed the applicants with those involved explaining the strengths and weaknesses of them. He hired a person with the right personality from outside the department. He restructured these departments to be more effective and to work together better.

One controversy involved a confederate statue at the courthouse. Half of the people wanted it to go and the other half wanted it protected because it is heritage. Mr. Suggs looked at what was fair to both sides. Someone suggested putting it on the ballot which was not a fair solution due to the racial makeup of the County. Other ideas included building a small fence that separates it from the courthouse or moving the sidewalk so it is further away. Another idea was to relocate

Reference Notes Terry Suggs

the statue to the Memorial Park but Mr. Suggs felt that those who wanted it moved should pay for the relocation instead of the County. It was very controversial but Mr. Goddard is not sure how it ended because he left office before it was resolved.

Two of the Commissioners do not like Mr. Suggs but they are not good people. Mr. Suggs is a good person. A property owner who has many properties like mobile homes and section 8 housing is always asking for favors and was able to manipulate the former Administrator. Mr. Suggs does not offer one property owner breaks that another does not receive. This individual does not like Mr. Suggs because he is held to the same rules as everyone else in the community.

Putnam County vetted all the candidates and found nothing of concern in Mr. Suggs' background. Mr. Goddard would hire Mr. Suggs he is a joy to work with. Anyone who hires him will be very pleased.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Honest,
- Understanding,
- Compassionate,
- Efficient, and
- Diplomatic.

Strengths: His greatest strength is how he builds the staff.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Laurie Parker – Human Resources Director, Putnam County, FL 386-937-7934

Ms. Parker knew of Mr. Suggs when he worked for Palatka but met him when he came to the County in 2017. Hurricane Irma hit right before Mr. Suggs started as County Administrator. Even though he was not yet the Administrator, he came to the EOC (Emergency Operations Center) and helped.

One strength that Mr. Suggs has is encouraging and mentoring staff. He not only encourages continuing education, but he also supports staff by allowing them to take time off that they need to do so. His previous assistant wanted an IT degree, he supported her in the process and now she works in IT. When employees gain new skills and it comes time for them to move to a new organization or position, he does not become upset, he remains supportive. He is all about having a good team and he put together a great management team. He calls it his work family.

When employees, even on the upper management team, or a Commissioner come to Mr. Suggs with something, he does his homework before making a decision. At times the Commissioners or

Reference Notes Terry Suggs

staff members are basing their opinion on a public complaint, but the member of the public does not always have the entire story. Mr. Suggs does the background work to reach a solution that best resolves the situation. He is innovative and maintains a high level of operations.

In the community Mr. Suggs and his wife attend functions and donate their time. During the hurricane when people cooked for the staff at the EOC or restaurants donated food, Mr. Suggs served the employees before he ate. He worked the call center so those staff members could get something to eat. He does not act as if he is better than anyone else, he will do any job in the organization, and he always puts employees first.

During covid they have rotated switchboard duties and Ms. Parker has taken her turn. Many Administrators do not answer their phone, but he does. When Mr. Suggs is in his office, the switchboard operator knows to transfer the call in without screening them. When you call the County and ask for him, he takes the call unless he is in a meeting. Most of the members of the public like him, you cannot please everyone, though he does his best to find a solution for them.

Every Monday morning they have an executive team meeting where Mr. Suggs provides information. He also visits the departments and talks to the staff directly from time to time. They have new hire orientation every Thursday morning and he always comes in to introduce himself. He lets them know he has an open-door policy and invites them to meet with him at any time. Some have taken him up on his invitation and when they brought issues to his attention, he works with the supervisor to resolve it.

Ms. Parker does not have access to the budget but has never heard of anything negative about Mr. Suggs in relation to finance. He is very responsive. Even during stressful situations, like Hurricane Irma, he was never irate or raised his voice. He is always in a good mood. When he is busy, like during budget season, he is pleasant but may not be as talkative with employees. He is always very professional and friendly with employees no matter their title.

Before covid if Mr. Suggs heard an employee was hurt or in the hospital, he and his wife went to the hospital to check on the employee and visit with the family, even in the evenings. He is very sincere with all employees. Because of covid he can no longer visit them in the hospital, but he personally contacts the family to see how the employee is doing.

One Commissioner and Mr. Suggs do not see eye to eye. This Commissioner is very rude and he reminds some of the proverbial bull in the china shop. From an HR standpoint Mr. Suggs is correct in remaining professional and not responding in a like manner, but Ms. Parker would have said something to this Commissioner. This Commissioner, and one individual who is good friends with this Commissioner, may have a different opinion of Mr. Suggs. However, this individual believes that everyone at the County is crooked and inundates the County with public records requests without finding any issues or evidence to support the claims.

Another controversy involved the Public Works Director. An employee reported that the Director showed favoritism in giving jobs to friends who were contractors instead of asking for

Reference Notes
Terry Suggs

bids. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement conducted an investigation. They also found that prices on the invoices did not match the actual prices of the product. They had been inflated to receive more money than appropriate. Mr. Suggs was not involved but he had to resolve this controversy. Nothing in his background or conduct would concern a reasonable person.

Ms. Parker wishes that she could give a bad reference so that Mr. Suggs would stay in Putnam County, but that would not be right. She would hire him. Everyone loves how family oriented he is and the way he treats the staff. He is all about family and encourages employees to take vacations and be with their families, which they love.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Hard worker,
- Very smart,
- Supportive of staff, and
- Sincere.

Strengths: Great administrator, encourages everyone to do their best, encourages and supports staff in continuing education opportunities.

Weaknesses: He can be sensitive at times. One example was when an employee that he did much for gave him and the deputy administrator unkind nicknames in a staff meeting where they were not present in an effort to be funny. However, he does not act on these feelings, he just feels disappointed.

Terry Wright – Veterans Rep, Putnam County, FL 386-546-2947

Mr. Wright met Mr. Suggs in 2015 and worked with him from 2017 to 2020 at Putnam County. Since 2020 Mr. Wright has been Mr. Suggs' pastor. If Mr. Wright had to work for someone again, he would work for Mr. Suggs 100%. Mr. Wright has not heard anything negative about Mr. Suggs from anyone in the community.

Mr. Suggs creates a wonderful environment. He backs people who have integrity and should be supported and corrects those who do not. If you have an issue, he listens and then tells you what he is thinking. When you are right, he agrees with you. When you are wrong, he asks you to rethink your stance. He keeps everyone informed so they are never surprised.

Mr. Suggs leans on the staff, though he is a delegator and not an autocrat. He looks for them to make the right decisions. He has good people beneath him who make great decisions now, but he did not at first. It took him a few years to build an excellent staff. When making decisions in general he really listens to others and hears them. He assimilates the information to make a good decision. He is not perfect, but he is very rational and definitely makes good decisions.

Reference Notes Terry Suggs

Being very engaged and active, Mr. Suggs is everywhere. He works very well with the public for the most part, but it is a very broad and diverse group. He tries to engage but not everyone is open. He does what is right and at the end of the day everyone benefits.

A veteran in the community asked Mr. Wright for help that he could not give. Mr. Wright responded and said that he loved this individual but could not help him anymore than he already had due to limited resources. This individual went to Mr. Suggs to complain that Mr. Wright was not representing him well. Mr. Suggs researched the situation and brought them all together. He mentioned that the person before Mr. Wright had the case for five years and did nothing while Mr. Wright had only had the case for three months. The way that he handled the situation, by bringing proper perspective, was very beneficial.

Mr. Wright was not involved in the budget or finance, but the County has a \$14 or \$16 million dollar surplus which indicates that Mr. Suggs handles the resources well. He is always responsive and timely in his responses. In difficult circumstances he responds after the fact, which shows high EQ and is the right way to handle a situation. He takes in the information, researches the data, and then responds.

Putnam County has some controversy, as is typical for municipalities, but the positives outweigh the negatives. Mr. Suggs is a good man, nothing in his background or conduct is controversial.

Mr. Wright does not want Mr. Suggs to leave and gives Mr. Suggs his highest recommendation.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Calm,
- Calculated,
- Kind,
- Considerate,
- Deliberate, and
- Forgiving.

Strengths: Very knowledgeable in government, knowledgeable about people and nuances of personality, not always politically popular but always right, approachable.

Weaknesses: None identified.

**Reference Notes
Terry Suggs**

**Dana Jones – Executive Director, Chamber of Commerce, Putnam County, FL
386-546-6303**

Ms. Jones has known Mr. Suggs since 2015 but they have worked more closely together since he has been with Putnam County. From an external perspective he is very effective, and he seems to do a great job.

Few managers are able to see both the current issues that need to be addressed while also having a vision for the future and what needs to happen. Mr. Suggs does both well. He has been very effective in leading both Palatka and Putnam County. He is very informative and a great communicator.

Mr. Suggs is very active in the community and is an ex-officio member of the Chamber Board. Prior to the pandemic he showed up at social and community events. He participated with downtown groups and various functions. No one in the community has complained about Mr. Suggs, he is accessible. He is very laid back and low key. He has handled every challenge well, including hurricanes and the pandemic.

A new industry was looking for a place to settle and Putnam County was short listed. Mr. Suggs promised that the County would do everything they needed to do speedily. Many people make promises but do not follow through, but Mr. Suggs followed through. The business is already open, and they have commented on how well the process was managed from the County perspective. They are complementary of the services provided by Mr. Suggs and the County.

Government always has controversy. They had to close a bridge during the pandemic to an outlying community, which was difficult for the community. Mr. Suggs did a great job mitigating the situation. Nothing in Mr. Suggs conduct would concern a reasonable person. Some in the community might have a different opinion of him but Ms. Jones does not know anyone personally who does.

Ms. Jones would hire Mr. Suggs, he is a great person as is his wife. He has done well both at Palatka and in Putnam County. His departure would be a great loss to the County, he has grown the community well.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Loyal,
- Speaks well of Putnam County and fights for it though he is not originally from there,
- Effective,
- Enthusiastic,
- Hires effective employees,
- Persuasive in a positive way, and
- Resilient.

Reference Notes
Terry Suggs

Strengths: Great communicator, visionary.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Tim Smith – Clerk of Court, Putnam County, GA 386-937-6409

Mr. Smith was the Mayor of Palatka before Mr. Suggs was hired and remained active in the community. They met in 2015. During Mr. Suggs tenure Mr. Smith was elected as Clerk of the Court. They have developed a strong professional relationship while working for the County.

Mr. Suggs has done a stellar job at both Palatka and Putnam County. He did a complete reorganization of personnel and established clear lines of authority that have worked very well for the County. He has made good decisions and he keeps others informed. He maintains the organization at a high level. He is always out in the community and works extremely well with the public. Mr. Smith frequently hears that Mr. Suggs is a breath of fresh air because of the relationships he has built in the community.

The county had a long term issue with the volunteer fire department. Mr. Suggs established a process to review components of the process. He reviewed personnel issues, the budget, and equipment. He laid out a plan to move forward to resolution.

While Mr. Suggs has good financial skills, he works with the finance staff. He understands finance, investments, expenditures, payroll, benefits, and always stays on top of them. He is very responsive. Prior to his arrival the residents complained about how long it took to receive a call back. He has vastly improved communication. He has not shown any signs of distress in tense meetings.

While Mr. Suggs has been involved in typical controversy that comes with working in government, he has not personally been involved in any controversy. Nothing in his conduct or background would concern an employer. The only people who might complain about Mr. Suggs are residents who did not get their road paved quickly enough.

Mr. Smith would hire Mr. Suggs, he would be a great hire for any government or entity. He would serve any government well because of his background, knowledge, and demeanor.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Competent,
- Knowledgeable,
- Fiscally responsible,
- Innovative,
- Compassionate, and
- Understanding.

Reference Notes
Terry Suggs

Strengths: Organizational structure and finding the right and qualified people to fill those spots.

Weaknesses: Some feel that he gathers too much input at times which can delay the decision making process. However, Mr. Smith does not see this as a weakness.

**Travis Cummings – Former State Representative and House Appropriations Chair,
State of Florida 904-386-5189**

Mr. Cummings has known Mr. Suggs since the early 2000s. Mr. Cummings interacted with Mr. Suggs as the Manager for Keystone Heights and also in Putnam County. Keystone prepared him well and he has done a great job in Putnam with a bigger role, budget, and number of employees.

Mr. Suggs makes good decisions. While he runs the organization at a high level, times change and when it is time to adjust processes or procedures, he is good in this regard as well. He attends community and chamber events, business oriented events, and shows up at the ball field. He goes out to lunch and appreciates the value of being out in the community. In public meetings he is very even keeled and down to earth. He communicates what someone may not want to hear but has a sense of ease and comfort that allows them to accept the communication in the best manner possible.

Health insurance programs for governments are generally either self-funded or fully insured. Deciding which route to go is not easy. Mr. Suggs created a committee and involved stakeholders including employees, constitutional officers, and the union to review the information, watch presentations on the subject matter and make a recommendation. The project had a successful and unanimous outcome which will serve the County for years to come.

While Mr. Suggs knows the value of a good finance and budget director, he has a knack for the budget process and understands the importance of it. He also knows the responsibility of tax payer dollars. His finance skills have developed over the years and are now one of his strengths.

Mr. Suggs is responsive, and timely in his responses. While he is too hard on himself, stress does not impact his job performance. He knows that tomorrow is a new day, and you learn from experiences. He understands the job of a manager will come with stress and has a good balance.

While Mr. Suggs has dealt with typical government challenges, Mr. Cummings cannot recall anything that was ultra controversial. Mr. Cummings is not aware of anything in Mr. Suggs background that would give an employer pause. Mr. Cummings is out in the community quite a bit and speaks with various individuals, commissioners, stake holders, and general members of the public. None of these individuals have expressed any concern about Mr. Suggs.

Mr. Cummings would hire Mr. Suggs, he is a great candidate for any position he is seeking. Considering him is a wise decision.

Reference Notes
Terry Suggs

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Good sense of humor,
- Smart,
- Hard worker,
- Even keeled,
- Consensus builder, and
- Likeable.

Strengths: Ethics, integrity, work ethic, personal skills, has the mindset needed in public administration when working with a diverse board.

Weaknesses: Being a good human being is a strength of his but can be a weakness as he always wants to make the elected officials happy which is not always possible. In these instances he is hard on himself.

Shawn Ladd – Operations Manager, City of Palatka, FL 386-937-7667

Mr. Ladd met Mr. Suggs in 2015. Mr. Suggs did an amazing job. He cleaned up several issues in finance. He is very personable. He walked around the organization and interacted one on one with the staff. He is very professional and efficient.

The people Mr. Suggs hired were very beneficial to the organization, some have moved onto bigger and better places. His decisions in general were good. He maintained an organization at a high level of performance.

During hurricanes Mr. Suggs worked with all the agencies directly. He was very community oriented and was very visible. He always took comments from residents, whether they were positive or negative. Everyone speaks positively about him. He puts the community first.

In weekly and monthly staff meetings Mr. Suggs kept everyone informed and then called department heads between meetings if something occurred that they needed to be aware of. He is a leader who rallies employees around the vision of the Board.

During Hurricane Irma the first floor of one of the nursing homes began to flood. Mr. Suggs worked with the City, forestry department and the County to dig a trench in the middle of the storm to divert the water. They were in water up to their chest, but they saved the facility. He kept everyone informed and listened to input when making decisions so they could make the right decisions. He stayed levelheaded and calm. He was in the trenches with the staff, and he handled it all very well.

**Reference Notes
Terry Suggs**

Finance is something that Mr. Suggs excels at. He and the Finance Director really turned around the finances. They restructured the budget to make it more proficient while increasing reserves. He was always very responsive and responded within hours but always by the end of the day.

Nothing in Mr. Suggs background or conduct is controversial. He left Palatka to work for the County, which was their benefit. Mr. Ladd cannot think of anyone who has a negative opinion of Mr. Suggs.

Mr. Ladd would not hesitate to hire Mr. Suggs. Mr. Ladd has worked for Palatka for 25 years and Mr. Suggs is one of the best managers they have ever had. He is very responsive, very outgoing in the community and with the staff. People just enjoy being around him. He is generally and genuinely concerned about what he was doing for the staff and the community.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Personable,
- Leader,
- Friend,
- All around good guy,
- Fair, and
- Sensible.

Strengths: Finance, personable, professional, efficient, just very good.

Weaknesses: He cares about people like they are family which can be both a strength and a weakness.

Daniel Martinez – Community Activist, City of Palatka, FL 386-329-7319

Mr. Martinez has known Mr. Suggs since 2015. Mr. Suggs was promoted to work for the County. He develops the staff and made good decisions for the both the City and the County.

Mr. Martinez was a Senior VP for Georgia Pacific in charge of manufacturing. He knows people and does not tolerate fools. Mr. Suggs has a great ability to select quality personnel. His deputy manager will most likely be promoted should he leave. He is very well respected. He does not micromanage employees. He is innovative, a change agent, and he keeps everything operating at a high level.

Mr. Suggs attends every Board meeting and is involved in the Rotary. He is very personable. He always has a bright face and does not display any bad humor or animosity. When someone steps on his toes, he just moves his foot away without any criticism. He works with the public in a way that they respect his conclusion even if they do not like it.

