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Attorney M. Michael O'Steen tentatively chosen as next Fanning Springs city attorney



The Fanning Springs City Council poses with the prospective Fanning Springs City Attorney M. Michael O'Steen. Seen here are (first row, from the left) Councilwoman Jennifer Padot-Collins, City Clerk Sheila Watson, O'Steen, Councilwoman Barbara Locke and Councilman Ron Queen, and (back row, from left) Councilman Thomas J. 'Tommy' Darus III, Mayor Howell 'Trip' Lancaster III and Councilman John T. McDonald.

Story and Photos

By Terry Witt, Senior Reporter © April 12, 2017 at 11:17 a.m.

FANNING SPRINGS -- Fanning Springs City Council members voted Tuesday night (April 11) to begin negotiations with Michael O'Steen as their future city attorney.

The City Council also voted to adopt a resolution changing the once-a-month meeting date away from the second to the first Tuesday of the month, in part to accommodate O'Steen's schedule.

O'Steen serves as staff attorney for the Dixie County School Board. That School Board meets on the same day as the Fanning Springs City Council, the second Tuesday of every month. The attorney told the Fanning Springs City Council he would have to discuss changing the meeting times of one of the boards to avoid conflicts.

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Fanning Springs City Attorney Jamie Lynn Shideler (who is also known as Jamie Lynn White) of the Dell Graham Gainesville Law Office listens as City Council members discuss who will replace the firm as being the city attorney for Fanning Springs. Like Shideler, Levy County School Board Attorney David Delaney is part of the Dell Graham



Gainesville Law Office, which is a highly respected and well-established firm. Despite the excellence of the firm, the city leaders decided against renewing the annual contract.



Councilman Thomas 'Tommy' Darus III listens to discussions about who should be the next city attorney.

Fanning Springs Mayor Howell "Trip" Lancaster III said he would prefer moving the meeting to the first Tuesday of the month, regardless of whether negotiations were successful with O'Steen. A motion by Councilman Thomas J.

"Tommy" Darus III passed unanimously to move board meeting to the first Tuesday starting in June.

The decision to choose O'Steen as the preferred candidate for city attorney passed on a 3-2 vote after board members filled out ballots and handed them to City Clerk Sheila Watson. Placing second was Lindsey Lander who grew up in Dixie County like O'Steen. Both said they also have deep ties to Levy and Gilchrist counties.

The 3-2 vote showed Fanning Springs City Councilwoman Jennifer Padot-Collins, Councilman Thomas J. "Tommy" Darus III and Councilman John T. McDonald choosing O'Steen first and Councilwoman Barbara Locke and Councilman Ron Queen favoring Lander as the first choice.

Lander said he would work for a flat fee of \$2,500 per month (12 x \$2,500 = \$30,000

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a year) but would charge extra if there was litigation or a big project like a water and sewer line extension.

O'Steen said he would work for \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year and would give the board eight to 10 hours of time monthly without extra charges to answer questions from the City Council. He would charge extra for litigation but said he would work to keep the city free of lawsuits.

Lander, who has 19 years of experience and serves on multiple boards, including as a contract attorney for the Suwannee River Water Management District, compared favorably to O'Steen in terms of time working in the legal profession. O'Steen has 10 years of experience and serves only one governmental body, the Dixie County School Board.

Fanning Springs resident Marty Collins saw that as an advantage, potentially leaving more time to represent Fanning Springs. Fanning Springs resident Dana Sheffield preferred Lander, largely because he has nearly twice the experience as O'Steen working as an attorney.

Fanning Springs City Council members agreed to O'Steen's request to have a photo taken with him after the meeting, but negotiations between O'Steen, Lancaster and Darus must take place before O'Steen can officially be approved by the full board at the next city attorney replacing the Dell Graham Law Firm of Gainesville.

Fanning Springs City Attorney Jamie Lynn Shideler (who is also known as Jamie Lynn White) of Dell Graham Gainesville Law Office was the person serving as the city's attorney during the April 11 meeting.

While the confirmation of O'Steen as the new city attorney for Fanning Springs is tentative, the change of meeting times every month is set in stone.

O'Steen would begin serving as city attorney on the first Tuesday in June (June 6) if he is hired. He said he plans to sit through the May 9 meeting of the board to become familiar with the city's issues.