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Mayor claims 'investigation' continues; *Fire Marshal's Office comments;* City Council elections set for Jan. 19 and Feb. 2



Fanning Springs firefighters Chris Anderson and Chella Decker check out Fanning Springs Fire Department Pumper 22 on Tuesday afternoon.

Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 12, 2015 @ 8:07 p.m.

FANNING SPRINGS – Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. “Trip” Lancaster III said on Tuesday afternoon (Jan. 12) that he had not appointed an interim fire chief, and that the “status quo” remains the same in regard to suspended Fanning Springs Fire Chief Ron McQueen.

And Clerk Sheila Watson, who is the supervisor of elections for city elections, said three candidates qualified for the Seat 1 position on the Fanning Springs City Council.

Tommy Darus, Frances Grantham and Joe Locke are running. The primary election in the race is from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Jan. 19. The top two candidates from that election will be decided by voters on Feb. 2.

Joe Locke is not related to incumbent City Council Member Barbara Locke.

In other news from Tuesday, the Fanning Springs City Council will be meeting for its regular monthly meeting on Feb. 9 rather than Feb. 2, due to the election. That meeting starts at 5 p.m. in Fanning Springs City Hall and it is open to the public.

As for the choice to suspend Chief McQueen without pay, the mayor said he is still conducting research.

In fact, Mayor Lancaster said he is conducting “an investigation” and he has not completed that investigation.

Mayor Lancaster said he has called the office of Fire Marshal Jeff Hardee Atwater to determine if the choice the mayor made to suspend McQueen without pay is correct.

(Please see the Jan. 8 story for background on that).

By the status quo remaining, the mayor indicates that Fanning Springs Deputy Fire Chief Elania Spain is in command of the fire department until that changes.

Earlier on Tuesday afternoon, Fanning Springs firefighters Chris Anderson and Chella Decker were checking out Fanning Springs Fire Department Pumper 22, a 1983 Sutphen truck built in Columbus, Ohio.

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On Tuesday evening, Fire Marshal Atwater's Office noted "With regard to the matter at hand, it is a local issue that is not within the State Fire Marshal's jurisdiction.

"By law, the governing body – in this case the mayor's office – has the right to act within accordance of the statute," Ashley Carr, director of communications for Atwater noted. "If you're employed, you must be certified as a career firefighter (Firefighter II certification). Alternatively, if you have the Firefighter I certification, you may serve in a volunteer capacity.

"The Chief of Fanning Springs has a FFI certification," Carr continued. "It is not our place to render a judgment or opinion on the matter."