Reference Notes
Terry Suggs

A Rotarian who lived on a clay road developed lung cancer. The road had potholes and every time he had to drive on the road, he screeched from the pain. Mr. Martinez brought this to Mr. Suggs attention. Mr. Suggs had the road grater out to level the road within the week, and he also filled the holes with clay. It rained which moved the clay and so it had to be done a few more times, but he delivered to help this resident during his final months. When he became aware of any issues, he smiled at the customer and then took care of the issues.

Mr. Suggs would not be where he is if he did not understand finance. He is responsive to everyone, including groups trying to develop business in the County. He is even responsive to the one commissioner who does not like him. He has never shown any signs of stress.

All the employees and public speak highly of Mr. Suggs. One Commissioner has a negative opinion of him, but this Commissioner has a negative opinion about most people. Mr. Martinez and Mr. Suggs have a professional relationship and do not spend time together socially, but Mr. Martinez is not aware of anything in Mr. Suggs' background that would embarrass an employer.

When Mr. Martinez was Senior Vice President he would have hired Mr. Suggs as Vice President to run a division. He is an excellent manager. One of his assets is his wife. She is brilliant, sharp, and she supports him.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Responsive,
- Supportive,
- Willing to resolve problems,
- Innovative, and
- Personable.

Strengths: Managing and developing people to move up.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Daniel Lewandowski – Former Councilperson, City of Keystone Heights, FL 352-538-3005

Mr. Lewandowski has known Mr. Suggs since 2013 when the former became a city councilperson for the City of Keystone Heights. In the short time they have worked together, Mr. Suggs has shown only the highest quality work and an excellent job performance.

Mr. Suggs is an excellent communicator. Even though he lives 40 minutes away from the community, he strives to attend all the social functions including parades, special services, and community events. He interacts easily with those in attendance. He is prompt with responding to emails and phone messages and communicates well with the City Council, City Staff, and the

Reference Notes Terry Suggs

external agencies the city works with. He is an adept public speaker. He presents himself well and thinks quickly on his feet. He helps the public feel like they are being heard and that he will do everything within his powers to improve the City.

The City of Keystone Heights is located within Clay County. Once a year the County has an important meeting entitled the State of Clay where each of the municipalities prepares a speech about what has happened in their communities each year and presents it to the entire County. The night before the event, the Mayor of Keystone Heights got sick and called on Mr. Suggs to give the speech instead, so Mr. Suggs quickly wrote a speech and did an outstanding job in representing their City to all the other municipalities with very little assistance or advance notice. He was able to do so because of his extensive knowledge of what is going on in his city. He takes pride in the City and his work. He does not simply check the boxes. He goes above and beyond his call of duty.

Mr. Suggs is a positive person. He is open to innovation and tries to see where others are coming from. He has a can-do attitude. He works very hard to expand his knowledge both through academic training and also by real world experiences. He strives to improve his knowledge any way he can and demonstrates his knowledge in his daily activities. Mr. Suggs won grants because of his knowledge and expertise in applying for them. He received a large amount of grant money for the City in the time he worked for them.

Mr. Suggs was a wonderful City Manager for Keystone Heights and will continue to achieve excellence wherever he goes as a Manager.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Present,
- Ethical,
- Quality,
- Helpful,
- Balanced, and
- Wise.

Strengths: Knowledge, attitude and communication skills.

Weaknesses: Because the City of Keystone Heights is so small, Mr. Suggs lacks the experience working with a police department, fire department, and other city functions such as utilities, water and sewer departments. The County and Sheriff's department takes care of those functions for the City. Although he lacks that experience, he is capable of learning quickly, and it will not be an impediment for him.

**Reference Notes
Terry Suggs**

Lynette Rutkowski – City Manager, City of Keystone Heights, FL 352-473-4807

Ms. Rutkowski has known Mr. Suggs since 2012. She has held a variety of positions since she came to the City including a Code Enforcement Officer and Administrative Assistant. She was the Zoning Clerk while Mr. Suggs was the Manager.

Mr. Suggs was open to new ideas. Ms. Rutkowski enjoyed working with him because he made it a point to work with people instead of working against them. He was open to new possibilities and new directions. He was a people person and helped residents who were upset about something or confused about what was happening. He listened to them and was truly compassionate about their situation. Citizens came to Mr. Suggs with a hard shell, but after talking to Mr. Suggs most left happy and satisfied.

Mr. Suggs worked on the Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) project plan. He separated the projects into smaller groups based on each sub-leader's specific strengths. He was efficient in planning and carrying out projects. Mr. Suggs had a pleasant personality and made work fun for everyone around him.

Prior to Mr. Suggs being hired as the City Manager for Keystone Heights, the Code Enforcement was cut out of the budget. Mr. Suggs realized that this was becoming an issue so he readjusted the budget and sought out an enforcement officer. He hired Ms. Rutkowski for that position because he saw potential in her. She became a Certified Code Enforcement Officer and they now have a good Code Enforcement Program.

Mr. Suggs is very intelligent. He researches and finds out the correct answer if he does not know the answer. His friendly characteristics and technical capability make him successful as a City Manager. He will be an asset for any community.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Jolly,
- Professional,
- Diligent,
- Productive,
- Knowledgeable, and
- Creative.

Strengths: People person.

Weaknesses: Too compassionate at times. He takes it personally if someone is not happy.

**Reference Notes
Terry Suggs**

**Rich Komando – Municipal Attorney, Kopelousos, Bradley & Garrison, P.A., FL
904-521-3988**

Mr. Komando has known Mr. Suggs since 2013. The former works with a law firm serving various municipalities throughout North Florida. The City of Keystone Heights is one of their clients, as is Putnam County. Mr. Komando has worked with Mr. Suggs in both positions and capacities and continues to be impressed with his performance.

Mr. Suggs was innovative. He applied for grant opportunities for Keystone Heights that most people did not even realize exist. He procured a great deal of additional income for the City in this way. When Mr. Suggs became the City Manager, he set up a proposal to update their computer equipment and technology for the City. Along with updating their equipment, he refreshed their internet presence with a new Website and internet presence.

Mr. Suggs is customer service oriented. He intentionally moved his office in Keystone Heights from the back of the building to the front, close to the front desk, so he could more easily interact with citizens when they came in with questions or concerns.

Mr. Suggs is financially savvy. He prepares the entire budget and presents it for the Council's review. The audit came back clean without any comments. Mr. Suggs worked with the Community Redevelopment Agency to update the sign ordinance. He took the time to meet with everybody and made sure all the opinions were heard and discussed before the final recommendation was presented to the City Council.

Mr. Suggs has worked in local government his entire career and continues to advance in knowledge and experience. He has demonstrated community involvement and leadership skills. He will continue to grow and be an excellent leader for any municipality.

Words or phrases used to describe Terry Suggs:

- Intelligent,
- Focused,
- Driven,
- Responsive,
- Customer service oriented, and
- Ethical.

Strengths: Self-starter.

Weaknesses: None identified.

Prepared by: Lynelle Klein
Colin Baenziger & Associates

CB&A Internet Research

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

January 28, 2021

Credit Where Credit's Due - County commissioners celebrate employees for their years of service

Author: Sarah Cavacini

Smiles and applause filled the Putnam County Government Complex on Tuesday as county employees were recognized for their dedication to the community.

Fire and Emergency Medical Services Battalion Chief Tina Hitchcock kicked off the achievement presentations with her recognition as Employee of the Quarter. Public Safety Executive Director J.R.Grimes said Hitchcock goes above and beyond her duties, and he couldn't think of anyone better suited to receive the recognition. "Everything we needed since the first day I started here, she was the first one to step up and say, 'I can do that.' She's got the can-do attitude. She'll do absolutely anything," Grimes said. "... I can't thank her for the hard work she puts in enough. I mean, this (award) was just a small token."

Recognitions occurred during the Board of County Commissioners meeting. County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said the program started before the coronavirus pandemic, and although the virus made meetings difficult to conduct in person, recognizing employees again was a great opportunity. There had not been such an employee recognition program prior to 2020.

Property Appraiser Tim Parker presented awards to office employees Mark Holder, Victoria McRae, Justin Edwards and Clay Davis for their combined 45 years of service. Sandra Slaughter, who also works at the Property Appraiser's Office, was scheduled to be recognized Tuesday for her five years of service but was unable to attend the meeting.

Davis is the longest-serving property appraiser employee, having put 20 years into the Putnam County office. He is the deeds and mapping supervisor, holds a state-certified residential appraiser designation, serves as chairman of the county's Insurance Committee and is a member of the Kiwanis Club of the Azalea City. "Thank you, Clay, for your leadership this past year on our Insurance Committee as chairman," **Suggs** said. "You've done an outstanding job and you made it so much easier. Thank you so much."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

January 7, 2021

Vaccine process starts smoothly in Putnam

Author: Sarah Cavacini

A Palatka man who received the coronavirus vaccine Wednesday praised Putnam County officials for the easy process. Alain Hentschel, 69, said he trusts science and wanted the Moderna vaccine because he thought it was a good idea. Hentschel said the whole process took about 30 minutes. He said he checked in, received the vaccine shot and had to wait 15 minutes to make sure he experienced no negative effects, which he did not. “I am in the high-risk group and the thought of getting COVID was not a pleasant one,” Hentschel said.

Vaccine distributions in Putnam County are being done for first responders, health care workers and residents 65 or older. People must register on putnam.floridahealth.gov and have an appointment.

Hentschel said he received a text from Putnam County health officials and made an appointment right on the phone after signing up online. “I just thought, ‘Wow, (scientists have) developed this vaccine. It’s been tested and people like (Dr. Anthony) Fauci recommended it, and people I respect said it was good and I believe them,’” he said. “... We should all want the vaccine. We want to be done with this. This is horrible.”

The Florida Department of Health in Putnam County announced Wednesday there were 83 additional COVID cases. No new deaths were reported, but Putnam COVID cases since the pandemic began stand at 4,275 as of Wednesday.

Board of County Commissioners Chairman Larry Harvey, who helped at the vaccine distribution site, said 120 vaccines were administered Tuesday and 270 were given Wednesday, with officials hoping to administer more today. He said more than 6,300 Floridians were registered in the system to receive a vaccine, but the county only received 1,300 doses as of Wednesday. Health officials are expecting to receive more doses soon and all vaccine recipients will need a second dose 28 days after the first.

“Kudos to (Executive Director of Public Safety) J.R. Grimes, (Executive Director for Planning and Development Services) Jim Troiano, (County Administrator) **Terry Suggs**, our whole staff and the team put together by the health department,” Harvey said. “We had some help from the National Guard, and I was just so impressed by the process. We couldn’t have asked for a more cohesive unit.”

Harvey said an outbreak among some staff members caused the county to cancel meetings for the remainder of the week. He said next Tuesday’s board meeting will have commissioners at the Putnam County Government Complex in Palatka and a Zoom link provided to the public.

“We’ve had a little outbreak in our office. We want to make sure staff is safe and the public is

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

safe because we want to get people well. We're going to be very cautious in the next week or so and see how it goes."

County meetings aren't the only things staying virtual.

Hentschel, dean of the Florida School of the Arts at St. Johns River State College in Palatka, said things have been tough for performing arts during the pandemic. He said teachers at the school are getting through the situation. Luckily, Hentschel said he was tested for COVID several times and results always returned negative.

Students are coming back to campus after having classes online, but Hentschel is worried about student safety because the pandemic is still going. He said performances are done online for the FloArts students and said staff members are handling the situation, but he hopes the vaccine will improve the coronavirus situation as the year progresses. "I'm just praying that everybody makes it through this until everyone can get back ... and we can be normal again," Hentschel said.

Palatka Daily News Editor Wayne Smith contributed to this story.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 17, 2020

County savors accomplishments ... but is looking ahead

Author: Sarah Cavacini

Putnam County officials expressed their gratitude to the Board of County Commissioners for its help in 2020 to complete 15 county projects. Improvements included completing the Crescent City Main Street sidewalk, the County Road 207 bridge over Dog Branch Creek, reopening Veterans Memorial Park in East Palatka and building Project P.L.A.Y. at John Theobald Sports Complex in Palatka. “There’s a lot of things that are happening here, a lot of projects,” County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said last week.

The 2019 dirt-to-pave list also was finished; additional volleyball courts were added to the sports complex; two derelict vessels were removed from the St. Johns River; and the East Palatka Wastewater Treatment Plant Expansion was finalized.

County officials announced Wednesday that Vulcan Materials Co. donated an additional \$30,000 to Florahome Park and Heritage Association for the restoration of Florahome’s Historic Village Improvement Association Club House. “The preservation of this historic building, which for many years served as the center of our rural town, will create opportunities for a greater sense of community. We are extremely grateful for Vulcan’s generous gift,” association president Merilin Piantanida said in a statement.

The association is working to revitalize the clubhouse into a museum and space for community events, and Vulcan Environmental Specialist Traci Johns said contributing to local communities is important to the company. “Being active in the local community and helping with meaningful projects is at the heart of being a good neighbor,” she said in a statement.

Other projects in the county to be finished include the Melrose library expansion, Bardin bridge, Lake Susan Road Phase II and the new Animal Control facility. “It was funny when I got hired, (Commission Chairman Larry) Harvey said, ‘We had a tremendous amount of balls in the air. It’s time to bring some of them in,’” **Suggs** said. “And that’s what we’re trying to do.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 10, 2020

County highlights shuffle, strategic plan

Author: Sarah Cavacini

With a new year just weeks away, Putnam County officials looked back on this year’s accomplishments, saying the changes in the county will better serve residents.

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said in his 33 years of work, he never saw anything like 2020 – a pandemic year. Despite the coronavirus pandemic, he said the county still made progressive changes, such as establishing Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act grant funding to help small businesses and individual grants for households. However, one of the most productive changes made in the county was reorganizing county personnel. Five county executive directors were given new duties and bigger responsibilities to benefit residents, the county administrator said.

“I think efficiency is the key word,” Deputy County Administrator Julianne Young said. Young is one of the five, which also includes Executive Planning Director Jim Troiano, Executive Director of Public Safety J.R. Grimes, Executive Director of Human Resources and Administrative Services Angela Nelson and Executive Director of Public Works Mike Troxel. Each of the five should be able to respond to a resident’s request and help them quicker than before the reorganization.

“I think the key word here is ownership,” **Suggs** said. “Each one of the executive directors ... takes ownership.” With the new duties, any executive director should be able to respond to a resident’s request no matter the subject. Another benefit of the reorganization is the county saved \$100,000 in the county budget, **Suggs** said.

In other 2020 county accomplishments, the board lowered county millage rates, created the Fire and Emergency Medical Services Committee to resolve local Emergency Services problems and approved a countywide strategic plan in November for the first time. “When you’re talking about doing those things in the era of COVID, that’s quite an accomplishment for sure,” **Suggs** said.

The strategic plan outlined the county’s goals for the upcoming years and includes maintaining Putnam County’s rural landscape, encouraging and supporting alternative court programs, expanding sewer systems and encouraging vocational training. **Suggs** said without a plan, there would be no focus on what needs to be accomplished in Putnam County.

“Although we just officially passed the final draft, staff is already well underway in their different disciplines and accomplishing those metrics and getting those goals accomplished,” Young said. “It’s been a road map ... for what the desire of the community is, for what the desire of the board is and to allow staff to focus efforts on that.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

October 13, 2020

County gives money back to community with millage vote

Author: Sarah Cavacini

There is good news amid the coronavirus pandemic for Putnam County taxpayers because not only did property values increase, but the Board of County Commissioners voted to lower property taxes. The board voted 4-1 in favor of lowering the 9.5946 millage rate set Sept. 22 to 9.4404 mills Thursday during a special called meeting. The decrease was possible because of an unforeseen change in taxable property values.

“We have adequate reserves,” board Chairman Terry Turner said. “It seemed like the prudent thing to do to give the money back instead of adding the additional reserves that we already had and trying to figure out how to spend it. That’s why I was in favor of a millage rate decrease.”

Commissioner Jeff Rawls voted against lowering the millage rate because he wanted to use the money to fund other county departments and projects.

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said property values increased by \$674,000 and the board could have kept the extra money or lowered the tax rate as proposed. He said property values have increased over the last three to four years. “Even though we’re in a pandemic, property values are set as of Jan. 1 of each year,” **Suggs** said. “If there’s going to be any reflection of values in a downturn in the market, it will incur in the next year or two.”

The county’s fiscal year begins Oct. 1, so decisions on budgets are usually made before then. Lowering a millage rate in October is a rare occurrence, Deputy County Administrator Matt Reynolds said. In his 13 years of working with proposed property taxes, this is only his second time seeing a change so late. He said the first time was when he worked with the city of Palatka, but it was the opposite opportunity. City officials would have had to raise the millage rate to “get the same amount of taxes at the city” or keep it where it was, but the lost revenue was made up throughout the fiscal year by cutting expenditures.

Suggs said every time the board can lower millage rates, they try to take it. He thought people may ask why raises weren’t given or equipment wasn’t purchased with the money, but a salary raise includes a reoccurring cost that would have to be included in other budgets. **Suggs** said if another property value increase didn’t happen next year, money would have to be taken from other county funds for the raise or employees would be laid off.

