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Drummond to loan city up to \$3 million for city hall work



Williston Finance Director Stephen Bloom explains how the terms he sought give the city more flexibility in the next 20 years to pay off the loan.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 22, 2018 at 8:58 p.m.

WILLISTON – The City Council of Williston chose Tuesday night (Feb. 20) an offer from Drummond Community Bank to accept a loan of up to \$3 million for construction of the new City Hall.

City Finance Director Stephen Bloom said he sought proposal from 15 to 20 banks, locally and distant.

The construction project currently has an estimated cost of about \$2.5 million, Bloom said. It is estimated to be ready for occupancy in October, City Manager Scott Lippmann said, however construction projects depend on weather and other factors as far as their final completion.

There is no pre-payment penalty. There is a 12-month drawdown period for the city to accept the money.

In Bloom's plan, the repayment is to be covered by funds from the General Fund, the Utilities Fund, The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) and the Airport Fund.

Dr. Kenneth A Schwiebert, DMD, a member of the CRA, said Florida law precludes the city from using revenue designated for the CRA to rebuild the City Hall – even though it is in the area of blight and slum that comprises the space to be improved.

Given this input, the finance director may be revising percentages from the different city funds, after the city attorney completes his review of the law.

The guidelines for Bloom's plan, though, are for the city to have flexibility with the repayment of the loan. Yes, he said, there will be less revenue for capital improvement projects as a result of this relatively big purchase.

When one audience member asked about the City Council not finalizing the financing of the purchase before starting the project, City Council President Charles Goodman explained, as he has before, although with even more detail this time, that the old City Hall was dangerously

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falling apart.

The people of Williston could attempt to repair the worn-out structure piecemeal, he said, but just like an old car that needs part after part, it ends with the buyer spending more on repairs than on the complete replacement.

The president again said the city has the money in its contingency budget, but that money is best left where it is. Nonetheless, even no bank or other entity could or would loan the city the \$2.5 million, the project cost would be covered.

On a motion by City Councilman Elihu Ross, seconded by City Councilwoman Marguerite Robinson, the City Council voted 4-0 to approve it. The fifth seat on the City Council is vacant until after a special election to replace former City Councilman Kori Lamb who moved out of the city limits.

OTHER NEWS

STUDENTS HONORED



Matthew Mullins of Joyce Bullock Elementary School accepts his certificate - the Outstanding Student Award.

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Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat presented two elementary school boys with the Student of the Month award.

Kindness, consideration and behavior like this is exemplified in these students, he said.

Joyce Bullock Elementary School second grade student Matthew Mullins was noted by his teacher as being a student who always strives to improve, the mayor said.

Mullins never surrenders and keeps going despite any challenge he faces, the mayor said as he read what the boy's teacher noted.

He is a hardworking student who shows kindness to his classmates, Hethcoat said as he read what the teacher wrote.

"He is seen as a leader," Hethcoat said. "You take control, don't you Matthew?"

This meeting, as usual, Mayor Hethcoat had a conversation with the recipients through the ceremony.

Mullins follows directions and always helps other students, Mayor Hethcoat said.



Jeremy Hildebrandt, a Williston Elementary School student listens as Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat reads what the certificate signifies.

The second student presented with an award was Jeremy Hildebrandt.

Hildebrandt is a student at Williston Elementary School.

His teacher noted that he earned this recognition for being a model student who constantly and consistently sets a good example for his classmates.

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Hildebrandt always does what he is supposed to do, his teacher said, and he helps his classmates who need help. He is polite and cares about all of the students at Williston Elementary School, the mayor said the boy's teacher noted.

Both students received Outstanding Student certificates for "Academic Excellence, Leadership, Citizenship and Attendance" at their respective schools. Both boys also received a certificate for a 14-inch, two-topping pizza from Williston-based restaurant.



Matthew Mullins (left) and Jeremy Hildebrandt stand with Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat after the presentation of the certificates is completed.

MFA To Give Proposal to School Board

The Ministerial Faith Alliance is going to present its proposal to take over the Williston Middle School property.

Two weeks ago, Pastor Johnnie Jones III agreed to meet with City Manager Scott Lippmann and City Attorney Frederick L. Koberlein Jr. to discuss the city accepting the property, and then giving it to the MFA.

"My legal opinion is that the Alliance should try to reach a resolution with the School Board itself," Koberlein said. "The School Board is the current landowner."

The attorney's recommendation is going to be followed by Pastor Jones. The MFA leader said he plans not to present the School Board and Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison with his proposal for the MFA to take over the property as a center point for the whole community.

If the School Board rejects the MFA proposal, Jones said he will return to the Williston City

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Council with a proposal for the city to accept the property from the county's educational leaders.

City Council President Charles Goodman said he would write a letter of support, although he will be doing so only as one resident of Williston and not in his position as a representative of all of the people of the city.