

Fanning Springs City Council wants closer look at expenditures *Mayor says records are open*



(from left) Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. 'Trip' Lancaster III, City Attorney Conrad Bishop Jr. and City Clerk Sheila Watson look at material during the meeting.

**Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Dec. 2, 2015 @ 2:37 p.m.
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FANNING SPRINGS -- A two-hour meeting on Tuesday evening (Dec. 1) ended the 2015 regular monthly meetings for Fanning Springs City Council.

With only one regular City Council meeting a month, the wheels of municipal decisions turn more slowly than in some cities where there are two regular meetings a month. However, with a government that includes a strong mayor, the possibility of some quick executive action still exists.



Mayor Trip Lancaster shares facts and opinion with the City Council.

Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III is the chief executive officer of the City of Fanning Springs, however there is a check

and balance on his power by the five-member Fanning Springs City Council.

At least one member of the Fanning Springs City Council wants to have a more detailed view of expenditures. City Councilwoman Barbara Locke asked about seeing copies of all of the credit card statements and checks written on a monthly basis. Mayor Lancaster said there are 100 or so checks written a month.

Locke suggested that the City Clerk Sheila Watson put the copies of several checks on one piece of paper to reduce the cost of providing that paper copy in the monthly materials given to City Council members. There did not appear to be a final ruling on that request by Locke during that meeting.

City Attorney Conrad Bishop Jr. provided a cursory review of the Fanning Springs City Charter, which shows a potential for future workshops and a possible referendum to make certain powers of the mayor and City Council clearer.

And there is a possibility to change some sexist verbiage in the charter that exists today – if the City Council and city attorney fashion revisions that are put up for a vote by the registered

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voters of the city, and if those voters approve those changes.

Meanwhile, Bishop's recitation of some parts of the document that forms the foundation for municipal law in the City of Fanning Springs also reflects the city previously was named the City of Suwannee River before its name was changed to the City of Fanning Springs in 1977.

The attorney stressed "city" rather than "town," too, as he read that part of the charter.

As one gauge of populations in the various municipalities in Levy County, following are the number of active registered voters in each municipality as of Dec. 2, according to Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones.

The City of Fanning Springs, though, is unique because it has registered voters in two separate counties. Therefore, information from the Office of Gilchrist County Supervisor of Elections Connie Sanchez is noted below as well.

ACTIVE REGISTERED VOTERS

Town of Bronson - 671

City of Cedar Key - 601

City of Chiefland - 1,190

City of Fanning Springs (**Levy County**) - 330

City of Fanning Springs (**Gilchrist County**) - 225

Town of Inglis - 929

Town of Otter Creek - 71

City of Williston - 1,667

Town of Yankeetown (a coastal village) - 418

OPEN RECORDS

Mayor Lancaster responded to questions from City Councilwoman Locke.

He said there have been questions over the past three or four months regarding a couple of part-time employees who are related to City Clerk Sheila Watson.

As he answered questions, the mayor said invoices are paid by the mayor each month per the charter.

City Clerk Watson was hired by the City Council years ago. The charter is unclear, however, about whether the City Council can terminate her employment. Attorney Bishop said there is some lack of clarity as to whether the mayor, who is the clerk's supervisor, can fire the clerk; or if the City Council can terminate the clerk's employment with the city.

The City Council wants to wait until it fills the empty seat of a former member who moved out of the city limits and resigned from the council, before it possibly begins workshops to revise the city charter.

Locke told the mayor that she has been asked by members of the public how city credit cards are being used. She requested to see those records. Clerk Watson said members of the public can come to City Hall and ask about any purchases made by city governmental employees.

Lancaster said all invoices to the city are public records and any person can inspect public records or receive copies of them per Florida law.

In another matter, Lancaster mentioned that he is speaking with Waste Pro about fees that would be imposed on residential customers if the city created an ordinance for mandatory garbage collection.

One price he mentioned was a 10-year agreement where the customer would pay \$25 a month for once-a-week garbage and recycling pickup.

The mayor said additionally that there would be a 10 percent rebate to the city for everything it collected, if it went with the 10-year agreement with Waste Pro.

There was no action on that, as this is in the preliminary informal discussion stage.

FESTIVAL TIME

The mayor announced that the city is having a festival on Saturday (Dec. 5), and there will be little yellow rubber duck races down the Suwannee River (at 3 p.m.) just like years ago.

The Festival of Lights will be from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., he said.

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There are 38 vendors scheduled to be at the event, he said. There will be various bands playing, he said, including a band that will be performing in the river during the duck race.

In the rubber duck race, the numbered yellow rubber ducks are dumped in the river. The first three ducks across the finish line net cash for the people who placed bets on those ducks.

The ducks are collected after the race to be used year after year.

There is also a lighted boat parade planned to happen on the river after dark.

The city has invested \$2,500 in the festival this year. The festival is being put on by the newly formed Fanning Springs Chamber of Commerce, with some help from the city.