“We have our spending under control. . . . We are in a much better position than we were three years ago,” **Suggs** said. “The Board of County Commissioners felt it was more important to lower the millage rate if they had the opportunity to do so.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)
September 23, 2020

Commissioners approve \$160M county budget

Author: Sarah Cavacini

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday evening unanimously approved a budget of more than \$160 million for the 2020-2021 fiscal year. Few changes were made to the \$160,865,113 budget since the first budget hearing Sept. 8, but the final budget is more than 19% higher than the current fiscal year's \$134 million budget. The new fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

The countywide operating millage rate was set at 9.5946 mills and did not increase from this year. The Municipal Services Taxing Unit millage rate stayed at 1.1 mills, remaining unchanged from the current fiscal year. Per state statute, the county's millage rate cannot exceed 10 mills. At 9.5946 mills, someone would multiply his or her property value by 0.0095946 — one-one-thousandth the millage rate. Someone whose property is worth \$100,000 would owe \$959.46.

During the board workshop, commissioners unanimously voted to raise Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act allocations to \$5,000 for eligible nonprofit organizations and small businesses. The board also extended the CARES Act grants through Oct. 15 in a unanimous vote during the Tuesday meeting. "The more money we can put into the community, the better off we'll be," Commissioner Jeff Rawls said.

Nonprofit organizations that would like to receive more than \$5,000 will need further approval from county officials, but the board decided to extend funding to organizations affected by COVID-19. The cap was set at \$10,000. Businesses and nonprofits that have already applied and been accepted will still receive the extra money from the county.

"The biggest consensus of the board is that we need to help our citizens," said County Administrator **Terry Suggs**. "We're looking at every opportunity."

Gov. Ron DeSantis announced Friday an additional \$255 million would be dispersed among the 55 Florida counties with populations below 500,000 people. Board Chairman Terry Turner said he was unsure if the county would receive additional money, but a citizens' initiative committee would be created to look further into extending more money to local residents. "I just think we ought to be mindful enough (and) thinking about the possibility of about putting more money on the street," Rawls said. "I'm not saying just hand out cash, but we need to be handing out cash."

CARES Act grant applications can be found at main.putnam-fl.com.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

September 23, 2020

Grimes starts work as public safety director

Author: Sarah Cavacini

Putnam County’s executive director of public safety, who formerly was Palatka’s fire chief, began work this week, finally filling all county executive positions. The new executive director, J.R. Grimes, said he was grateful the county trusted him with the job. “We will be pushing some stuff out real soon,” he said during Tuesday’s Board of County Commissioners meeting.

Board Chairman Terry Turner said with Grimes’ position filled, the county has all executive director positions manned.

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** put the organization chart together within a year and saved the county \$100,000, Turner said during the board meeting.

“I’m very enthusiastic, to say the least,” Turner said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

August 13, 2020

Suggs recognized for community leadership

Author: Sarah Cavacini

Putnam County Administrator **Terry Suggs** was internationally recognized this month for his leadership and dedication to the community. **Suggs** is one of 1,300 local government management professionals credited through the International City/County Management Association’s voluntary credential program. **Suggs** said obtaining the certification was hard work and demands a continuing education with strenuous requirements. “It’s very exciting. It’s very personal,” **Suggs** said. “I spent 25 years in the public service arena, and this is a combination of years of service, my dedication to formal education and my dedication to serving the public.”

Suggs spent the last nine years serving as city manager of Keystone Heights, city manager of Palatka and county administrator. “I have watched him navigate our county from a declining financial situation to completely rebuilding and stabilizing reserves. Mr. **Suggs** has changed our organizational culture by recruiting outstanding talent and has created an environment where professionals want to come and work,” County Commissioner Larry Harvey said in a statement. “Hiring Mr. **Suggs** will always be a wonderful memorial to me because I know I will be able to look back one day and be able to say we hired the right person to make Putnam County better.”

There was a time in Palatka’s history where the police department was unaccredited, but **Suggs** helped the Palatka Police Department regain accreditation in 2017. “It was Mr. **Suggs** leadership that assisted in identifying and prioritizing two extremely important tasks for the Palatka Police Department: improve overall training and regain accreditation status through the Commission for Florida Law Enforcement Accreditation. Mr. **Suggs** was very instrumental in providing support during the process. In 2017, the Palatka Police Department was reaccredited and has since maintained its status and commitment to excellence and best practices for policing our streets,” Police Chief Jason Shaw said in a statement. **Suggs** said after hearing positive comments from county residents when he received the award, he’s proud of what he does for a living. “It’s makes me proud to know the services I’m providing to my residents, my commissioners and my staff is recognized,” **Suggs** said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

June 17, 2020

County considers CARES funds as cases rise

Putnam on cusp of 200 as 8 more test positive; state sets another mark

Author: Sarah Cavacini

As county commissioners questioned the clarity of the CARES Act funding Tuesday, the youngest person with coronavirus was reported in Putnam County. A 2-year-old Palatka boy was one of eight new cases the Florida Department of Health in Putnam County reported Tuesday. As one case was transferred out of the county, a total of 198 cases have been reported since the virus outbreak began in March. Meanwhile, Florida's confirmed coronavirus cases rose sharply again Tuesday, weeks after the state began reopening its economy, setting a daily record with almost 2,800 new cases reported as the overall count eclipsed 80,000 and the death toll neared 3,000.

The state Department of Health reported 2,783 new confirmed cases Tuesday, breaking the record of 2,581 just set on Friday. Both days are well above the previous high of 1,601 set in mid-May. The state has reported 2,993 deaths, a one-day jump of 55. The daily average for the past week has been about 35, down from 60 in early May. Gov. Ron DeSantis approved funding from the CARES Act to reach counties that did not receive any help during the pandemic. Originally, only counties with 500,000 or more people received money. Although the money has not been dispersed to Putnam County yet, Commissioner Larry Harvey said during Tuesday's Board of County Commissioners workshop he expected to see the money funneling into the county soon. "I think in the next few days ... questions will be answered (and) we'll feel a little better about signing (the CARES Act) document and try to get some of our money," Harvey said. "I feel very confident by the end of the week we'll have this thing nailed down."

The money can only go toward coronavirus expenditures, and if the money was misspent, the county would have to pay it all back, Harvey said. Other commissioners were not as confident. Chairman Terry Turner said the guidelines to spend the funds were not clear and he did not want to proceed with budgeting the money until he knew exactly how it could be spent. "I don't share your optimism, Commissioner Harvey," Turner said. "I think mud is clearer than what this situation is because we've been given no direction." The commissioners agreed, if possible, they wanted to give the expected \$4.4 million back to small businesses in Putnam if they were unable to get government relief help. Commissioner Jeff Rawls suggested removing the state of emergency in Putnam County and closing the Emergency Operations Center, where local officials have been cooperating in the fight against coronavirus.

The county gets money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but 25% of the funds provided must be matched by the county's budget. "I don't see that it benefits us to operate the EOC at all. Are we still operating the EOC?" Rawls asked. The center remains open and staff members are available to answer coronavirus questions 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday at 329-1904. The Department of Health in Putnam County will be hosting free

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

coronavirus testing 9 a.m. – 3 p.m. Friday at the Price-Martin Community Center in Palatka. Florida is under a state of emergency until July 7 and Turner said if the county removed its state of emergency, which must be renewed weekly, it would lose FEMA money. He said Rawls is welcome to make a motion in the next board meeting to remove the state of emergency.

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said the EOC staff is doing everything they can to keep costs low, such as cutting back staff hours and closing the center on Sundays. “We have rolled back the cost of our EOC drastically in the last two, three, four weeks,” **Suggs** said. “I think it would behoove us to stay under the state of emergency as the state is under one. That way, if anything changes in the process, we are under that 25%. We don’t know where (the virus) is going to go.” The board decided to not make any decisions regarding budgeting CARES Act money until guidelines were made clearer. The option to approve the CARES Act grant agreement is an option on the consent agenda for Tuesday’s upcoming board meeting. “My concern is that I don’t want a gray area,” Turner said. “My whole point here is that we don’t move forward with this until we have an idea.”

In addition to the 2-year-old boy, the other new cases reported Tuesday in the county were:

- * A 21-year-old Palatka woman.
- * A 58-year-old Palatka woman.
- * A 17-year-old Palatka boy.
- * A 61-year-old Hawthorne man.
- * A 40-year-old Palatka woman.
- * A 62-year-old Palatka man.
- * A 21-year-old Palatka man.

Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried, the only Democrat elected statewide, blasted DeSantis Tuesday, saying in a statement he “has lost control of Florida’s COVID-19 response.” “His policies are simply not working, and he’s recklessly reopening Florida despite the data screaming for caution,” she said.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

June 6, 2020

Doing it the right way and making a mark

Palatka and Putnam County showed the rest of America how to gather as one and protest peacefully Thursday at the PEACE in the STREETS event at the Putnam County Courthouse. A crowd graciously mixed with black and white residents and all age groups held signs calling for racial justice, prayed together and heard calls for change. There were no incidents of dissent, no shouting or shoving, no agitators eager to horn in. It was harmonious almost beyond belief. Protests stemming from the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis at the hands of police there have sparked protests across the nation and world, many marred by violence and looting.

Thursday's PEACE in the STREETS protest in Palatka was just as its name proclaimed, peaceful.

The protest organizers were two Palatka college students, 20-year-old Dar'Nesha Leonard and 18-year-old Tevel Adams. The rally they organized for Putnam County was unlike others around the country also in that its spotlight was not overtly on the police brutality that led to Floyd's death. In focus Thursday was the Confederate monument featuring a rebel soldier facing north and the 130-year-old Maltby Oak, a tree the two said symbolizes the lynching of black Americans during the Jim Crow era. Leonard and Adams called for both to be removed from courthouse property, stating they are offensive to Putnam County's black residents.

Many whites, Hispanics and Asians would also approve of their removal. It is ironic that on the same day Adams and Leonard called for Putnam County's Confederate monument to be removed, plans were announced to take down the most conspicuous and hallowed Confederate statue of all. Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam on Thursday made public his intent to remove the large equestrian statue of Gen. Robert E. Lee that dominates Monument Avenue in Richmond, the 1861-65 capital of the Confederate States of America. Lee is the most hallowed of all Confederate figures. Taking down his statue would be a significant step, and not just in imagery. Whether Leonard, Adams and their supporters will have success persuading the Putnam County Board of Commissioners to remove the Confederate statue here, or the Maltby Oak, is as yet unknown.

Many city and county elected officials were in attendance Thursday, but there were no sightings of any of the five members of county commission or the county administrator. That should not be taken as a demonstration that they do not support the rally's aims, however. Had any of the commissioners or Administrator **Terry Suggs** attended, it is likely they would have been asked to speak about the requests for monument and tree removal and state their position. To do that before a request has been brought before the commission or discussions held with county staff and other commissioners would have been awkward, at best. Some, perhaps a majority of the board, may favor removing the monument. There is more resistance in the community at large over taking down the Maltby Oak than taking away the Confederate soldier, based on comments to the Palatka Daily News' print and social media platforms.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The long shadow of Minneapolis and George Floyd gives this generation of emerging and existing leaders a chance to leave a legacy of change 155 years in the making. How this all plays out locally in succeeding weeks will be interesting reading and another test of our community's ability to work together.

Leaving a legacy affecting thousands of Putnam County residents is exactly what Dick Westbury and Abe Alexander did. Our community lost these two titans of education, business and youth leadership over the last week, and we mourn them. Abram "Abe" Alexander influenced more young men and women through his years at Central Academy and in church and civic affairs than he ever knew. Alexander was the music director at Central, Florida's first accredited African-American high school. He pushed his students to be their best as musicians and people, helping many along their way to college at his alma mater, Bethune-Cookman University. Alexander was also a leader for racial equality, becoming one of the founding members of the Putnam County chapter of the NAACP. His faith was another driving force in his life, as he served as director of the choir at Bethel A.M.E. Church in Palatka. Alexander touched others. His was a life well-lived.

So, too, for Richard "Dick" Westbury. After graduating from the University of Florida and a couple of years in the Army, Westbury began a career defined by success. It included a stint as advertising director at this newspaper, marketing and promoting Rodeheaver Boys Ranch and starting a communications and promotion department at Hudson Pulp and Paper Corp. before the company was sold to Georgia-Pacific. He went on to a stint as executive manager at the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce and finally co-owner of Palatka Printing and vice president of Webb-Westbury ad agency. With Bob Webb at Webb-Westbury, the two established and sponsored Putnam County's Top 50 Scholars program, a recognition that continues and the Palatka Daily News is proud to sponsor with Putnam County School District. Westbury, like Alexander, left an indelible mark in Putnam County. Both men are local heroes who will be missed.

Finally, perhaps no group of people did it right or left a bigger mark than the soldiers who participated in D-Day, 76 years ago on June 6, 1944. The bravery of those American and Allied soldiers turned the tide of World War II and helped free the world from tyranny and the evil of Adolph Hitler. We honor them, part of the Greatest Generation, on this day.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

May 27, 2020

\$70K settlement reached in Public Works dispute - County, Jacksonville-based company also agree to not sue each other

Author: Sarah Cavacini

The Putnam County Board of Commissioners and a Jacksonville company reached an agreement regarding controversial work tied to former Public Works Director Press Tompkins. The board unanimously approved a \$70,000 settlement and debarment with A.W.A Contracting. The commissioners agreed to not work with the company for at least three years and the case concluded with no formal hearing, according to county documents.

The item was placed on the board’s consent agenda, which can be approved without discussion. Although commissioners made no comments about the matter during Tuesday’s meeting, County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said later he considered the matter put to rest. “The county staff followed directions ... regarding the contractual obligations with A.W.A.,” he said.

Issues were raised in August about “inconsistencies and or performance deficiencies.” In December, Commissioner Jeff Rawls accused Tompkins of mishandling county contracts. Rawls said A.W.A. performed work not originally planned, and it resulted in an additional \$88,000 charge to the county.

The Putnam County Sheriff’s Office turned over the investigation of Tompkins last year to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, which confirmed Tuesday it is investigating a case involving Tompkins. “FDLE does have an active case,” department spokeswoman Jessica Cary said in an email.

Tompkins retired in September after working for the county since 2016. His position was filled earlier this month by Mike Troxel after Assistant Director Mike Nimitz became the interim director.

Tuesday’s agreement also stipulated Putnam County could not sue A.W.A. for “any and all actions, causes of actions, at law and/or in equity, charges, complaints, contracts, liabilities, obligations, claims, demands, promises, reimbursements, costs, losses, debts, expenses, attorney’s fees, damages, indemnities and claims of any kind or nature.” The contract said A.W.A. can also not sue.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News

March 19, 2020

County leaders at odds over cancellations, time off

Author: Sarah Cavacini

Tension sizzled once again Wednesday morning at a Board of County Commissioners emergency meeting this time between Commissioner Jeff Rawls and County Administrator **Terry Suggs**. Board Chairman Terry Turner urged an orderly meeting as arguments erupted. “No. We’re not, sir, because (Rawls) doesn’t know how (to be orderly),” **Suggs** said. The conflict arose when Rawls compared the current coronavirus crisis to the 2009 financial crisis. “In 2009, the lesson I learned was if you were stuck in your ways, you were out of business,” Rawls said. “We’re going to have to think and change on the fly. It’s not going to kill anybody.”

Turner said seven employees from the Putnam County Library called out sick Tuesday, and if the library would have to close to keep people safe, it would be the proper solution. Deputy County Administrator Matt Reynolds said one county employee has been out of work in self-isolation. The employee went on vacation, but Reynolds did not know where the employee vacationed. “There seems to be no issues,” **Suggs** said. “However, we’ve asked them to follow CDC guidelines and self-quarantine.”

Rawls argued there should be no closure. Gov. Ron DeSantis ordered restaurants to be at half-capacity, but that contradicts the rule of no more than 10 people in a gathering, Rawls said. “This is where we need to be bold in our leadership,” Rawls said. “Encourage our employees to be diligent and safe for themselves but also continue to work.” **Suggs** said comparing the virus to economic problems from 2009 doesn’t add up. “Comparing this, and I don’t mean to be disrespectful in any way, but to compare this to 2009 ... there is no comparison,” he said. “2009 was a financial issue. This is a health issue.”

Rawls also voted against canceling the upcoming board meeting scheduled for Tuesday because he said in a time of emergency such as now, these meetings would be the best way to update each other rather than only emails or social media. The vote passed 4-1 as a precaution to the public’s health. Despite DeSantis’ 10-person rule, 30 people attended the emergency meeting. Because of Sunshine Law, board meetings must be public, and access cannot be restricted to the community. “We are making bold decisions and we will do the things we need to do to keep business running as smooth as we can in Putnam County, but what we won’t do is put the remaining staff in harm’s way,” **Suggs** said.

Rawls said he felt attacked by **Suggs** comments, but **Suggs** said he only wanted to make sure county employees know commissioners will put employees in “the best position to be safe.” This is not the first time voices raised at a board meeting. A December board meeting escalated between Rawls and Turner as Rawls said the cost of hiring a contracting firm seemed “excessive.” “This is where my B.S. meter starts to scream,” Rawls said in December. “Looking at the costs; it’s excessive. A continuing services contract doesn’t allow somebody to come in

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

and charge 300% markup.” A meeting in January saw Rawls and Turner break into another argument during a discussion to hire a firm to engineer bridge repairs. “Don’t sit here and be a d--k to me, OK,” Rawls said during the meeting, causing Turner to leave the room.

