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Councilman Takes Oath Of Office



Williston City Councilman Tim Hass (left) accepts the duties in a post that is new to him. Hass is replacing former Williston City Councilman Danny Etheridge. Administering the oath of office is Levy County Court Judge J.T. 'Tim' Browning. One of the first jobs Hass accepted was to

be the representative from Williston on the Levy County Tourist Development Council. Photo by Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 8, 2017 at 9:47 p.m.

Workshop scheduled for finding fair salaries for Williston city workers



City Councilman Tim Hass (left) and City Councilman Kori Lamb are seen at the meeting Tuesday night (Feb. 7).

Story and Photos By Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 9, 2017 at 2:37 p.m.

WILLISTON -- After a relatively extensive discussion and a 3-2 vote to not accept what city staff had proposed, the Williston City Council on Tuesday night (Feb. 7) voted 5-0 to hold a workshop on Feb. 17 (a Friday) starting at 5 p.m. in the City Council meeting room.

There are currently 49 city employees, Williston City Manager Scott Lippmann said Thursday (Feb. 9). There were 14 who were recommended for increases in salary on Tuesday night, which would have increased the annual budget by \$39,800.

It was City Council Vice President Nancy Winger who made the motion to accept the

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recommended increases as they were presented Tuesday night. City Councilman Tim Hass seconded her motion.

City Council President Charles Goodman, City Councilman Elihu Ross and City Councilman Kori Lamb voted against it.



Vice President Nancy Winger explains why the workers can be paid more, and why they should be paid more as City Councilman Elihu Ross listens.

That 3-2 vote against the Winger-Hass vote came after an extensive discussion regarding the significant research conducted by City Clerk Fran Taylor.

Williston Finance Officer Stephen Bloom created a spreadsheet for the City Council members to see city employee position titles, the current starting salaries, the average of salaries in comparable places, and the proverbial bottom line of what it would cost to provide salary increases to 14 employees who appear to be underpaid.

This matter was brought again to the forefront of the City Council's considerations in part as a result of the recent increases in salaries for members of the Williston Police Department.

City Manager Lippmann told the elected leaders that the city has experienced difficulty attracting and retaining employees due to the low pay scale throughout the municipality's labor force – for instance, in the utility department, public works, and administration.

Two weeks ago, the city remedied some of the issue by increasing starting pay in the WPD.

Bloom's spreadsheet is a summary of the extensive set of facts City Clerk Taylor provided as she researched to help the City Council have a grasp of the market of city government workers and employment opportunities.

The cities of Gainesville and Ocala being in such close proximity to Williston create monetary magnets that pull talent from the town. Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat mentioned during the lengthy discussion that Williston will not be able to pay as much as those metropolitan areas to the south and east.

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City Manager Scott Lippmann (center in light blue shirt) answers a question as City Attorney Frederick L. Koberlein Jr. (right) listens.

Lippmann attempted to help the City Council notice, though, that City Clerk Taylor had found cities of comparable size to check salaries with.

One fact that became clear, however, was that finding an exact match of Williston in regard to demographics, city services provided and being in a market with two relatively large cities was not possible. Researcher Taylor created a relative gauge that arguably met or exceeded standards to use as one part of making the decision to increase or not increase pay for certain city posts.

Lippmann pointed out that Williston is in direct competition for employees within a certain market.

Dunnellon, Newberry and Belleview are a couple of those smaller cities attracting potentially the same city workers.

Lippmann said the facts show that in many cases, Williston's pay scale is at "the bottom of the heap."

Mayor Hethcoat asked if the city is losing workers due to just having low salaries or something else.

After saying there may be other factors affecting this situation, Lippmann said Williston is perceived as being low-paying.

"We've lost employees to other cities," Lippmann said. "I mean people who were working for us have gone to other cities because they were offered significantly more money."

The city must address recruiting and retaining employees that are qualified, he said.

President Goodman asked if the problem is low pay, "... or is it leadership down?"

Former City Councilman Jason Cason, Lippmann said as he responded, sought an analysis that showed a person working in the city's labor pool in 2007 remained employed to today and factored in the cost of living.

"After the 3 percent raise that was given this year," Lippmann said, "the employees were still 6 percent below what the cost of living from 2007 was."

The city manager said, therefore not only is the city losing in the competitive market of salaries, but it is losing ground in the mathematical measure of increased prices for products and services.

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After Lippmann said one study the city commissioned to be conducted resulted in the lowering of some city workers' pay, Mayor Hethcoat asked "What did that tell you?"

"That told me," Lippmann said, "that the people who did the study were trying to save money."

Lippmann said the city staff are not asking for a Cadillac pay plan. If the city wants to attract and retain good employees, then the city must increase the pay for people in certain jobs.

Mayor Hethcoat contested some of Taylor's choices of places to compare salaries. He disliked the use of Bradenton Beach, Indian River Shores, Malabar and other high-priced cities.

"Gainesville and Ocala," Hethcoat said, "... we're not ever going to compete with Ocala and Gainesville (to obtain good employees)."

Hethcoat labeled Williston as being "a training ground" for city workers who then go to places for more money.

City Council Vice President Wininger explained why she favors going with the proposal before the City Council that night.

Looking at the budget and the reserves, Wininger said she favors giving the workers the increases noted that night.

"I am in favor of giving our employees what they are asking for," she said. "I don't think it's out of range by any means when you look at the surrounding cities and what we compete with, and when you look at our budget with what we do have.

"We're not a wealthy place," she continued. "They are not asking for a lot of wealth. They're asking for a decent living and I certainly think they are entitled to it."

After the 2-3 defeat of Wininger's motion, City Council President Goodman said he wanted to have a workshop to more fully explore the issue. He did not simply want to completely stop the consideration of giving some more pay increases.

He made that in the form of a motion, which was seconded and unanimously approved. And so there will be a workshop on this matter on Feb. 17 (a Friday) starting at 5 p.m. in the City Council meeting room.