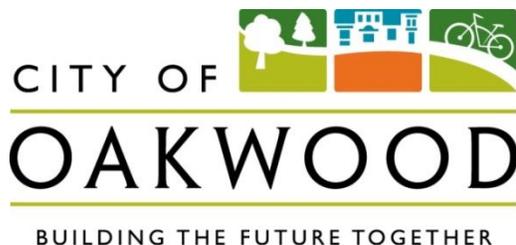


MAYOR
Lamar Scroggs

CITY COUNCIL
Martha Collins
Sam Evans
Montie Robinson, Sr.
Todd Wilson



CITY MANAGER
Stan Brown

CITY CLERK
Tangee Puckett

NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on September 14, 2015

Oakwood passes ordinance banning panhandling, ‘urban camping’

City takes up issue following Flowery Branch's action

Oakwood became the second South Hall County city this month to pass an ordinance cracking down on “aggressive” panhandling and people regularly camping out in public places, such as streets and sidewalks.

“The biggest problem we were having were Romanians,” Police Chief Randall Moon said. “They’re known to travel and work areas. When we got to looking into (the group), we found out that they had moved up from Doraville and Suwanee — just kept coming this way.”

City Manager Stan Brown said the ordinance, which was given first approval Monday night by the Oakwood City Council, is intended to cut down on activity “before we have a big problem, especially if our neighbors are adopting similar ordinances.

“It just makes us a good target if we don’t have something on the books.”

The ordinance, which the council will consider later for final OK, basically makes it illegal to aggressively solicit others for money or camp in public places. The offense would be a misdemeanor, punishable by up to a \$1,000 fine and six months in jail.

The law would aim to prevent “situations that put people in an unsafe situation ... and people out there (from) scamming the public,” Brown said.

He said the city has looked at similar ordinances by other governments, including one Flowery Branch City Council approved on Sept. 3 and is set to give final OK to at a meeting set to begin 6 p.m. Thursday.

“Ours is very much in line with (Flowery Branch’s),” Brown said. “I think that most of your urban areas — if they haven’t already dealt with this — will be.”

Flowery Branch officials have said such activity has been picking up particularly around the Stonebridge Village shopping center off Spout Springs and Hog Mountain roads.

The city’s ordinance primarily targets repeat offenders, Flowery Branch Police Chief David Spillers said.

“If it’s a one-time thing, we’re going to actively pursue a homeless shelter and three churches here that run food banks — we make constant referrals to those,” he said. “We would be more than happy to take somebody to Gainesville to a homeless shelter.”

The issue didn’t generate much discussion among Oakwood council members, except for a few questions asked by Councilman Sam Evans. He asked particularly about the frequency of such incidents and the extent of law enforcement’s involvement.

“We have to ... go out two or three times a day, and we found that it was the same people who kept coming back,” Moon said.

“But, without this ordinance, we didn’t really have a leg to stand on. We’d just keep asking them to quit bugging the public and move on.”