The emergency meeting continued without issue. Commissioners decided another emergency meeting could be called, if needed, during Florida’s state of emergency, which lasts through April 15. Turner said Wednesday he canceled meetings for later in the day out of safety and in compliance with DeSantis’ executive order limiting gatherings to 10 or fewer people. “Life as we know it for the next month or two is just not going to be the same,” Turner said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News

January 18, 2020

A New Vision

Putnam County welcomes a new decade filled with hope

Author: Wayne Smith

The first decade of the 21st Century was cruel to Putnam County when the 2008 recession hit. Businesses closed, people moved away and the county became one of the state's poorest. However, a positive ending to the century's second decade has area leaders feeling upbeat as 2020 and a new decade arrives. "I'm very optimistic with some of the things we see changing in Putnam County," County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said. "We've got Revitalize Historic Palatka and other things going on at the riverfront. We've just updated our comprehensive plan that will help us in our residential growth and business plans for industry in economic development. I see a lot of pros for Putnam County."

Some of those pros include Georgia-Pacific and Seminole Electric investing half a billion dollars in renovations at their plants in Putnam County. In addition, Comarco Products is spending \$6.5 million renovating the spec building it purchased in Putnam County Business and Aviation Park. The company, which makes precooked eggplant dinners for the restaurant industry, is moving its headquarters to Palatka from New Jersey. The plant is expected to open in mid-April and will initially employ an estimated 50 to 75 workers. **Suggs** hopes more new businesses will soon follow. "Our property values in Putnam County put us in a good position to attract new businesses," **Suggs** said. "We want good, smart and sustainable growth. Putnam County is on the cusp to do great things in the next 10 years."

Others, including Palatka Mayor Terrill Hill, agree. "For me, I think 2020 is the ultimate sign of a new vision for us," Hill said. "We've got two major projects called Vision 20 – as in 2020, which is our Booker Park and John Henry 'Pop' Lloyd Sports Complex – and also the A. Philip Randolph Intermodal Transportation Hub, which is creating a transportation hub on that 11th Street corridor. "When you look at what's going on in this new decade, it's a decade of change. Hope has been restored in this community, and the gem of the St. Johns River has begun to shine again." With the help of Quint Studer's Vibrant Community Partners, 1 Putnam and other local organizations are directing revitalization efforts in Palatka and Putnam County.

The work in downtown Palatka includes restoration of the historic Hotel James and plans to do the same at the former JCPenney building now housing Bingo Palace. The city is also in the process of replacing old water lines downtown dating back to the 1800s. The next major phase of work is scheduled to start in early 2020 along St. Johns Avenue. Other improvements expected downtown next year include the opening of Azalea City Brewing Co. in the former Coca-Cola building. "I've been here going on 10 years, and we're starting to see some significant things happen, especially in the downtown corridor," Palatka Public Works Director Jonathan Griffith said. "Looking back, we've had a lot of positive developments, and it's only going to get better starting the next decade."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Griffith is also involved with Palatka Young Professionals, a group that managed to bring back the Blue Crab Festival in 2019 with resounding success. One focus of the group is retaining the best and brightest young professionals in the county. Keeping that talent is something Studer and **Suggs** say is a key strategy for Palatka becoming a vibrant community. “We’re surrounding ourselves with great talent to lead Putnam County for the next 10 years – local, well-educated people who want to be here,” **Suggs** said. Dana Jones, president of the Putnam County Chamber of Commerce, also looks ahead with optimism to the start of a new decade. “With a new decade, I’m an over-the-top optimist,” Jones said. “I believe we’re perfectly poised for great, great things.”

Jones said the new decade will start with two major fishing tournaments in February, including the Bassmaster Elite Series and a Fishing League Worldwide bass tournament. Last year’s Bassmaster tournament brought an economic impact of \$2 million as well as national TV exposure on ESPN. “Our first lineup for tourism is amazing right out of the gate,” Jones said. “And then, Comarco will bring new jobs and new opportunities at the beginning of the second quarter.” Tourism, specifically ecotourism, is also expected to continue to grow by leaps and bounds during the upcoming decade. Palatka was designated as a Trail Town in 2019, building on the success of the Bartram Trail in Putnam County.

Sam Carr, director of Putnam Blueways and Trails and president of the Bartram Trail Society of Florida, said ecotourism will continue to drive the county forward as a “destination location.” “The whole purpose of becoming a Trail Town is to create amenities for people to come here and spend their money,” Carr said. “We want to bring people to town and let them have a positive experience. “Maybe next time, instead of staying in St. Augustine, they will stay in Palatka.” County Commissioner Bill Pickens is another official looking forward to seeing what the new decade brings to the area. “I just think we need to have a good balance of everything,” Pickens said. “We want to make sure we recruit new businesses and keep creating some good jobs so our local talent has a place to come back to and pursue a career. “As a small business owner, I’m hopeful for our entire county.”

Grand Gables Inn owner Tate Miller is in the process or renovating Hotel James in downtown Palatka. Like Pickens and others, he’s hopeful about what the new decade will bring. “If we judge it by what’s changed just in the last five years, we all should be optimistic,” Miller said. “Four years ago, a lot of the downtown area was literally boarded up. “Now, you can count on one hand those places. With the place we’re at and so many people putting forth the effort to rock us forward in a great way, there are a lot of things happening in partnership and cooperation.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 14, 2019

Suggs says allegations not being mishandled by county authorities

Administrator: Matter involving former official is under investigation

Author: F.W. Broschart

Putnam County officials said Friday allegations of potential impropriety leveled against a former public works director were not being mishandled by county authorities. During Tuesday's Putnam County Board of County Commissioners meeting, Commissioner Jeff Rawls suggested county officials were derelict in their duty by allowing former Public Works Department Director Press Tompkins to retire rather than fire him. Rawls made the comments while discussing payment to a contractor for work performed which Rawls said had been improperly ordered and cost county taxpayers too much.

Putnam County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said in a statement that the matter was under investigation by law enforcement and county officials were honoring a request by investigators to not disseminate information during the investigation. "At some point in time, somebody allowed this kind of contract, and allowed this kind of abuse to happen," Rawls said Tuesday. **Suggs** stated, "As insinuated, by a county commissioner, that county administration, staff and elected officials are not doing their due diligence with respect to 'potential malfeasance' is factually inaccurate. To allude that the county is being negligent in its actions, or lack thereof, is erroneous."

Suggs said the county's Human Resources Department began an investigation in July after being told of concerns. The human resources investigation uncovered enough information to compel the county to engage law enforcement for a possible criminal probe. Sheriff Gator DeLoach told the Palatka Daily News in September his office had been approached to look into the matter, but the request had been delayed while county officials scrambled to prepare for Hurricane Dorian. Florida Department of Law Enforcement is investigating. Asked Tuesday for an update, DeLoach said he could not comment on the status of any investigation. "The biggest problem is that county staff is not being honest with commissioners," Rawls said Friday. "**Terry Suggs** has a duty to act. And allowing a county administrator to keep this under wraps is not the right way to go, either."

Staff were keeping mum because that's what law enforcement asked them to do, according to **Suggs**. "Relevant information leaked or discussed has the potential to impede FDLE's ability to investigate. This could result in impairment of the investigation, case and diminish their ability to charge or prosecute," **Suggs** said. "County Administration, Commissioners and staff who have remained silent have done so in the spirit of cooperation with FDLE agents to allow our law enforcement agencies every opportunity to do their job."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

October 30, 2019

EMT shortage necessitates double overtime pay

Author: F.W. Broschart fbroschart

A shortag

e of emergency medical technicians means more hours for Putnam County’s first responders, but they may soon get extra incentive to work those hours. At a special meeting of the Putnam County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday, board members unanimously voted to allow County Administrator **Terry Suggs** to authorize double overtime pay for EMTs who volunteer to staff ambulances.

“We have nine ambulances budgeted and eight on the road. One (of them), I can’t fill because I don’t have staff to fill it,” said Quin Romay, chief of Putnam County Fire/EMS. “If we don’t come up with a solution pretty quick, we’re going to have to start browning out another ambulance.”

The personnel shortages mean Emergency Services have had difficulty reacting to call volume, Romay said. The problem is only part of a wider, nationwide EMT and paramedic shortage. “We’re running our people to death having to do mandatory (overtime),” Romay said. “Being 11 paramedics short, plus some other positions, has compounded the issue and creates open spots on a daily basis.” Currently, up to six people per shift are on mandatory overtime, for which they receive time-and-a-half pay, Romay said.

Paying double the hourly rate to EMTs who volunteer for extra duty could be an incentive to existing personnel and could help to draw people into empty positions, he said. The starting hourly rate for an EMT in Putnam County is \$10.32 per hour. “I think it’s critical that we start looking outside the box for our staffing levels,” **Suggs** said. “We are looking at other opportunities to incentivize this area of need so we can attract folks here.”

Even though some employees may be paid double-time, it will not create any budgetary shortfalls for the year, **Suggs** said. County Commissioners voted unanimously to grant **Suggs** authority to make the changes, provided the department stays within budget. “This is a decision our administrator should have been able to make tomorrow by himself without breaking his budget,” Commissioner Terry Turner said. “It’s my job to set the budget amount. I don’t think that’s what we should be doing is micro-managing this county.”

Turner said the commission should make changes to its personnel rules to allow staff members to make more personnel decisions within their budgets without needing the approval of the board.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

October 9, 2019

Sheriff's office ending legal spat with CSX

Author: F.W. Broschart

Putnam County officials and CSX appear to have patched up their relationship and are putting litigation behind them. At the Putnam County Board of Commissioners meeting Tuesday, the board voted to dismiss a lawsuit brought by Sheriff Gator DeLoach against the company regarding plans to shut down railroad crossings, potentially isolating neighborhoods from emergency services and school bus routes. "As it stands right now, I'm prepared to make a recommendation to you that the sheriff's office and the Board of County Commission drop the suit against CSX," DeLoach said. "They have shown over the last several weeks that they are more than willing to be cooperative. It was my belief, it was then as it is now, that this issue (that) arose was the result of a contractor they had retained to do some of this work."

Last month, DeLoach launched a lawsuit and asked the court to issue a temporary injunction against CSX and its contractors to prevent them from shutting down a railroad crossing at Buffalo Bluff Road in Satsuma, leaving neighborhood residents cut off from emergency and school bus service. Because of the safety issue, the Board of County Commissioners voted to join the suit. The motion for an emergency injunction was not successful, and the court scheduled a hearing for Sept. 20. By the time of that hearing, the county and railroad company had come to the table and begun negotiating in good faith, County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said. At Tuesday's meeting, **Suggs** characterized the relationship between county authorities and CSX as "collegial and cooperative."

DeLoach said the lawsuit should be dropped as long as CSX is amenable to leaving emergency access open when it closes the crossing at County Road 309 in Satsuma for maintenance. "We don't anticipate any problems from CSX based on their cooperation over the last week or two, but want to make sure there is a workaround," County Attorney Joseph DiNovo said.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)
September 11, 2019

City, county hopes to recoup capital lost during opioid crisis

Author: F.W. Broschart

Putnam County has joined the city of Palatka in a lawsuit against the makers and distributors of drugs accused of causing the opioid crisis. On Friday, the city retained the services of Osborne & Francis, an Orlando law firm representing numerous other counties and municipalities across the state against in a lawsuit against the makers and distributors of opioids. On Tuesday, the Putnam County Board of Commissioners voted to enter into a contract with the same firm. Palatka Mayor Terrill Hill appeared before the board meeting Tuesday morning to ask the county to join the city in the opioid lawsuit.

Putnam County was one of the worst hit by the opioid epidemic, and county taxpayers wound up footing the bill for the costs of the epidemic in terms of increased need for emergency services, health care services and even crime, Hill said. The lawsuit could be a way for county taxpayers to recoup some of their expenses, Hill added. “We’ve probably been hit the hardest when you look at the resources expended by emergency services, as well as the (Putnam County) Sheriff’s Office as well as other areas throughout the county,” Hill said. “I think it’s incumbent on us to look at these opportunities as a means to recover some of those resources.”

Gregorio Francis, a representative from Osborne & Francis, told commissioners at their 2 p.m. workshop on Tuesday his firm operated on a contingency basis, where the county would only pay the firm a percentage of any future recovery. Francis said the firm agreed to lower its contingency fee to 20%, which is below the typical contingency charged by the plaintiff’s firms. “This is a lawsuit that seeks to recoup the funds that this county, that residents who have never taken an opioid at all have had to expend with their tax dollars,” Francis said. The lawsuit was filed in federal court in Cleveland against manufacturers and distributors of opioids. Overall, there were about 30 named defendants in the case, Francis said.

County commissioners voted unanimously to instruct County Administrator **Terry Suggs** to obtain a contract for the firm to represent the county that will be presented before county commissioners at their next workshop at 2 p.m. Sept. 17, where they will vote on the contract. Commissioners did not vote to retain the firm Tuesday because they wanted to ensure they were not violating rules regarding purchasing of services, Commissioner Terry Turner said.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

August 7, 2019

Goals almost reality with proposed pay increases

Author: F.W. Broschart

Under the county’s proposed budget, county workers might be receiving a pay raise for the first time in over 10 years. The Putnam County Board of Commissioners has proposed a pay hike for county employees of 8% for those making \$20 per hour or less and 2% for those making more than \$20 per hour. The pay increase is part of the board’s proposed budget that will receive another reading Sept. 10. The raises will affect only non-constitutional employees, Commissioner Buddy Goddard said. It will not affect any employees in offices of elected officials. “There have been a lot of challenges for a long time,” Commissioner Bill Pickens said. “Raises are one of the goals the commission has had for a while.”

The pay raises are part of a budget that is balanced, does not cut into reserves and does not require a millage rate increase, Pickens said. Previously, the county resorted to millage rate increases and tapping into reserves to balance the budget, he said. This year, the board is proposing to keep the existing millage rate of 9.5946 mills. Raises for staff were necessary so the county could compete with neighboring counties and the private sector in hiring and retaining quality staff, Pickens said. “It has been several years, 10 or 11, since staff has seen an increase in pay,” said **Terry Suggs**, Putnam County administrator. “It’s a great start and something we will be able to sustain.”

Suggs said the Board of County Commissioners had begun a process of making the county government more efficient, and that, in part, allowed for pay raises without an increase in the millage rate or dipping into county reserves. The raise is part of the proposed 2019-2020 budget, which will have the first of its final readings Sept. 10 and its second reading Sept. 24. The board will vote to approve the budget during both hearings, but a green light in the second hearing would finalize the budget. “There was an agreement on the Board of County Commissioners,” **Suggs** said. “There was a definite directive they were given to give employees a raise.”

“There was much need for a raise,” Goddard said. “These are good, loyal employees who deserve a raise after years of hard work.” Goddard and Pickens said they cannot disclose how they plan to vote on the budget and pay raises, but both said they felt the issue was important to commissioners and were hopeful the raises would go through. “I’ll be distraught if it doesn’t pass,” Goddard said. The next reading of the proposed 2019-2020 budget and millage rates for Putnam County will be 5:05 p.m. Sept. 10 at the Putnam County Government Complex, 2509 Crill Ave. , Suite 100, in Palatka. The final reading will be 5:05 p.m. Sept. 24 at the same location.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

June 12, 2019

Shipbuilding company reaches deal with county

Author: Cristóbal Reyes creyes

After nearly two months of negotiations, county officials reached an agreement with a local shipbuilding company to lease a facility at the Barge Port that has been vacant for more than half a year. The agreement made between the Putnam County Port Authority and St. Johns Shipbuilding went into effect Tuesday and was announced by County Administrator **Terry Suggs** at yesterday's Board of County Commissioner's meeting. "It took a couple of opportunities to get that done, but we've finally got the signed copies back," **Suggs** told the commission.

St. Johns Shipbuilding, which already has a facility on Stokes Landing Road in Palatka, agreed to pay \$5,250 a month plus a 6.75% sales tax, according to the agreement. The company said in April it will use the facility as a satellite location "primarily for fabrication and warehousing of aluminum components" for the ships it builds. The lease is a one-year deal, but the company has the option to extend the agreement to four additional one-year terms. It also has the right to first-option if the Port Authority decides to sell the property.

The company, which began in 2006, currently employs 160 workers and conducts \$30 million in business a year, said General Manager Bobby Barfield, who made the case for the lease before the county commission. "We have a great need for expansion, and the Port Authority's location would be a great location for us to use as a satellite facility," Barfield told commissioners on April 9.

The company's client base and reputation made it a good candidate for the lease, county officials said. According to the company website, the company has built a range of steel ships for "commercial and government entities building under U.S. and foreign flags."

The Barge Port's 20,550-square-foot warehouse is seen as an economic development engine for the county, and having a local business like St. Johns Shipbuilding occupy that space made it an even stronger candidate, **Suggs** said. "We have a local company that's doing well that was looking for a place to expand its operations, and luckily we had a facility available," he said. "It's a tremendous project for the both of us."

Also part of the lease was the company agreeing to pay \$31,600 for improvements to the facility in lieu of a security deposit, according to the lease. Included in the list of approved improvements are renovations to existing infrastructure like air conditioning units and electrical systems and \$10,000 in renovating the bathrooms to make them handicap accessible.

St. Johns Shipbuilding didn't return requests for comment by press time Tuesday, but Administrative Manager Kelli Hilligus said in an April 11 email the company hopes to hire "40

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

to 60 new employees” as a result of the lease. “It would enable us to expand our footprint and secure more aluminum vessels to construct, allowing us to hire and train more local personnel (and) keeping work in Putnam County as opposed to farming out jobs to other shipyards in the gulf,” Hilligus added.

