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CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

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COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Land development director placed on administrative leave

Joanna Coutu to face hearing

By **MICHAEL D. BATES**
Chronicle Reporter

Joanna Coutu, a longtime Citrus County government employee who has played a key role in the county’s growth and development decisions, has been placed on administrative leave pending the completion of a disciplinary proceeding.

County Human Resources Director Jessica Flynn confirmed Coutu’s status Tuesday morning, telling the Chronicle in an email that Coutu “is currently on administrative leave pending completion of the county’s disciplinary proceeding. No final

disciplinary action has been taken.”

Coutu has worked for Citrus County for more than two decades and has been involved in some of the county’s most consequential land-use debates.

Coutu began working for Citrus County more than 20 years ago as a secretary in the Building Division and worked her way through the county’s growth-management ranks.

Over the years, she became a familiar face before the County Commission and Planning and Development Commission, presenting development proposals, comprehensive-plan amendments and other land-use matters to elected officials.

Her work put her at the center of many

of the decisions that shape how and where Citrus County grows.

Coutu’s career also has put her in the middle of an increasingly heated public debate about growth in Citrus County.

Over the past year or two, residents have grown increasingly vocal about what they see as unchecked development, with concerns ranging from traffic and crowded roads to the loss of rural character and the strain new development could put on the county’s infrastructure and natural resources.

As the county’s top land-development official, Coutu frequently has been the staff



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WTC REGIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY TRAINING COMPLEX INITIATIVE

From swampy range to regional training hub?

Citrus looks to DeLand as model for proposed public safety annex

By **CASMIRA HARRISON**
Chronicle Reporter

The smell hits before the firing range ever comes into view.

On a humid September morning, the pungent odor from the looming Citrus County landfill hangs heavy over the nearly 50-year-old training ground. It lingers in the thick air over Withlacoochee Technical College’s firing range until the wind picks up enough to carry it away.

Then there’s the flooding.

Even on a sunny Tuesday morning, mud squishes underfoot from summer rains and water trickles across the saturated ground like a slow moving creek in some places. A wooden boardwalk crosses one particularly soupy stretch, built so law enforcement recruits can reach the concrete shooting pads without sinking into the muck.

And when the rain comes down hard enough, Citrus County Sheriff David Vincent said, much of the place can disappear beneath it.

“This has been a good range, but it’s outlived its usefulness,” Vincent said during a tour of the firearms range Tuesday.

That aging, flood-prone range near the county landfill – coupled with an increasingly crowded technical college miles away – is helping drive an ambitious plan to rethink how Citrus County trains its future law enforcement officers and first responders.

The Citrus County School District, Citrus County Sheriff’s Office and Citrus County Board of County Commissioners, with support from state lawmakers, are working toward a regional public safety training complex in



Matthew Beck / Chronicle photo editor

Chris Jones, a coordinator and instructor at the Daytona State College Law Enforcement Firing Range, talks about some of the features that make this state-of-the-art indoor firing range unique. The indoor range can support shooters at a maximum of 50-yards. Most handgun training takes place much closer.

Lecanto that could eventually bring law enforcement, fire and other public safety training together on one campus.

And about 80 miles away, they may have found a model for what it could become.

Vincent and state Rep. J.J. Grow recently traveled to Daytona State College’s DeLand campus to tour its new 20,000-square-foot indoor firearms training center, which opened in January 2025 as the first phase of a larger public safety

training campus.

Vincent liked what he saw.

“If I could duplicate that in Lecanto, it’d be a home run,” he said.

A range that has served its time

The Bob Parlamen Range has been training Citrus County law enforcement recruits since about 1978 or 1979, Vincent estimates. It’s bare bones, but functional. Two pistol ranges provide the

distances needed for recruit training. A rifle range extends to 50 yards, with another area capable of accommodating 100-yard shooting. Its isolation has also been an asset over the years, providing enough room for firearms training without creating noise problems for nearby residents.

What it does not have is running water or conventional electrical service.

Water has to be hauled in. Electricity comes from a solar system

Vincent installed years ago. An off-grid toilet system was added to improve on the portable toilets available to recruits and instructors who can spend from first light until late afternoon there during training days.

Each academy class gets about 80 hours of firearms instruction, the sheriff said, meaning recruits can spend the better part of two weeks at the range.

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