MONEY MANAGEMENT

The City Council had questioned what appeared to be \$36,000 listed instead of \$50,000 for the investment the city had made with Smith Asset Management.

Shannon Smith speaking on behalf of the company told City Council that the company has donated money to the city.



Shannon Smith tells Fanning Springs City Council that the company donated money to the city's investment portfolio.

“This doesn’t happen very often,” Smith said, “and I have been in the business going on 20 years. But one of the assets we originally purchased for the Fanning Springs’ portfolio was not performing the way we had expected it to (perform).

“So we sold it for a loss,” Smith continued. “And then what we did, is we made a decision that we thought was the right decision to make the city whole. And we turned around, and within a matter of a week or so; I think a real short time frame, we wrote a check from our business and deposited into the Fanning Springs’ account for the exact amount of the loss.”

He went on to say that as of Tuesday afternoon, the value of the account was \$53,809.19. Smith said the November statement will reflect a different number, but that was the correct amount as of Dec. 1.

From Jan. 1 through Dec. 1, he continued, Smith Asset Management had earned more than \$4,000 in dividends and interest in that account – all of which has been reinvested.

SPECIAL ELECTION

An announcement for qualifying dates and a special election to replace a City Council member who resigned after he moved out of the city limits was made. By a 4-0 vote, the City Council approved the minutes of the Nov. 23 special meeting, where the dates for qualifying and the election were set.

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Qualifying for the one open seat will be Dec. 7 through Dec. 11 at Fanning Springs City Hall. If there are two candidates, the election will be finished Jan. 19. If there are three or more candidates, then there will be the Jan. 19 election followed by a runoff of the top two from that election, and that runoff will be on Feb. 2.



SEWER IMPROVEMENTS

Joe Mittauer, president of Mittauer and Associates Consulting Engineers, received a 4-0 vote of approval for a \$353,300 contract for engineering services.

Commercial Industrial Corp. (CIC) of Reddick was awarded a \$1.2 million construction contract by a 4-0 vote. CIC is the company that built the first phase of the multi-phase collection system.

Before agreeing to spend that money, the City Council heard from Mittauer about progress on the sewer collection system's expansion. In 2013, the city agreed on 10 areas where this development would occur.

This expansion of service area fell on the heels of the phase one

project; Mittauer said when the new wastewater treatment plant and first part of the collection system was completed.

The city applied for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds back then, he said as he brought everyone up to date with where the plan stands at now.

In moving forward, he said, the city discussed using the USDA Rural Development grant-loan process as it considered improving the sewer collection system. The USDA Rural Development part of the first phase, he said, resulted in a 60 percent grant and 40 percent loan.

The two CDBGs, he said, are 100 percent grant with no loan aspect for the city.

By blending the two CDBGs with the phase two funding, he said, the plan was to reduce the loan percentage and increase the grant percentage for the 10 remaining service areas of the city to be improved for sewer collection.

By discussing the plans with Mayor Lancaster, Mittauer revised the plans so that the first five areas on the north end of the city will be the first to be improved.

In a rather long explanation of funding, Mittauer showed the City Council where the \$62,000 spent by the city was re-leveraged to combine with funding from a \$600,000 CDBG and \$400,000 from the Suwannee River Water Management District, and funding from the Florida Legislature, to equal about \$3.4 million that is being used altogether in this project – and that makes it about 98 percent grant funded and 2 percent loan-funded.

This is for phases two and three combined.

While the Silver Oaks subdivision is not on the first set of places to be improved, the River Walk subdivision is among the first five out of the 10 areas.

There is going to be no hook-up cost to homeowners as their septic tanks are emptied and removed and they are connected to the central sewer system, Mittauer said, which is an extraordinary benefit in this type of project. He said the state's efforts to reduce nutrients going into the state's springs are the reason for the state helping the city in this project.

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Total project funding is summarized as follows:

Leverage Funding from Phase II:

Private Funding (M&A preliminary project planning, meetings & drawings)	\$40,000
City of Fanning Springs (CDBG Readiness-to-Proceed Engineering)	\$62,000
CDBG Funding	\$600,000
State Legislative Springs Funding (SFY 14/15)	\$492,960
SRWMD Springs Funding (SFY 14/15)	<u>\$121,440</u>
Total Leverage Project Funding	\$1,316,400

New Funding for Phase III:

State Legislative Springs Funding (SFY 15/16)	\$2,000,000
SRWMD Springs Funding (SFY 15/16)	<u>\$120,000</u>
Total New Project Funding (SFY 15/16)	\$2,120,000

Here is a breakdown of how the city's \$62,000 CDBG for readiness to proceed is part of the total leverage project funding of \$1.3 million in Phase II, and how the \$2.12 million in Phase III adds to that to make \$3.4 million in Phase II and Phase III combined.

Document provided by Mittauer and Associates