Initially, county negotiators were looking to strike a deal with another company, J&M Metal Works. That company submitted a bid for the warehouse but was quickly denied by the Port Authority at its April 9 meeting after only presenting a single-page letter with proposed rent payments and dockage fees. At the time, Commissioner Jeff Rawls called on the other members to oppose the deal due to lack of information. Barfield, who was in the audience at that meeting, then proposed the county do business with St. Johns Shipbuilding.

One of the sticking points that dragged out the negotiations was company officials’ questions regarding performing an environmental assessment of the property. Ultimately, both parties agreed doing so is currently “not practical,” but added the county would have to prove St. Johns Shipbuilding is responsible “if environmental contamination is found in the future,” according to the lease.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

February 23, 2019

County scraps contract amid sharp criticism

Author: Cristóbal Reyes

Masters Funeral Home, the business contracted with Putnam County for cadaver transport services, was issued a termination notice last month after local, regional and state agencies voiced concerns about the company's services. The county stated it was exercising its contractual right to issue a 30-day notice "without cause." However, the decision was made two days after officials from the District 23 Medical Examiner's Office requested Putnam County terminate its contract with the funeral home. The funeral home's contract will end March 1, according to the termination notice.

Kelly Boulos, assistant to the medical examiner, made the request Jan. 29 in an email notifying Putnam County General Services Director Julianne Young of a Masters employee accused of taking photos and video at the scene of a fatal crash while the victim's body was still in his vehicle.

In that crash, a garbage truck collided with a tractor-trailer leaving Vulcan Materials Co. in Grandin, killing one of the drivers. Screenshots of one of the photos and a live feed that appeared to have been posted on Facebook by Masters employee Thomas Pietrowicz were attached in the email. "This is a serious incident and beyond unprofessional," Boulos said in the email. "The disrespect to our decedents, their families and to the reputation of the District 23 Medical Examiner's Office is unacceptable."

The next day, Young emailed County Attorney Stacey Manning, County Administrator **Terry Suggs** and Deputy County Administrator Matt Reynolds about a conversation she had with state Highway Patrol Cpl. Brian Timmons. According to the email, Timmons witnessed Pietrowicz "on the active crime scene before he was authorized to come recover the body." Timmons told Young the agency was looking into whether to charge Pietrowicz for obstruction. Information the Daily News requested from FHP was not available by press time Friday. The emails and screenshots make up dozens of pages documenting three agencies' complaints against Masters Funeral Home employees going back to April 2018.

Suggs said discussions about whether to terminate the contract began at least a week before the crash. Emails from the Medical Examiner's Office "didn't carry weight with my decision," he said. "I don't get involved with the day-to-day operations that come with the agreements," **Suggs** said. "I wasn't privy to the information that was received in the emails, and I didn't use that to make the decision."

Quincy Masters, owner of Masters Funeral Home, declined to comment on the investigation or say whether Pietrowicz still works for him. He denied wrongdoing and called on the public to withhold judgment until the investigation is completed. "I have invested my life in the business I

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

have inherited from my father,” Masters said in an emailed statement. “A funeral home is measured by the trust the community has in us, and I appreciate the trust the public has placed with us for the last 65 years. I take this as a very serious matter.”

And despite multiple emails noting Boulos’ insistence on not using Masters Funeral Home’s cadaver transport services, she said in a phone interview the Medical Examiner’s Office can’t make that decision unilaterally. She declined to comment further on the matter.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

News4jax.com
September 18, 2018

**I-TEAM: Putnam County road cut off by flooding for 2 months
Residents fed up, worried more rain will cause even bigger problems**

Authors: Jennifer Waugh, Jodi Mohrmann, and Eric Wallace

For two months, many Putnam County drivers have had to take a different road to get to and from work because part of County Road 308B in Welaka has been swallowed by flood waters. At least 10 inches of rain has fallen since July, causing a retention pond next to the road near Elm Street to overflow. As a result, about 100 feet of the road between Welaka Village and the town's city hall has been closed to cars, and, as the I-TEAM discovered, part of the road remains covered with about a foot of water.

Residents fed up with flooded road

"It goes up about 200 yards this way and 200 yards that way," David Schrider said as he pointed to flooding on each side of 308B. Schrider contacted the I-TEAM, concerned the county is not doing enough to fix the problem. "Putnam County roads is pretty much telling me to say a prayer. There's nothing they can do about it. The sheriff is telling me they're monitoring these roads right now, and I've been down here quite a bit and I've never seen a law enforcement officer here. I'm fed up with going around," Schrider said.

While there are other roads that lead to Crescent City and Welaka, the closed portion of CR 308B is the fastest route -- not just for commuters, but also for emergency responders. An alternate route is several miles out of the way. "As a former first responder, our job is to help save people, to get to people who need help and assistance," said Desiree Myers. "With this road the way it is, we can't do it." Myers is worried it may take too long for paramedics to reach her home with the road closed. Her teenage son has a heart condition, and as a former EMT, she knows that minutes can make the difference between life and death. "The county needs to be held responsible for making sure that first responders can get here to do their job. We are doing all we can, isn't good enough," she said.

The flooded road is right in front of Isaiah Mills' home. Part of his side-yard and backyard are also flooded. His rental home across the street is also filled with water. "My tenants had to move out," he said. "I don't have flood insurance." Mills told us he's lived his entire life in Welaka, and has not ever seen this part of CR 308B flood so badly. He is frustrated that more has not been done to clear the road but said he has not thought about complaining to county leaders. "I have not seen the county do anything except, like come here and put up these signs that say water over the road," Mills said.

We saw several signs warning drivers the road is closed to traffic and is covered by water. But, Schrider is increasingly frustrated to see trucks are ignoring the signs and driving through the water anyway. We saw at least a dozen pickup trucks and commercial trucks drive through the flooded road while we were there. Schrider is concerned the weight of the trucks and the long-

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

standing water over the road will erode it further causing so much damage, that once the water does finally recede, it will need to be closed for repair. I asked him if he felt like the county is ignoring the people of Welaka because it is a small town with about 700 residents. “Yes,” he said. “I do really think we are being ignored.”

I-TEAM takes concerns to the county

As a county road, Putnam County is responsible for its maintenance, so we took our concerns to the county's administrator, Public Works director, and the commissioner representing residents of Welaka. “I wouldn't say they (residents) are being ignored, we are out there every day,” County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said. “We are trying to find a solution to the problem, and I'll be honest, we don't have that solution yet.” But, **Suggs** did tell us, that right now, the water is not too high for emergency response trucks to use the road. “The road is closed for safety reasons to small vehicles and motorcycles. Our safety vehicles are still able to traverse that highway,” he said.

When our cameras visited the area, the water had receded some, so we asked, "What if the flood waters do rise and become too high for safety vehicles to pass?" “We look for solutions as we are doing today. We will always be able to provide a service to them. We will make sure we can get to our residents,” answered **Suggs**. **Suggs** had Putnam County Public Works Director Press Tompkins show News4Jax why the flooding problem is so difficult to solve. Tompkins displayed a topographical map, which shows elevations in Welaka. Pointing to either side of CR 308B, Tompkins explained that the area covered with water is like a bowl.

“You can see we are about 70 feet above sea level here, and over here, we are about 40 feet, and everything is channeling down in all directions into this bowl area,” said Tompkins pointing to the portion of the road that has been under water for two months. He said the water table in Putnam County is extremely high due to Hurricane Irma and from summer rain showers. As a result, he said it does not take much water to flood. Our Sky4 helicopter recorded a retention pond overflowing near the flooded portion of CR 308B, as well as several acres of land beyond it also submerged in water. “We have about 120 acres of land staged up,” Tompkins said. He said this means the water table is so high from Irma's rain last year, rain from persistent summer showers is not soaking into the ground. “The groundwater table is up as high as it's been in 30 to 40 years,” he added.

Would ditches be a fix?

We then asked Tompkins if ditches could be dug on either side of the road to help drain the water off. “If you try to dig ditches on either side, it will be very deep and it would take up a tremendous amount of property and I don't think that is a viable solution,” said Tompkins, who also pointed out that most of the land is private and not owned by the county.

Would pumps be a fix?

The I-TEAM asked Tompkins if the flooding on CR 308B could be pumped off the road, but he said there is nowhere to put it since so much of the area is already flooded.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Would a bridge be a fix?

Tompkins said they have considered building a bridge over the flooded water, but said until some of it recedes, he can't do that. "I tell people very candidly, we are at Mother Nature's mercy right now."

There is currently "no place for the water to go"

District 1 Commissioner Bill Pickens, who serves Welaka, said he's been aware of the flooding problem, but reiterated what County Administrator **Terry Suggs** and Public Works Director Press Tompkins explained, "There is no place to drain it efficiently." All three county officials did agree that they would be happy to meet with Welaka residents to explain why there is no easy or immediate solution, especially since they all agree another storm or more rain could make the flooding worse. The I-TEAM will continue to monitor the flooding along CR 308B and press the county for solutions -- should the water rise enough to impact emergency response times.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

July 13, 2018

County budget doesn't dip into reserves

Proposed \$121 million budget is a 4.25 percent increase from 2017-2018 fiscal year

Author: Brandon D. Oliver

Good news was aplenty Thursday as Putnam County commissioners and staff reviewed the preliminary budget for the 2018-2019 fiscal year. Deputy County Administrator Matt Reynolds and Office of Management and Budget Director Stacie Poppell informed the Board of County Commissioners next fiscal year's preliminary budget was balanced without using general fund reserves. "We spent a significant amount of time going through the budget to try to find savings where we could," Reynolds said. "It was not easy."

The proposed budget for next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1, is \$121,794,991, an increase of about \$4.9 million (4.25 percent) from the current fiscal year. One of the main reasons the budget is higher, Reynolds said, is because the entire fund balance is included in the budget, per state statute. Although the proposed budget is higher, the proposed millage rate next fiscal year is 9.6622, a .227 (2.3 percent) decrease from the current year. The projected fire millage rate will remain at 1.1000. Countywide reserves are projected to be \$18.7, while general fund reserves will be \$6.3 million, an increase from the current \$4.8 million in general fund reserves. The projected 2018-2019 fiscal year general fund balance is \$57.1 million, up from \$48.3 million this fiscal year.

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said Reynolds, Poppell, department leaders and constitutional officers worked tirelessly to find ways to "create efficiencies and save dollars" in next year's budget. During budget meetings earlier this year, **Suggs** said, staff knew "we need to bring back a responsible balanced budget to the commissioners for (fiscal year 2018-2019). Department heads and staff have worked over 200 hours on this budget." While there are no staff raises or cost-of-living increases in the budget, there are also no changes to employee health insurance contributions.

Some of the county's goals when crafting next year's budget were to reduce the amount of reserves used to balance the budget, increase the amount of reserves and decrease the millage rate. The state prohibits local governments from having a millage rate higher than 10 mills. To balance the current year's budget, \$1 million of reserves were used. Finding money to accomplish those and other goals was difficult, but staff worked hard to find a way to make it happen, **Suggs** said. "It was not that easy to find money for us to be able to reduce that budget," he said. "We've put on a hiring freeze. We've put on a spending freeze."

Commissioners will vote whether to approve the tentative budget during their July 24 board meeting. And from then until the first budget hearing in September, numbers could change and there could be a chance the millage rate could be decreased even more. Commissioners gave Poppell and Reynolds a standing ovation, complimenting them on putting together a concise and

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

transparent budget. “Any constituent who picks it up will be able to read it,” Commissioner Chip Laibl. “I’d like to compliment both of you. I’m learning things this morning.” Commissioner Larry Harvey said Poppell and Reynolds have done a great job saving money without putting county residents at a disadvantage. “Outstanding job,” he said. “I know you all have stayed up and worked these budgets. And you haven’t skimmed on the citizens of Putnam County. I applaud you.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

March 21, 2018

Putnam snags \$2.4 million in state funding

Author: Brandon D. Oliver

Local officials are celebrating Putnam County receiving \$2.4 million of appropriations following this year’s state legislative session. According to a statement from the office of state Rep. Bobby Payne, R-Palatka, the county received \$850,000 for an East Palatka fire station, \$790,232 for communications equipment upgrades, \$250,000 for school district advanced manufacturing training and \$500,000 for an animal shelter.

In a statement, Payne said he and state Sen. Keith Perry, R-Gainesville, worked hard to secure funding for their district. “We are extremely pleased to work with our colleagues in both the House and Senate to secure funding for these projects,” Payne said in a statement. “Sen. Perry and I have formed a strong relationship and will continue to press for appropriations each year in order to improve the quality of life for all in our district.”

County Administrator **Terry Suggs** said this was welcomed news for the county, given the harsh economic obstacles facing the county. “I think this is an excellent opportunity for Putnam County to move in the right direction,” **Suggs** said. “Animal Control is a serious concern in our community right now.”

The county has pursued a public-private partnership to build a new facility. Land near the Putnam County Sheriff’s Office was donated to the county, but permits, tests and other preliminary work must be done before construction can begin. Receiving \$500,000 – appropriated to the Department of Economic Opportunity to be given to Putnam – is great, **Suggs** said, because the money could fund preliminary work.

County Commissioners recently voted to allow up to \$750,000 from the Better Place Plan to be used for the animal facility if the county didn’t receive the appropriation. With the appropriation, the county could decrease the amount of Better Place Plan money, if any, used for the shelter, **Suggs** said.

Money for the county’s communications system is sorely needed, **Suggs** said, and it would allow the county to “bring our communications system into the 21st century.” Emergency workers and officials from all municipalities in the county use the system, which makes it too vital of a tool to remain antiquated, **Suggs** said. “Our communications system is in dire need of upgrades,” he said. “The bulk of that (money) ... will be spent on upgrading the current equipment that we have at our communications center.”

Suggs said the money used to lay water pipes for the East Palatka first station is an indicator the county should focus on developing the State Road 207 corridor, whether for industry, commercial interests or residential units. Having been administrator for less than a year – but

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

having worked in the public sector for more than 20 years – **Suggs** said this was one of the best legislative sessions he’s experienced for the local government he represented. He commended Payne and Perry for their work in Tallahassee. But **Suggs** said there were even more people working to uplift Putnam.

Whether county staff and commissioners, local business leaders or U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho, R-Fla., lots of hard work and long hours have been put in to help the county rebound from the recession 10 years ago. “I’ve been doing this a long time,” **Suggs** said. “I think Rep. Bobby Payne and Sen. Keith Perry are doing an excellent job. Putnam County is heading in the right direction. It’s time for Putnam County to continue on this track of momentum.” The funds will be available to the county July 1.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Terry K. Suggs** is listed below]

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 30, 2017

2018: PEOPLE TO WATCH

Big year could be ahead for the Daily News’ annual People to Watch selections

Authors: Allison Waters-Merritt and Brandon D. Oliver

Every new year brings promise and hope for better times. But the new year also brings mystery and the unknown. While no one knows for certain what will happen in 2018, the Palatka Daily News has compiled a list of people to watch next year. Whether a county leader with tough choices ahead, a school principal with pressure to succeed or a relatively young city official with a seemingly bright future ahead of him, the following people should be on everyone’s radar:

When the list of candidates for Putnam County administrator was made public during the summer, one name, though not a shoo-in, stood out among the crowded pack. Then-Palatka City Manager **Terry Suggs**, who has previous experience in Keystone Heights and Alachua County, was one of a handful of local candidates who applied for the position. Eventually, the Board of County Commissioners appointed him as the county’s new leader. But 2017 had its challenges – a tight budget, increasing health insurance rates and a hurricane – and 2018 is sure to have some of the same challenge. While most people are hoping for no hurricanes, the county is likely to face another tight budget session, and if patterns hold true, insurance rates could increase again.

In addition to leading the county through those trying times, **Suggs** will likely make at least three major hires, with the Library System, Human Resources Department and Planning and Development Services all currently without a permanent director. But since **Suggs** began his time in Palatka by hiring a new police chief, he has experience with making tough decisions that will have a long-lasting impact.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

August 16, 2017

Moving On Up

Author: Brandon D. Oliver

Putnam County didn't have to look far for its new administrator. After almost five months with the position vacant, the Board of County Commissioners on Tuesday selected Palatka City Manager **Terry Suggs** to be the new man in charge. "I feel very humbled standing here as your county administrator to be," **Suggs** said after the 3-1 vote to appoint him. "I am blessed. I am truly blessed." Although Commissioner Chip Laibl voted against appointing **Suggs**, each commissioner enthusiastically embraced – figuratively and literally – **Suggs** and voiced their readiness for **Suggs** to begin.

Commissioner Buddy Goddard, who in March called for discussions on whether to replace Rick Leary as county administrator, made the motion to appoint **Suggs** during Tuesday's special meeting. Goddard said the county administrator candidates, who also included Boynton Beach Assistant City Manager Colin Groff and Adams County, Pa., Manager Albert Penksa Jr., were all well qualified. But it was **Suggs**' familiarity with the area and established connections with local officials and business leaders that tipped the scales in his favor. "It wasn't an easy decision," Goddard said. "Mr. Groff, I thought, was an excellent choice, also. But **Terry** is very familiar with what's going on. He has built a relationship, in the short time he's been here, with a lot of people."

