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## City Council resolves latest issue started by Fanning Springs mayor



**Councilwoman Jane Nogaki (left) and Councilman Tommy Darus are two of the five people who extinguished the flames of discontent fanned by Mayor Trip Lancaster.**

**Story, Photos and Video By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 1, 2016 @ 4:37 p.m.**

**FANNING SPRINGS** -- A unanimous 5-0 vote by the Fanning Springs City Council on Tuesday night (Nov. 1) laid to rest the latest issue raised by Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III in regard to the settlement of what the city took from Fire Chief Ronnie McQueen.

On a motion by Councilwoman Jane Nokaki, almost simultaneously seconded by Councilman Ron Queen and Councilwoman Barbara Locke, the City Council, including Chairman Paul Chase and Councilman Tommy Darus, all agreed the chief was due compensation for 59 calls rather than the 51 that Lancaster came up with -- after the City Council already had voted to pay for the six-month average for a 30-day period.



**Chairman Paul Chase recognizes City Councilman Tommy Darus who brought the question back to the motion by Councilwoman Jane Nogaki to accept the average amount of calls as a settlement amount.**

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**Councilman Ron Queen and Councilwoman Barbara Locke both wanted to second the motion by Councilwoman Jane Nogaki to pay for the 59 calls as they had agreed to pay that already.**

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During the most recent meeting of the Fanning Springs City Council, Mayor Lancaster and Chief McQueen spoke to each other about whether it was 51 or 59 calls.

Earlier this year, attorney Sunshine Baynard, in an attempt to have her client Chief McQueen fairly compensated for the losses he experienced as a result of the mayor's misapplication of law, took the average number of calls for the six months prior to the suspension.

At the Oct. 11 meeting Mayor Lancaster said he thought the average of 59 calls was more than what he counted as 51 calls for which the chief was not compensated.

The difference in payment for 51 calls versus 59 calls is \$96, which is what the mayor contended at the October meeting was more than what is deserved by the chief.

If the number is 83 rather than 59, then that means the City of Fanning Springs should pay Fire Chief McQueen \$996 rather than the \$708 he would be due for 59 calls.

Therefore, rather than the mayor's \$96 savings, this would be an increase of \$288 actually due to pay the chief.

The city had already paid the chief for all but the \$96 that the mayor wanted to not pay the chief.



**Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. 'Trip' Lancaster III explains why he thinks the calls were fewer than the average. Sitting next to him is Fanning Springs City Attorney Jamie Lynn Shideler (who is also known as Jamie Lynn White) of the Dell Graham Gainesville Law Office.**

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The payment to the chief for his attorney fees is done too.

The payment for extra attorney service to cover the city's part of this legal battle is done. Generally, the taxpayers are looking at a \$30,000 loss just to find that the mayor's interpretation of Florida law was incorrect.

McQueen is given a \$12-per-call stipend for responding to a fire or health emergency call.

It was Councilman Darus who brought the issue into the best focus as he interrupted the verbal sparring match between Lancaster and McQueen. Darus said the City Council had already voted on this issue, as he asked Councilwoman Nogaki to read from the record.

Even though the City Council had voted previously to approve the six-month average of 59 calls, Nogaki made the motion again on Tuesday night to quell Mayor Lancaster's most recent raising of an issue.

(Please see the related story on the [Home Page](#) about Chief Ronnie McQueen retiring six weeks early due to being in a hostile work environment.)

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## Second reading of after-the-fact ordinance approved



**Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III and Fanning Springs City Attorney Jamie Lynn Shideler (who is also known as Jamie Lynn White) of the Dell Graham Gainesville Law Office are seen Tuesday evening in Fanning Springs City Hall.**

**Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Nov. 2, 2016 @ 10:37 a.m.**

**FANNING SPRINGS** -- A unanimous 5-0 vote Tuesday night (Nov. 1) by the Fanning Springs City Council repaired human error that caused a May 27, 2014 action to not be followed through until two years later, according to what was said at the open public meeting that night and at previous meetings of this august body.

Fanning Springs Mayor Howell E. "Trip" Lancaster III started at an annual salary of \$14,000 because his predecessor Cheryl Nekola had successfully lobbied for the increase in pay from \$12,000 a year.

The \$14,000 annual pay started in 2015 as best as can be determined.

After the haggling over the budget in the summer of 2014, that pay was agreed upon, but both City Clerk Sheila Watson and former City Attorney Conrad Bishop Jr. fell short of courteously reminding the City Council members of the matter of having an ordinance approved, as is required in the city charter, for that raise. The \$19,000 Nekola had lobbied for was negotiated

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down to \$14,000 a year, Nekola had said previously.

Fanning Springs City Attorney Jamie Lynn Shideler (who is also known as Jamie Lynn White) of the Dell Graham Gainesville Law Office told the City Council that not only is it permissible to create this local law after the fact (ex post facto), but since the legislative intent was clear from when the raise was first enacted, the mayor would have cause to sue the city if his \$14,000 annual salary was dropped back to \$12,000 a year.

While the potential of a veiled threat may be seen by some residents as the force moving the second unanimous vote for this action, City Councilwoman Jane Nogaki stated why she was voting with the majority to create this ordinance required for a mayoral raise in the City of Fanning Springs.

Nogaki made her statement after the motion by City Councilman Tommy Darus was seconded by City Councilwoman Barbara Locke. Since it is an ordinance, the roll had to be called to assure who was voting which way on this matter, according to the Fanning Springs City Charter.

Nogaki said the \$14,000 salary for the Fanning Springs mayor had been approved in the budget of the previous fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30, 2015.

“And we have done so again in 2016 (for the fiscal year from Oct. 1, 2016-Sept. 30, 2017),” Nogaki said. “That there is a reasonable expectation that is the salary. And if this is the legal way to make that happen, then my vote is ‘Yes.’”

The second reading of the retroactive municipal ordinance made it part of the local law of the land in the City of Fanning Springs.