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Williston City Council sets emergency meeting for Jan. 12



Four Williston City Council members and the mayor discuss matters Tuesday night (Jan. 9). They are (from left) City Councilwoman Marguerite Robinson, Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat, City Council President Charles Goodman, City Council Vice President Nancy Wininger and City Councilman Elihu Ross. City Councilman Kori Lamb was absent.

**Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 10, 2018 at 3:47 p.m.
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WILLISTON -- As a result of Williston City Manager Scott Lippmann being so ill that he was unable to attend the regular Williston City Council meeting on Tuesday night (Jan. 9), combined with the four City Council members present wanting to move quickly toward starting work to build a new City Hall, those four leaders chose to call an emergency meeting of the Williston City Council to be held Friday (Jan. 12) at 3:30 p.m. in the City Council Meeting Room.

The two matters upon which discussion and action exclusively may occur at the meeting are the approval or rejection of a deal with the Levy County School Board for the city to use a multi-use building on the campus of the former Williston High School while the new Williston City Hall is being built; and the approval or rejection of a contract with Oelrich Construction of Jonesville to build the future City Hall.

The four City Council members who attended and voted at the Tuesday night meeting were City Council President Charles Goodman, City Council Vice President Nancy Wininger, and City Council members Elihu Ross and Marguerite Robinson. City Councilman Kori Lamb was absent.

There was a 2-2 vote in regard to approving the agreement for the city to use the School Board property from January through Dec. 31 of this year.

Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat was called upon, per the City Charter, to break that tie vote.

Wininger and Robinson voted for approval of the deal with the School Board. Goodman and Ross voted against it.

Goodman and Ross said the agreement was unclear on the cost of an "electric generator" the city was to purchase for the recently constructed Williston Middle High School campus, in consideration of the School Board letting the City Council use a building of the old WHS – which

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is on the market for sale.

The cost of a generator to power the entire campus of the new WMHS campus would be astronomical, in contrast with some hundreds or thousands of dollars for a smaller generator. The resolution written for the agreement between the two entities was unclear about what constitutes this particular generator as part of the deal.

As noted in the City Charter, Mayor Hethcoat broke the tie. He voted in favor of tabling the decision on approving that resolution -- at that point in that meeting -- for another two weeks, until the next regular meeting of the City Council.

The leaders were unable to obtain more information about the type or cost of the electric generator being considered in this agreement, because City Manager Lippmann was absent.

President Goodman for several months has used 10 minutes of each meeting in his attempt to improve communications between staff and the City Council.

With City Manager Lippmann's absence not being planned soon enough for the city manager to contact the City Council president, that appeared to have touched a sore spot with Goodman. Goodman repeatedly let all listeners know that he was unhappy that Lippmann did not telephone him to say he was too ill to attend the meeting.

City Clerk Fran Taylor did tell the City Council that the city manager had told her earlier in the day that he was not feeling well.

The next resolution that was stalled was the agreement for Oelrich Construction to begin the work on the future City Hall.

President Goodman asked for the exact financing method for the \$2 million project.

City Clerk Taylor said City Finance Director Stephen Bloom was creating a package that would include a mix of financing as well as Bloom planning to approach banks for financing. The finance director previously has told the City Council that he felt confident the city could pay for the new City Hall over a period of time.

Since neither Bloom nor Lippmann was present Tuesday night, Goodman expressed his dismay and discontentment regarding his inability to have the answers he sought. He appeared to believe his attempt for better communications did not carry through enough, because he did not know the city manager would not be present that night.

However, it may not have been until just before Lippmann was going to the meeting that he realized he was too ill to be showing up.

Given that the construction company was to "begin mobilization" on Jan. 28 (a Sunday) of this project, and the fact that start requires a signed contract beforehand, Goodman said he was unhappy -- because the people with answers he wanted before he would vote on approval of the contract were not present.

He apologized to the representatives of the construction company for the city being unable to give them enough advance notice so that they did not have to be at the meeting. Their presence, however, did turn out to be relatively good -- because they confirmed their ability to plan to be at the emergency meeting now scheduled for Friday.

To help the construction company stay on the projected starting date for the timeline of the project, both resolutions -- one for the agreement with the School Board and one for the contract with Oelrich Construction -- currently are scheduled to be ruled upon on Friday.

Interestingly, the mayor's tie-breaking vote in regard to the generator showed that matter being moved to Friday rather than two weeks later, because it is part of the whole plan for the city to build its future City Hall, and for employees to have a place to serve the public during the construction phase.

That open public meeting is set for 3:30 p.m. on Friday (Jan. 12).

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City Attorney Frederick L. Koberlein Jr. said that he saw 72 hours' notice as being the minimum mandatory amount of time for this emergency meeting to occur after the regular Tuesday night meeting, given there was not a flood or other natural disaster requiring even less public notice for the emergency meeting.

People who live or visit in Florida enjoy what is known as Open Government, where many meetings where elected and appointed ruling and advisory bodies vote on matters must be noticed so that people can attend them. One idea leading to the creation of the law is that the people should have a right to see how their elected representatives reach decisions, and to do that the people need to be able to watch the leaders discuss matters in the open.