Suggs' first-hand knowledge of the county and the challenges it faces was the deciding factor for most commissioners. All commissioners, in one way or another, said the choice boiled down to Groff or **Suggs**. Since last week's series of interviews, Commissioner Bill Pickens said, he has been reviewing candidates' biographies, résumés and work histories. Pickens also received a plethora of phone calls from county staff and members of the community. "I probably read the candidates' bios 10 times," Pickens said. "I did a lot of soul searching because this is a big decision."

Commission Chairman Larry Harvey said candidate interviews Friday helped him make up his mind. And throughout **Suggs**' two years with the city of Palatka, Harvey said, **Suggs** has worked hard, led by example and even volunteered his time in other city departments. During the interview, Harvey said, "**(Suggs)** was very brutally honest about how he wanted to move the county forward."

Although eager to work with **Suggs**, Laibl threw his support behind Groff. **Suggs** and Groff have long histories working with local government, Laibl said, but it was Groff's additional years of experience that made him Laibl's standout candidate. "I just went down to their experience," Laibl said. "I saw them almost identical, except for a few more years of experience with Colin. I'm happy with however this turns out today." After **Suggs** was appointed as incoming county

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

administrator, Laibl motioned to have Stacey Manning, county attorney and interim county administrator, start drafting a contract for **Suggs**. The board unanimously approved the measure.

Exactly how much **Suggs** will be paid and when he will start will be decided when his contract with the county is finalized. Earlier this year, the board agreed the new county administrator would have an annual salary of \$120,000 to \$140,000. As city manager of Palatka, **Suggs** makes \$98,000 annually. Putnam County Tax Collector Linda Myers – who was on the Hiring and Selection Committee, one of two groups that assisted with the candidate search – said the board’s pick has re-energized her zeal for the community and the services county government could provide it. “I, like anyone else, am excited about the county we live in,” Myers said. “And I look forward to working with our new county administrator.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Jacksonville.com

August 8, 2017

The help Trump promised hasn't come. So the 'dying city' of Palatka is determined to save itself.

Author: Robert Samuels

As the sun set along the widened expanses of the St. Johns River, Palatka Mayor Terrill Hill grabbed a cooler filled with beer and climbed aboard the Pride of Palatka. Inside the red-and-white riverboat sat a group of visiting environmental enthusiasts, eager to see the attraction locals hoped could revive the rural town they love. Sam Carr, a Palatka native who runs a local outdoor activities promotion group, told passengers they'd soon be immersed in a waterworld of green marshes and moss and mangroves, of tall birds wading in the current and alligators lingering in the water.

The travelers hoped the old river might be the key to a prosperous future for a rural community that, like many others across the United States, has been largely left behind by the modern economy. They envision bed-and-breakfasts along the water, condominiums rising for retirees who might prize the view, and tourists flocking to experience a rare pocket of undisturbed, natural Florida. "This is our best thing," Carr said. As Carr continued his talk, the sky turned dark and gray. The waves rose and, in the distance, lightning flashed. "We have to leave the boat," he said as the group began to evacuate.

The return to the river would have to wait. Palatka, a city of 10,400 swaddled by potato farms and a paper mill that employs a fraction of the workers it once did, is desperate for an economy to call its own. Abandoned by retailers that have moved out of their city, and disappointed that President Trump hasn't yet delivered on his promise to restore economic opportunity to small communities, the people here say they don't have much choice. The alternative would be to allow their beloved home to become the next example of a dying American small town. To help save it, some have started homegrown carwashes and small restaurants and bars selling craft beers. Others have worked with developers to build apartments downtown. And officials here are striving to turn the riverfront, a resource that is unique to their city, into a future hub for tourism and a draw for retirees.

"We have to tap into our locals, our entrepreneurial spirit and our aspirations to substitute what is happening around us," said Hill, 44, who grew up here, left to get degrees from Howard University and the University of Florida, and returned to open a law practice. Some here thought this would be a year of revival. Trump had vowed a major deal to pour trillions into roads, bridges, water systems and other infrastructure projects that Palatka, like many other communities, have been seeking for years. Some Democrats, even in these tense times, said they were eager to work with him.

Instead, the only Kmart went out of business this spring, and the town's beloved J.C. Penney closed its doors this week, eliminating dozens of jobs and the only thing around that resembles

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

upscale shopping. Opioid abuse is rampant, and 1 in 10 residents continue to live in public housing. The school system ranks among Florida's worst. And the city's pipes are so old that the water sometimes comes out the color of rust. One by one, the institutions that Palatka officials had wanted to depend on were proving unreliable. Requests this year for financial assistance from Washington and Tallahassee have gone unanswered. A plea by the mayor to J.C. Penney's corporate headquarters to reconsider shuttering the department store was shot down. In some ways, the strategy of self-reliance is a return to the city's past.

For decades, Palatka's leaders and residents had embraced their bubble. Politicians rejected plans over the years to build highways that would have connected Palatka to Interstates 75 and 95, spurring growth. Back then, they were afraid growth might have changed things too much. Sixty miles south of the sprawling city of Jacksonville, residents here have relished their lifestyle in a place Hill calls "the last bastion of old Florida" - shaggy trees, old houses with worn-out roofs, accents that were more like Montgomery, Ala., than Miami. From the city's founding, residents relied on the river to attract thousands of jobs. It once brought in a furniture manufacturing plant and a paper mill.

And, in a city whose population is close to evenly split between blacks and whites, Palatka residents take pride in their values. Whites here largely rejected the Ku Klux Klan when it was terrorizing black residents in other parts of north Florida, according to City Commissioner Mary Lawson-Brown, 81, who is black. Lawson-Brown's grandmother operated an integrated hospital; her grandfather ran the funeral home. No one could be born or buried in town without help from a black person. "We were still a segregated city, especially on Sunday," Lawson-Brown said. "But we didn't have any racial riots... . Everyone wanted to preserve Palatka."

Over the past two decades, however, the small city has been forced to contend with the realities of the global economy. The furniture manufacturer closed in 2003, citing competition from Chinese imports, according to news reports at the time. About 650 people lost their jobs. The old factory building sits on River Street, unused and empty. Automation and competition led to jobs at the paper mill, which is owned by Georgia-Pacific, being slashed by a third to 850 over the past 12 years, according to public affairs manager Terry Hadaway. By 2013, local leaders were horrified to learn that an expert hired by the Florida League of Cities had found that Palatka was the state's only "dying city." The designation was based on pure statistics - more deaths than births, more people moving out than moving in. But it stung.

For Hill, the label served as an inspiration to make the leap into politics. In 2014, he ran for mayor with the slogan "Helping Our Palatka Evolve," and persuaded one of his friends to run for the city commission. They won overwhelmingly, and Hill became the second black mayor in Palatka's history. By 2016, the five-person city commission was all black. Four commissioners were under 50. "The city needed fresh ideas," said Ed Killebrew, a white fifth-generation Palatkan. "And they were all from here, so they understood what we needed." When it came to the presidential election, Killebrew, like many others in this traditionally Democratic city, made a similar calculation. "There was only one candidate who I felt knew what we needed," Killebrew said. "That was Trump."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

And what does Palatka need? “Help,” he said. To understand the city’s troubles, Killebrew suggested, take a stroll through the Palatka Mall. Foot traffic was reduced by online retail, and other stores left for bigger cities throughout the country. When Killebrew was growing up, he remembered going with his family to shop for Boy Scout uniforms downtown and lining up along the main street for the annual Christmas parade. Then came the mall in 1981, taking all the major businesses within its enclosed peach-colored walls. Its anchor was the J.C. Penney, which had put its first Florida store in Palatka in 1928 and employed a generation of workers, mostly women, who generally did not seek to work in the sulfurous-smelling mill.

For years, the new mall was filled with people and it bustled with commerce. Today, there are almost no people and hardly any commerce. The mall sits as an empty, dimly lit shell where lizards race up and down with abandon. The parking lot in front of the old J.C. Penney is empty. Hill had tried to make the case for J.C. Penney to stay. In April, he wrote to the company’s chief executive in Plano, Tex., to explain how much his city depended on the department store. He noted Palatka’s low rate of car ownership and said many residents could not easily get to the nearest store, 30 miles away in St. Augustine. There is a local bus service that caters to seniors. “We have lost too many major retail chain stores,” Hill wrote.

The company’s senior counsel, Arnold Grothues, responded five days later. He was not convinced. “We are sensitive to the fact that this is a blow to our associates in those stores and to the communities they have served,” Grothues wrote, according to a copy of the letter provided by the city. “But I must stress that the decision is final.” A J.C. Penney spokesman declined to comment. At the mall one recent afternoon, Jaquese Smith, 18, sat on a bench in front of a closed jewelry shop. He had graduated from Palatka High with a 3.2 grade-point average but could only find a job working for Wendy’s. He quit after a manager asked him to shave his goatee, an infringement he felt was not worth the \$8 an hour.

So Smith had come to the mall to visit one of the only storefronts with a tenant - the Army recruitment office. “The military is probably the best place for me to get some opportunities and to earn some benefits,” he said. “This place is kind of hollow,” he added. “Everything’s closing. Kmart gone, J.C. Penney’s gone. I’m just saying, you kind of wonder what’s next?” City officials have the same question. The closures of retail stores not only means a loss of jobs, but also a decline in sales tax revenue that can be used to address the city’s many needs. Palatka’s cracked and rusty water pipes, some of which haven’t been replaced since 1886, seemed to be exactly the type of problem both parties in Washington wanted to address. But Palatka has had a tough time finding an ally, according to City Manager **Terry Suggs**.

The city’s population made it slightly too big, by about 500 people, to be eligible for federal grants and loans to assist rural communities with waste-management problems, **Suggs** said. **Suggs** said he sent emails, made phone calls and visited with lawmakers in hopes of securing waivers so Palatka might qualify for assistance of some kind. But no decision has been made. “We need folks in Washington to get their act together!” **Suggs** said. Among those to hear from **Suggs** was Rep. Ted Yoho, the Republican congressman whose district includes Palatka. Yoho

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

counseled patience. “The Trump administration is just getting started,” he said. “It has taken a while for nominees to get approved, so it will just take some time.”

The city also appealed to the state for \$1.5 million to help with water treatment during the most recent legislative session in the spring. State Rep. Bobby Payne (R), who represents Palatka, said he couldn’t even get the bill out of committee. Larger communities tend to have more clout in the budget process. “We’ll keep trying,” Payne said. The city’s lobbyist in Tallahassee, Yolanda Cash Jackson, said Palatka will always have disadvantages. “They don’t have a giant tax base, and they are Democrats in a Republican state,” Jackson said. “So it’s easy for their problems to get lost. And they do.”

On a recent evening, residents flocked to Beulah Baptist Church, ready for a revival. The preacher commanded the worshipers to be hopeful even in the presence of hardship. “Every time I step forward, it feels like I’m taking two steps back,” he said. “But after all I’ve been through, I ain’t gonna let nothing, or nobody, take my joy! Grab it! Get your joy back!” Applauding him was Isaac Brinson, 44, whose smile displayed his teeth capped with gold grills with dollar signs on them. Brinson, who as a felon lost his voting rights, said he would not have supported Trump had he been allowed to cast a ballot. But he said he appreciated Trump’s ability to hustle. He was a hustler, too. Brinson said he had planned on using the money he earned from selling drugs to help start a day-care center. Then he was arrested. When he returned from prison, he opened his own business because he couldn’t get a job.

“I took a bucket, some detergent and one of those sticks with a large brush and started my own carwash,” Brinson said. “Now, I don’t even wash cars. I have two people working for me each day. That’s what we need to do here.” Hill figured the city would need that kind of moxie, just on a larger scale. Everyone had to hustle. When city officials heard the owner of Bass Pro Shops was coming to town for a bass tournament this year, Hill and the city manager traveled to the private airport to try to persuade him to build a store in Palatka. There have been a few good signs. The paper mill announced in June that it was adding a new processor to the factory, bringing 80 more jobs to the community.

Georgia-Pacific was also working with the local school board to train high school students to prepare them for the manufacturing jobs of today. “We have confidence that Palatka and the surrounding area can support the kind of skilled employees we need now, but more importantly, in the future,” said Karen Cole, a company spokeswoman. She added, “You can’t underestimate the value of a positive, long-term relationship with a community, which we very much have in Palatka.” A 10-minute drive from the mill, a local accountant and his wife had bought space downtown to start Uncork and Unwind, with \$7 craft beer and the most expensive wine in town. Sitting on a stool there one evening was Killebrew, the fifth-generation Palatkan, drinking a Raging Blonde with real estate agent Robbi Correa and the owner. “If we just improved our education system, we can have more jobs,” said the owner, David Griffith, who was tending the bar. “But we need good jobs,” Killebrew said. “This way people can stay.”

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

They were happy that there were more jobs coming to the mill, but feared how long it would be until, once again, technology rendered them irrelevant. Correa, a retired teacher from Connecticut, cast her hopes on encouraging tourism. If more people saw the river, she said, they would choose to retire here, like she did. Their conversation took place on the same afternoon Hill and the visiting environmental enthusiasts had to evacuate the boat. After climbing out, the group dined in a local welcome center on food from the Golden Corral and discussed how building hiking and biking trails had improved other small towns in Florida. From the windows, they could see the sky clearing in shades of blue and pink. Carr, who led the group off the boat, looked again to the St. Johns's flowing waters. They walked out of the center and headed back to the docks. As the last speckles of the day's sun sparkled on the river, they climbed aboard the Pride of Palatka and trailed away. After the rain, the conditions seemed just right.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

April 15, 2017

City of Palatka receives bond upgrade from national rating service

Author: Scott J. Bryan

While there was no cake to celebrate the monumental occasion, city leaders were pleased to announce Palatka recently received upgrades on its financial standing. According to Palatka Finance Director Matt Reynolds, Fitch Ratings upgraded Palatka’s bond rating to A+ from A-. Additionally, Fitch upgraded the long term issuer default rating for Palatka to an A+ from an A-. “The rating outlook is stable,” a news release from Fitch Ratings said. Reynolds said Fitch Ratings’ upgrade could be attributed to numerous factors.

“There were several things,” Reynolds told Palatka commissioners Thursday during a city commission meeting. “They mentioned the city’s ability to contain expenditures. They looked at how we made it through the recession. We didn’t have any furloughs and layoffs. We made it through with attrition and retirement, people leaving for other jobs, things like that. “They looked at our reserve balance, which is trending upward. They also looked at our millage rate and where it was. Our decrease to 6.4, I think, was a big factor and the fire assessment fee was a big factor.”

Reynolds said the bonding upgrade meant Palatka’s finances will be looked upon favorably by investors. “That signals to people outside the city to take a look at our financials and our bond ratings,” Reynolds said. “It’s a very good judge of how the city is doing financially.” Palatka City Manager **Terry Suggs** lauded city staff and commissioners for their support in improving the city’s financial situation. “Since Day 1 of me getting here, it’s been the mindset of this commission, to steal a phrase from you folks, to no longer kick the can,” **Suggs** said. “It allowed us to put in place things that we need.”

The Fitch Rating report wasn’t all good news. It noted Palatka’s unemployment still exceeds state and national averages. “Economic indicators remain weak with city wealth levels more than 50 percent below the state and nation, and a poverty rate that exceeds the state and national norms,” the report said. “Home values endured precipitous declines due to the severe housing market downturn and have recovered at a slow pace, with current home values still roughly 50 percent below recessionary peak.” The Fitch Ratings report also said the city is spending more than it should. “Fitch believes the natural pace of spending to be above revenue growth trends, given lack of population growth and limited development,” the report said.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 13, 2016

Suggs: BPP funds spent incorrectly

Author: Scott J. Bryan

Palatka City Manager **Terry Suggs** informed city commissioners on Monday night that the city has been inappropriately using Better Place Plan funds to pay off golf course debt, according to a state audit committee tasked with investigating the city and Putnam County. **Suggs** said he, Finance Director Matt Reynolds and Mayor Terrill Hill met with the legislative audit group Monday afternoon. At that time, **Suggs** said, the city was informed the Better Place Plan funds were inappropriately used because golf course debt was “old debt” accrued before the Better Place Plan was approved. “The only major thing I saw or heard today was the money we have used out of Better Place to offset our debt service at the golf course,” **Suggs** said. “Your previous city manager read the statute and felt it was appropriate to use those dollars; however, the legislative audit committee does not agree. “That is the biggest thing we found out today.”

The previous city manager in Palatka was Michael Czymbor. Czymbor was fired in February 2015. He is now the city manager in Hardeeville, S.C. The audit committee, according to Reynolds, said the city spent about \$341,000 from Better Place Plan funds inappropriately. But the audit committee only looked at the city’s finances from Jan. 1, 2014, through September 2015. The city pays about \$160,000 in debt service each year at the golf course. **Suggs** said spending Better Place Plan funds would have been appropriate had the debt incurred prior to the passing of Better Place Plan in 2002, but some of the debt goes back as far as the 1990s, Reynolds said.

Moving forward, **Suggs** said, city staff will draft a budget amendment to present to commissioners, because the current fiscal year budget still includes Better Place Plan funds paying off golf course debt. “It looks like we’ve got a clean bill of health,” **Suggs** said. “There’s nothing we can’t overcome. It was simply a matter of housekeeping.” The legislative audit committee voted in November 2015 for an audit of Putnam County and Palatka finances at the request of former state Rep. Charles Van Zant, Putnam County Commissioner Larry Harvey and a host of Putnam County residents. “For approximately a year now ... I keep hearing a lot of complaints from (Putnam) constituents,” Van Zant said Nov. 30, 2015. “(I think) there is some real fire where the smoke is.”

Suggs said there were numerous allegations lodged against the city, but auditors found no criminal actions. “The allegations that were made were found to be untruthful,” **Suggs** said. “We’re moving forward. We’ll have 18 months to comply with the findings, and they’ll come back and see how we did.” Hill thanked **Suggs**, Reynolds and Finance Department staff for their work on providing the audit committee with requested information. No other commissioners commented on the audit findings.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches***Terry K. Suggs****(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

Palatka Daily News (FL)

September 23, 2016

Commissioners approve budget, lower millage

Author: Scott J. Bryan

Amid little fanfare, Palatka commissioners officially lowered the city's millage rate for the second consecutive year. Commissioners had their second and final reading of the city's millage rate Thursday night during their regularly scheduled meeting. The new millage rate, effective Oct. 1, is 6.4000 mills, down from 6.9967 mills from the current fiscal year. The new millage rate passed unanimously, 4-0. Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown was absent from Thursday's meeting.

Commissioners voted to decrease the millage rate 8.5 percent from the current year, and the rate is 5.89 percent lower than the rollback millage rate of 6.8009. In the past two years, city commissioners have lowered the millage rate 30.2 percent from the 2014-2015 fiscal year. The millage rate is the amount paid per \$1,000 of assessed value of property within the city. For example, if a house is worth \$100,000, the homeowner would pay \$640. The dramatic decrease in millage came last year when city commissioners implemented a controversial fire assessment fee. In the fire assessment fee, property owners are required to pay \$2.46 per \$1,000 of the relative value of the improvements associated with the tax parcel, a \$125 fixed rate and a \$5 city administration charges. Residents will also be charged an additional fee so the assessment can be included on the tax bill.

City commissioners did not discuss the budget Thursday when it was an action item, and no one spoke during public hearing. It's the second consecutive meeting where residents did not speak about the city's tax rate during the public comments portion of the meeting. The city did not discuss the planned increase in water and sewer rates. Staff recommended the second reading of that ordinance be postponed to Oct. 13 because of an advertising error in the state-mandated announcement. In a previous city commission meeting, commissioners agreed to increase water and sewer rates by 4.9 percent and solid waste collection by 6.5 percent. The 2016-2017 budget included an 18 percent increase in insurance rates for city employees, and employees will receive a 5 percent cost-of-living agreement.

During commissioners' comments at the end of the meeting, Commissioner James Norwood Jr. and Mayor Terrill Hill lauded city staff, including Finance Director Matt Reynolds and City Manager **Terry Suggs**, for providing a balanced budget and lowering the millage rate for the second consecutive year. Hill noted the city budget has an increase in the Parks and Recreation Department's budget, which includes the hiring of a full-time Parks and Recreation director. The department's budget increased 45.72 percent from a year ago. "I'm excited about the new budget year," Hill said. "It's an opportunity to bring recreation back to the city of Palatka. ... I'm looking forward to bringing back some life to the parks within this community. I'm really pleased to bring some financial stability to the community."

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

http://uber-assets.solesolution.com/sites/2839/assets/A7Y1_3.18.16pdn.pdf

Palatka Daily News
March 18, 2016

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, SEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR PUTNAM
COUNTY, FLORIDA
CASE NO. 2016-76-CA
Div: 53

STATE OF FLORIDA, ex rel. TERRY K. SUGGS, Plaintiff,

vs.

MICHAEL BRUCE LIMANTI, SR., a married man, and UNKNOWN OCCUPANTS, TENANTS, OWNERS, AND OTHER UNKNOWN, including, if a named Defendant is deceased, the personal representatives, the surviving spouse, heirs, devisees, grantees, creditors, and all other parties claiming by, through, under or against that Defendant, and the several and respective unknown assigns, successors in interest, trustees or other persons claiming by, through, under or against any corporation or other legal entity named as the Defendant, and all claimants, persons or parties, natural or corporate, or whose exact legal name is unknown, claiming under any of the above named or described Defendants, Defendants.

NOTICE OF ACTION

TO: MICHAEL BRUCE LIMANTI, SR., a married man, and UNKNOWN OCCUPANTS, TENANTS, OWNERS, AND OTHER UNKNOWN PARTIES, including, if a named Defendant is deceased, the personal representatives, the surviving spouse, heirs, devisees, grantees, creditors, and all other parties claiming by, through, under or against that Defendant, and the several and respective unknown assigns, successors in interest, trustees or other persons claiming by, through, under or against any corporation or other legal entity named as the Defendant, and all claimants, persons or parties, natural or corporate, or whose exact legal name is unknown, claiming under any of the above named or described Defendants,

YOU ARE NOTIFIED that an action to FORECLOSE A LIEN on the following property in Putnam County, Florida: Lot 16, Block 256 of the City of Palatka, according to Campbell's Map of said City on file in the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Putnam County, Florida. Has been filed against you and you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Donald E. Holmes, Esquire, of HOLMES & YOUNG, P.A., at 222 North 3rd Street, Palatka, Florida 32177, (386) 328-1111, on or before the 27th day of March, 2016, and file the original with the clerk of this court either before service on the plaintiff's attorney or immediately thereafter; otherwise a default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint or petition.

DATED this 26th day of February, 2016.

TIM SMITH Clerk of the Court

By: /s/ Ruth Milligan As Deputy Clerk

3/11/16, 3/18/16

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Legal No. 00040845

http://uber-assets.solesolution.com/sites/2839/assets/A7Y1_3.18.16pdn.pdf

Palatka Daily News

March 18, 2016

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT, SEVENTH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT, IN AND FOR PUTNAM
COUNTY, FLORIDA

CASE NO. 2016-77-CA 53

Div: 53

STATE OF FLORIDA, ex rel. TERRY K. SUGGS, Plaintiff, vs.

VICTORIA ROBIN THAMES, a married woman; **STEVEN GEOFFREY RADTKE**; a married man; **JEFFIE GILBERT, JR.**, a single man; **RANDALL S. DAMPIER**, a single man; and **UNKOWN OCCUPANTS, TENANTS, OWNERS AND OTHER UNKNOWN PARTIES**, including, if a named Defendant is deceased, the personal representatives, the surviving spouse, heirs, devisees, grantees, creditors, and all other parties claiming by, through, under or against that Defendant, and the several and respective unknown assigns, successors in interest, trustees or other persons claiming by, through, under or against any corporation or other legal entity named as the Defendant, and all claimants, persons or parties, natural or corporate, or whose exact legal name is unknown, claiming under any of the above named or described Defendants, Defendants.

NOTICE OF ACTION

TO: VICTORIA ROBIN THAMES, a married woman; **STEVEN GEOFFREY RADTKE**; a married man; **JEFFIE GILBERT, JR.**, a single man; **RANDALL S. DAMPIER**, a single man; and **UNKNOWN OCCUPANTS, TENANTS, OWNERS, AND OTHER UNKNOWN PARTIES**, including, if a named Defendant is deceased, the personal representatives, the surviving spouse, heirs, devisees, grantees, creditors, and all other parties claiming by, through, under or against that Defendant, and the several and respective unknown assigns, successors in interest, trustees or other persons claiming by, through, under or against any corporation or other legal entity named as the Defendant, and all claimants, persons or parties, natural or corporate, or whose exact legal name is unknown, claiming under any of the above named or described Defendants, **YOU ARE NOTIFIED** that an action to **FORECLOSE A LIEN** on the following property in Putnam County, Florida:

Lots 3 and 4 of Combined Block 333 and 390 of H.O. HAMM PROPERTIES INCORPORATED, Map of the Re-Subdivision of Block 331, 332, 333, 390, 391 and 400 of Hillcrest Subdivision, City of Palatka, according to plat thereof as recorded in Map Book 3, page 166 of the public records of Putnam County, Florida. has been filed against you and you are required to serve a copy of your written defenses, if any, to it on Donald E. Holmes, Esquire, of **HOLMES & YOUNG, P.A.**, at 222 North 3rd Street, Palatka, Florida 32177, (386) 328-1111, on or before the 27th day of March, 2016, and file the original with the clerk of this court either

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

before service on the plaintiff's attorney or immediately thereafter; otherwise a default will be entered against you for the relief demanded in the complaint or petition.

DATED this 26th day of February, 2016.

TIM SMITH

Clerk of the Court

By: /s/ Ruth Milligan

As Deputy Clerk

3/11/16, 3/18/16

Legal No. 00040844

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

December 12, 2015

IS IT MONEY WELL SPENT?

The 2015-2016 commission budget is more than \$189,000, includes an \$18,000 increase in schooling, conferences and education

Author: Asia Aikins

Last month's Florida League of Cities Legislative Conference cost the city of Palatka more than \$4,500, as commissioners spent \$7,500 of their budget within the first two months of the new fiscal year. Four of the five city commissioners attended the annual conference, where league of cities members meet to discuss lobbying strategies for the upcoming state legislative session. This year's conference was held Nov. 19-20 in Orlando. "It's a chance for us to get our priorities together before we go to Tallahassee for the legislative session," Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown said. "Sometimes, our legislators are not right here with us, and they need to know what small cities need."

Brown, who serves on the league's board of directors, said league conferences offer a chance for municipal representatives to make contacts, participate in training and learn from informed speakers. "The beauty of the league of cities conference is there is multiple conferences going on at the same time," City Manager **Terry Suggs** said. "I think it's important our elected officials be at Florida League of Cities conferences."

Suggs said he tries to attend training sessions most relevant to the problems facing his community. During the legislative conference, **Suggs** said, he met with municipal finance representatives and heard an update about the upcoming state legislative session. "I always try to learn from other cities who have gone through similar circumstances (as Palatka) and pick their brain a little," **Suggs** said.

Suggs said he suggested an increased city commission budget this year so it would reflect the needed costs for training new commissioners and conference attendance. "Our budget should reflect the true cost, not a lesser amount and then you just take from another line in the budget later on," he said. "That's not transparent."

Commissioners ended the 2014-2015 budget year spending \$162,000. The budgeted amount was \$135,542. Commissioners Rufus Borom and Justin Campbell and Mayor Terrill Hill joined the commission in January. The 2015-2016 commission budget is more than \$189,000 and includes an \$18,000 increase for schooling, conferences and education, and \$25,000 for a lobbyist.

According to Palatka Finance Director Matt Reynolds, Brown, Borom and Commissioner James Norwood attended league activities throughout the week of the conference, Nov. 17-20. Hill attended the conference Nov. 19-20, and **Suggs** attended Nov. 20. Campbell did not attend the conference, but the city paid in advance for his \$225 registration fee, hotel and per diem travel expenses. **Suggs** said most conferences require advanced registration fees, but he and Reynolds

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

would look into refunds for the costs. In October, Brown and Borom traveled to Washington to meet with local representatives in Congress. **Suggs** said the commissioners were hoping to receive a waiver for population restrictions required for federal programs. “That’s something we’re still working on,” **Suggs** said.

Commission expenses reported Oct. 1-Dec. 5:

- * Mayor Terrill Hill: \$1,295 total — \$1,066 conference costs
- * Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown: \$2,536 total — \$1,163 conference
- * Commissioner James Norwood Jr.: \$952 total— all conference
- * Commissioner Rufus Borom: \$2,250 total — \$984 conference
- * Commissioner Justin Campbell: \$466.55 total — \$441.55 conference costs

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Actionnewsjax.com

December 2, 2015

State auditing Putnam County after taxpayers file complaints with Rep. Charles Van Zant

Author: Catherine Varnum

Money mismanagement and fraud allegations have the state stepping in to audit a local county. It all stems from complaints filed with a state leader by taxpayers. One of the allegations in the report said the Putnam County Sheriff's Office bought a car for its fleet, paying \$45,000 when the car was worth \$25,000. But county leaders tell us they aren't buying the allegations. Peter Myers has lived in Putnam County for more than 60 years. "Yeah there's favoritism. It's who you know in this town," said Myers. That's why he wasn't surprised to learn the state is coming in to audit what both the county and city governments have done for the last three years. State Rep. Charles Van Zant said taxpayers have made complaints to him about money mismanagement. He said documents he's received say companies are being paid multiple times for the same project. They also question where \$8 million for two projects went.

We first went to the city of Palatka for their response. City manager **Terry Suggs** answered our questions and said they're not concerned. "The best thing we can do is do an internal audit ourselves," said **Suggs**. So the city is. Only one commissioner told us he supports the state audit. Two others said it's a waste of time and resources. "It's just a handful of citizens and they seem to have an agenda of their own on how we should operate," said Commissioner Chip Laibl. "I think they'll find Putnam County is very competent," said Commissioner Karl Flagg. Van Zant told us over the phone, "The complaints are real." There is no word on how long the audit will take. [Click here to view the complaints.](#)

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)
September 11, 2015

Palatka approves lower millage

Commission approves 10 percent increase for water and sewer

Author: Asia Aikins

Palatka city commissioners lowered the millage rate Thursday, but raised city water and sewer rates by 10 percent. Commissioners passed a resolution that reduces city property taxes from 9.1749 mills to 6.9967 mills – \$6.997 per \$1,000 of taxable property – at the start of the fiscal year, Oct. 1. “This is the first time we’ve lowered the millage rate in 15 years,” Mayor Terrill Hill said.

The lower millage rate is expected to offset a fire assessment fee, which will be enforced during the upcoming fiscal year. The new millage rate is expected to result in a \$720,000 reduction in tax income, but the fire assessment fee is expected to produce \$787,000 in revenue. The fee revenue would be used to fund the fire department, allowing the city to build its general fund reserves, as the general fund money was used to fund the fire department in the past.

Earlier this month, Palatka Finance Director Matt Reynolds suggested the city commission adopt a 10 percent water and sewer rate during the upcoming fiscal year to keep the utility fund afloat and reduce the amount of money transferred to the fund from the general fund reserves. Without an increase, Reynolds said, the city is looking at a \$356,000 deficit in the utility fund. “We can’t continue to take from the reserves and plan to build the reserves,” Hill said.

Reynolds and City Manager **Terry Suggs** said they looked at “each line item” to see where money could be saved in each department, but still suggested the rate increase. “This (rate increase) just keeps us from going back further in the hole,” **Suggs** said. Commissioner James Norwood Jr. said money needed to be set aside for water and sewer infrastructure improvements if the city was going to raise the rates.

Commissioners agreed to take \$75,000 from the utility fund during the upcoming fiscal year and set it aside for matching grant funds for infrastructure improvements. Commissioners also agreed to allocate \$50,000 for the improvements from the general fund, reducing the general fund’s transfer to the Palatka Golf Club by \$50,000 to make up for the loss. Commissioners approved the rate increase with a 4-1 vote. Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown was the lone nay vote. Earlier this month, Reynolds said the rate increase would result in about \$6 more on the average, minimum city utility bill. The 2015-2016 fiscal year budget will be final after the Sept. 24 city commission meeting.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News

May 27, 2015

Keystone Heights manager chosen for Palatka post

Author: Asia Aikins

With a split vote, **Terry Suggs** was appointed Tuesday as Palatka’s next city manager. **Suggs** currently serves as Keystone Heights’ city manager. Mayor Terrill Hill said city officials would begin negotiating a contract with **Suggs** as soon as possible. While **Suggs** received the most No. 1 rankings from the commission, the decision to appoint him was made after an hour of discussion and about eight hours of interviewing on Tuesday.

Commissioner James Norwood Jr. said he was concerned with the lack of experience **Suggs** had in the city manager position. He has served as Keystone Heights’ city manager for four years, but has management experience in growth management, planning and zoning, codes enforcement, public works, solid waste and operations. “He spent 18 years in Alachua (County),” Hill said. “You can’t waive the experience he has in all the different departments over there.”

During his interview Tuesday afternoon, **Suggs** said he would spend the first five years in Palatka trying to start a mentoring and internship program, developing a budget not funded by the millage rate and improve infrastructure. He said he would get out of the office often to get to know his staff and members of the community. “I’m known for being very involved,” he said. **Suggs** said he is also experienced in seeking grant money to help fund city projects. He said he would pull from his experience in Alachua to make the transition to meet the needs of Palatka. Keystone Heights has a population of about 1,400 people, while Palatka has a population of more than 10,000 people. Commissioners agreed that **Suggs** had a “clean interview,” as his interview was the shortest interview of the day.

The commission eliminated city manager candidates Lyndon Bonner and Patrick Kennedy, as the two scored the lowest when all of the commissioners ranked the candidates on a scale of one-to-five. “(Bonner) seems like one of those people, when they get their mind is made up, they’ll push until it gets done,” Norwood said. Kennedy said he didn’t want to move to the city of Palatka right away if he was appointed city manager, as he has invested in two historic homes in Crescent City. Commissioners agreed that they wanted a new city manager who lives in and contributes to the city.

Suggs was with Donald Holmes and James Drumm on the top-three candidates list. Hill said he had concerns with Drumm’s departure from Zephyrhills and Commissioner Mary Lawson Brown said there was something about him that she “couldn’t connect with.” “He kind of reminded me of (past city manager Michael Czymbor),” she said. Norwood said he appreciated Holmes’ humility when he answered questions about why he should be named city manager. Holmes said the job wouldn’t be a “retirement job,” but a job that would allow him to have influence on his community instead of just from a legal aspect. “But if I don’t get this job, I’ll go back to making money,” he said. Commissioner Justin Campbell said he was disappointed with

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Terry K. Suggs

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Holmes' second interview. He said Holmes could have given the commission more clear-cut answers in his interview as he had so much experience working with the city. Holmes has served as the Palatka city attorney for the last 15 years. Commissioner Rufus Borom said he would like the new city manager to have experience being a city manager. Norwood moved to appoint Holmes, but did not receive a second to his motion. Campbell moved to appoint **Suggs** and Borom seconded. Brown voted in **Suggs'** favor along with Campbell and Borom, while Hill and Norwood voted against.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News (FL)

May 29, 2015

Suggs' contract on hold

New city manager's salary starts at \$88,965.98

Author: Asia Aikins

Palatka's new city manager starts July 2. Keystone Heights' city manager **Terry Suggs** accepted a new post in Palatka after he was chosen earlier this week as the Palatka City Commission's top pick for city manager. **Suggs** negotiated a contract with interim City Manager Allen Bush and Mayor Terrill Hill on Wednesday. The commission tabled the contract Thursday evening. City officials Thursday added language to **Suggs'** contract, stating he could be terminated or forced to resign by the city commission "without just cause."

Commissioners voted to table the contract since the language was added that day. The contract will be up for approval again at the June 11 commission meeting. According to **Suggs'** proposed contract with Palatka, he will be paid \$88,965.98 annually, with a 5 percent increase at the end of the first six months. He made \$62,000 annually in Keystone Heights.

Suggs will also receive a smartphone and a vehicle that will be maintained, insured and fueled by the city. He will be required to relocate to Palatka from his home in Green Cove Springs within 30 days of his start date, and the city will pay \$1,000 in expenses related to his move.

According to **Suggs'** contract with Keystone Heights, he was obligated to give the city council written notice of termination no later than 90 days prior to the effective date. "I emailed my (Keystone Heights) city council members right away," **Suggs** said Wednesday. "They are very supportive and understand the time crunch, especially during the budget planning time of the year."

Details of **Suggs'** Palatka contract:

* Fourteen days notice if **Suggs** wants to terminate his contract with the city. The commission could require he continue employment for up to 60 days past the date of termination, though.

* As an "at will" employee, the commission could terminate his contract at any time, without cause. He would be paid a lump sum of five months salary and benefits within 10 days of the termination, if it occurs after a 180-day probationary period and if the termination was not a result of an illegal act.

* **Suggs** will be subject to a performance evaluation every July, starting in 2016.

* He will have four weeks vacation available each year, with two weeks immediately available for purposes of relocation and planned family vacations. He will have one sick day per month.

Former Palatka City Manager Michael Czymbor's contract included similar language. The city paid Czymbor more than \$81,000 after the commission terminated his contract in February in an effort to "change direction." Czymbor made \$116,315 annually with the city of Palatka.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Palatka Daily News

May 22, 2015

City manager candidate wants to grow

Author: Asia Aikins

Note to readers: This is the third in a series of overviews of the five candidates named as finalists in the search for a new Palatka city manager. After four years in Keystone Heights, Palatka city manager candidate **Terry Suggs** said he's ready for a new era of service in Palatka. "It's an opportunity for me to grow," the current Keystone Heights city manager said. **Suggs** earned the confidence of half of the Palatka city manager selection committee Monday and returns for a second interview Tuesday afternoon. Keystone Heights' population is only about 1,400 people, but **Suggs** also spent 18 years working for Alachua County. His experience in Alachua included management positions in growth management, planning and zoning, codes enforcement, public works and solid waste. He served as operations supervisor from May 2005 until September 2011. The largest number of people under his supervision was about 20, he said. While he has about 10 years of experience formulating budgets in local government, **Suggs** said he met a challenge when he took the job in Keystone Heights. "I don't have the luxury of having a finance department or finance director," he told the selection committee. "I've had to do some things a little different." **Suggs** said he had to create a "what-if" formula for expenditures that weren't being tracked in Keystone Heights.

According to Sept. 4, 2012, Keystone Heights city council minutes, **Suggs**' first city budget included an increase in millage. The rate of 2.5302 mills passed 4-1. Councilman Brian Wilson opposed the increase. "Councilman Wilson stated he does understand that the city is financially hurting; however, citizens are hurting as well," minutes said. "Councilman (Paul) Yates pointed out that budget expenses have been reduced \$50,000 from last year." According to Clay County Property Appraiser's Office, Keystone Height's millage rate has increased every year since 2007. It is now 3.6 mills. The U.S. Census Bureau said the city has a median household income of \$55,000. **Suggs** told the selection committee he loves working for the city of Keystone Heights, but if he left the city for Palatka, he would leave it in a better financial position. While Keystone Heights and Palatka may differ in demographic, **Suggs** said Keystone Heights has recently attracted similar businesses, such as Dollar General and Family Dollar, and is also working to start infrastructure improvements.

According to **Suggs**' contract with Keystone Heights, he was hired at an annual base salary of \$62,000, with a 0 to 3 percent cost of living raise each year. He has a \$200 per month automobile allowance and \$50 per month cellphone allowance. The city of Palatka advertised a \$80,695-\$119,233 salary range for the position, depending on qualifications. **Suggs**' second interview is set for 5:15 p.m. Tuesday. A meet-and-greet is scheduled for all candidates, taking place from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. at Beef O'Brady's. Second interviews will be conducted by the city commission and take place at Palatka City Hall, 201 N. Second St.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

The Florida Times Union
February 6, 2015

Keystone Heights enjoys link to Apollo 14 Mission

Author: Jean Sealey

The American space program and an American sycamore tree in Keystone Heights share a piece of history. Apollo 14, NASA's third trip to the lunar surface, launched Jan. 31, 1971, with three crew members: Alan Shepard, Edgar Mitchell and Stuart Roosa. Upon reaching the moon's orbit, Shepard and Mitchell walked on the moon, and Roosa piloted the spaceship above them. Roosa, a former U.S. Forest Service smoke jumper, carried hundreds of tree seeds, part of a joint NASA/USFS project. Upon return to Earth, the seeds were germinated by the U.S. Forest Service. Known as the "moon trees," the resulting seedlings were planted throughout the United States and around the world.

One of the rare trees stands beside the library at the corner of Lawrence Boulevard and Orchid Avenue in Keystone Heights. "Keystone Heights was very lucky," said Joan Jones, former president of the Garden Club of the Lakes and the local expert on the tree. "Our Mr. Bob Byrnes, who owned a nursery, attended a forestry convention. He contacted the U.S. Forestry representative in charge of the seedlings. We had the promise of a tree, but we didn't get our tree until 1984." Jones said when Apollo 14 returned to Earth, the container with the tree seeds exploded during the decontamination procedures, and the seeds were presumed to be no longer viable. "Luckily, most of them were rescued," she said. "Those seeds were sent to Forestry Research Centers in Gulfport, Miss., and Placerville, Calif., where they were nurtured until they were mature enough to be transplanted to various other locations.

Five species of trees were included in the project: American sycamore, loblolly pine, sweetgum, redwood and Douglas fir. Because they were southern and western species, not all states were suitable climates for the trees. Florida has five recorded moon trees. In addition to the one in Keystone Heights, other trees in Florida include Cape Canaveral Kennedy Space Center, the University of Florida in Gainesville, Forest Capital Museum State Park in Perry and Cascades Park and the Doyle Conner Building in Tallahassee. Trees were planted at the White House, in Washington Square in Philadelphia, at Valley Forge, in the International Forest of Friendship and at various universities and NASA centers. Trees also were planted in Brazil, Switzerland and presented to the Emperor of Japan.

The city of Keystone Heights will rededicate its special moon tree on Feb. 28. City Manager **Terry Suggs** said the rededication is important to the city. "The rededication is important for several reasons," he said. "First, only 500 seeds made the trip to the moon, and of those between 420 and 450 seeds survived. So our moon tree is rare. And, we want people to know about it. Many of our own residents aren't aware of the tree's ties with the space program, and probably very few people outside Keystone Heights have even heard of a moon tree." **Suggs**, Keystone Heights Mayor Tony Brown and other dignitaries are scheduled to speak at the rededication ceremony. "The other reason this dedication is important to us is our very strong ties to military

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veterans and the space program. Our Wings of Dreams museum at the airport has one of the largest collections of NASA artifacts in the country.” In addition to the tree’s unusual history and the city’s ties to the space program, the tree itself is the attraction for some area residents.

“It’s a gorgeous tree,” Sue Hamerstrom, current president of the Garden Club of the Lakes, said. “That is another reason to appreciate and celebrate it. Our club was responsible for maintaining the area around the tree for a while, but now the city takes care of that. We simply enjoy the tree.” Hamerstrom said it surprises her that most people she talks to are not aware of the tree’s origin. “I’m glad the city is planning the rededication ceremony,” she said. “The main purpose is to raise awareness — educate people who don’t know about it and remind those who may have forgotten. I’m hoping people will bring their children to see the tree. It’s a good starting point for a history lesson.”

Jones said there will be displays relaying high points of Keystone Heights history. “A display of the history of the Apollo 14 mission will be displayed in our kiosk,” Jones said. “We are very proud of our quiet little town in the southwest corner of Clay County. We want residents and visitors to know just how proud we are to have a living piece of NASA history in our own backyard.” The public is invited to the rededication that will take place at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 28. The tree is planted at the corner of Lawrence Boulevard and Orchid Avenue.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

<https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/01/92/84/00009/01-30-2014.pdf>

Lake Region Monitor

January 30, 2014

Keystone farmers market manager fired

Author: Dan Hildebran

Keystone Heights City Manager **Terry Suggs** said he terminated the contract of Farmers Market Manager Cheryl Owen on Jan. 21. **Suggs** said he took the action because of a difference in philosophy with Owen and the way the city was being represented at the market. **Suggs** confirmed that a Jan. 18 dispute and confrontation Owen had with one of the market’s vendors, Rhonda Miller, who owns Gumbo Heads Goat Farm, led to the manager’s dismissal. Miller sent an email to **Suggs** and others claiming that Owen kicked Miller out of the market after Miller complained about the new spot within the market Owen had assigned Miller to.

Miller also wrote that Owen used profanity during the encounter and that the exchange was witnessed by then-vice mayor, Tony Brown. Brown said the events outlined in Miller’s email were accurate. He witnessed the exchange between Miller and Owen and said he was shocked by Owen’s outburst. “After they had words they both left the area,” Brown recalled. “I went to my truck and called **Terry**, told him what happened and said this is definitely going to be an issue.”

Last year, Owen resigned from her market manager’s job after a July 4 argument with Mayor Mary Lou Hildreth. Brown supported Owen’s reinstatement during a subsequent council meeting and the council gave Owen her job back. Asked if reinstating Owen was a mistake, Brown answered, “No.” He said he made the right decision based on the information he had at that time. During the council meeting in which members voted to re-hire Owen, Miller spoke against Owen’s reinstatement, complaining that many vendors had left the market because of Owen’s management style.

In October, Owen wrote in the market’s newsletter that unless more residents patronized the weekly event, it might go out of business. “This market is in serious trouble,” she wrote. “If Keystone does not begin to turn out on Saturday mornings the market is going to lose its remaining vendors due to a lack of business.” Owen did not return a phone call seeking comments for this story. **Suggs** said that on the Saturday following Owen’s termination, Jan. 25, a volunteer managed the market. He added that he plans to talk to council members about the future of the Saturday morning venue and evaluate its operations.

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Lake Region Monitor
October 3, 2013

Keystone Wins Chamber Award

Keystone wins chamber award

The city of Keystone Heights won the Clay County Chamber of Commerce's Area Beautification Business of the Month award. In a press release, the chamber said the city's trees and beautiful landscaping make the town a great asset to Clay County.

Much of the landscaping and capital improvements in the downtown area were financed and planned by the town's Community Redevelopment Agency. The city established the agency in 2006. In 2010, the Florida Redevelopment Association recognized Keystone with its President's Award.

City Manager Terry Suggs, Community Redevelopment Advisory Board Chair Deirdre Murphy, Mayor Mary Lou Hildreth, Public



Works Employee Steven the Clay Chamber's Area the Clay County Chamber Sapp and Public Works Beautification of the Month of Commerce. Supervisor Kenny Hall with award. Photo courtesy of

Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches

Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

Orlando Sentinel

June 20, 2010

Cheap, illegal roadside signs grow like weeds in a recession

Author: Jeff Kunerth

The signs cluster on the street corners like day laborers looking for work: They're selling carpet cleaning, tree trimming, air-conditioning repair, day care, website design, Google seminars. At the traffic lights, they offer passing motorists cheap health insurance, cash for junk cars, help with bankruptcy, the chance to stop foreclosure, the opportunity to make big money from home.

This is the intersection where the underground economy meets the recession: grass-roots advertising for people looking for a way to make a little extra money or a fast buck. The scam artists commingle with the truly desperate. That sign for a "3/2 Investor Home 39k Ca\$h" could be some poor soul losing his house or an unlicensed real-estate broker. The signs for custom T-shirts or business cards or banners — or the signs for signs — could be the only way a printing business can stay afloat or somebody trying to make a living without an occupational license.

To consumers, the signs suggest buyer beware. To Alex Rueda, they are a blight on the landscape, a hazardous distraction to moving traffic and an unabashed mockery of the sign ordinances of Orange County that prohibit "bandit" signs on public right of way. "They know putting these signs up is illegal," said Rueda, 42, an Orange County code-enforcement officer. "They assume nobody is going to come after them." And in many cities and counties, they may be right. It is a time-consuming and often futile task for code enforcement to remove the illegal signs, only to have a new group reappear the next day. Orange code-enforcement officers picked up 8,961 signs in May, up from 7,702 signs in April. "This is a huge, huge problem," said Robert Spivey, manager of Orange County Code Enforcement. "The problem is so big, they could do nothing but pick up signs. A person or business can put up 1,000 signs a day."

The same is true across the state, said **Terry Suggs**, president of the Florida Association of Code Enforcement Inc. "It's a never-ending battle, a circle I wish we could break," said **Suggs**, an Alachua County official. Every year, the code-enforcement association holds an "Operation Sign Sweep" day in which cities, towns and counties cleanse the landscape of illegal signs. Last year, 50 jurisdictions removed 16,000 signs in one day. The bane of code enforcement is the boom for sign companies. Business is up 25 percent to 30 percent in recent years at Fast Signs in Orlando, fueled largely by the collapsing housing market. "Especially with all the foreclosures over the past few years, we've definitely seen an increase," said general manager Kris Lepicier. State law makes illegal signs in a public right of way a second-degree misdemeanor. Fines vary from county and municipality. In Orange County, it's \$150 per illegal sign. But in Orange, as well as most places, standard practice is to issue a warning and give the person some time to remove the sign voluntarily. If the warning is ignored, the person can be given a citation, required to appear before a magistrate and face fines as high as \$500 a day for each sign.

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Terry K. Suggs

(Articles are in reverse chronological order)

But it takes time to track down a person and an address from a phone number on a roadside sign. In Orange County, 38 code-enforcement officers devote one day a week to removing illegal signs. Only one investigates the people behind signs. "That's me," Rueda said. "I'm the Sign Guy." On Monday, Rueda went before the county's magistrate to get fines levied against two illegal sign owners. The same day, he caught a man planting yellow house-for-cash signs and confiscated 65 of them. The county's recycling dumpster where he tossed the signs would be full by Friday.

On Tuesday, he picked up signs from the same "bankruptcy" and "we buy homes" business that was fined the day before. "At times, it's frustrating," he said. Rueda said most of the repeat and prolific violators are large businesses engaged in something shady. They know the rules and how to cover their tracks. "They are doing everything they can to make money and looking for ways not to get caught," he said.

But not all the signs on the side of the road are from unlicensed businesses, fly-by-night scam artists or people trying to make a little untaxed income. Some belong to folks who have something legitimate to sell or rent. For them, the standard yard-sale-sized signs are a cheap and effective way to attract customers. There's the guy renting out two rooms in his house to help pay his mortgage. He has been doing it for 10 years, using newspaper ads and Craigslist, but he says the signs work better and cost less. His signs are distinct with their hand-lettering in black paint: "Room 4-rent, lux 4/3 pvt. bath pool/cable/Int. \$475 mo + utilities." "Room 4-rent" doesn't want his name used. Nobody with roadside signs called for this story would give his or her name. Most hung up when they found out the caller wasn't interested in selling a junk car or buying a home with cash.

He said he has had his signs out for about four months and has had more than 40 calls. But the caliber of caller isn't as high as those from other forms of advertising, he said. It takes a ton of signs to attract the number of people necessary to find the one guy he can trust inside his house. "It's not that easy," he said. "You have to put up a whole bunch. You can't just put up one or two. People steal the signs. If you put up 10 signs, sometimes they last a week, sometimes three days." Room 4-rent, who lives outside Alex Rueda's jurisdiction, said he has never been contacted by code enforcement about his signs, but he understands the need to regulate, restrict and remove the roadside signs: "If you didn't take them away, there would be thousands of signs everywhere."

Research Compiled by: Shannon Farr and Tammie Browder
Colin Baenziger & Associates