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City Council hears requests



Janice Fugate (left) tells the Williston City Council about a stormwater retention issue. City Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson is at the right in the photo.

Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Aug. 10, 2019 at 9:19 a.m.

WILLISTON – Among its various actions, the Williston City Council heard about an alleged flooding issue and about an employee's retirement health insurance situation Tuesday night (Aug. 6).



(from left) Williston City Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson. City Councilman Justin Head and Mayor Jerry Robinson perform their civic duty Tuesday night (Aug. 6) as they consider matters.

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(from left) Williston City Council President Nancy Wininger, City Councilman Charles Goodman and City Councilman Elihu Ross perform their civic duty Tuesday night (Aug. 6) as they consider matters.

While City Attorney Frederick L. Koberlein Jr. had a planned and excused absence from the meeting, local attorney W. Blake Fugate was listed on the agenda to speak about stormwater runoff that allegedly has increased since the city improved Heritage Park.

Janice Fugate, however, spoke on behalf of the interested parties about the issue with flooding the family is seeing at the Williston-based law office of attorney Norm D. Fugate, rather than attorney W. Blake Fugate because he was not in attendance.

The Williston law office of Norm D. Fugate, located at 248 N.W. Main St. is across the street to the west from Heritage Park, which is also known as Linear Park, so named because it runs between and parallel with Main Street (State Road 121) and Northwest Main Street (which is actually west of Main Street, which is the east-west dividing line in the city) from Northwest First Avenue to Fourth Avenue.

Noble Avenue (U.S. Alt 27) is the North-South dividing line in the city.

Information from the Levy County Property Appraiser's Office shows 1981 as the date for "conditioned area" and an "actual built" date of 2003 for the house that is now the law office. The structure looks like a residence from the exterior but it functions as a one-story office building.

Cookie King's real estate office also allegedly is affected by the reported increase in Heritage Park stormwater runoff at Main Street and Northwest Third Avenue, which is said to be as a result of the improvements at Heritage Park.

King was present at the meeting that night as well.

Adding impervious parking may have increased the amount of runoff from rain in the area, according to some of the comments made at that regular twice-monthly City Council meeting.

Janice Fugate opened her part of the discussion by asking Williston City Council members if there is "anything in the works" to solve the reported flooding dilemma, which she and some of her neighbors allegedly are enduring. Other property owners who are downstream on the "Northwest Third Avenue River" were not present for the meeting.

City Councilman Charles Goodman clarified Fugate's point by stating it was the new construction at Heritage Park that the Fugates and King are saying caused the added stormwater runoff going to their property, which is not dissipating or draining in a

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timely manner from their perspective.

Where Northwest Main and Third Avenue connect, she said, is making Third Avenue into “a river” rather than a road when it rains now. Fugate said she appreciates the city adding sod on the right-of-way to help absorb some of the runoff; however, her family now sees water standing under the office building.

Fugate said she does not know if there is any recourse available, nor does she know who provided the engineering for the stormwater runoff from the Heritage Park improvements.

Councilman Goodman asked City Manager Scott Lippmann and Utilities Director C.J. Zimoski if they were aware of this reported flooding problem.

Zimoski and Lippmann said this issue has been reviewed.

As for the water, “You either put it in the park, and there is only so much elevation there in which to put or else it flows down Third (Avenue),” Zimoski explained.

The utilities director said there has been flooding at that intersection historically.

The two choices with what to do with the stormwater is to keep it in the park or send it down Third Avenue.

The nearest storm-drain to this point, Zimoski said, is by Northwest Fourth Street near the nursing home. That storm drain, though, is already overburdened with stormwater that it cannot drain quickly enough.

He added that the Southwest Florida Water Management District wants rainwater to stay where it falls, or naturally flow to wherever it goes.

“The state won’t let us build berms to divert it off your property,” he told Fugate, “unless we have a place to put it.”

Zimoski shared with listeners that the city applied for Small County Outreach Program grants from the Florida Department of Transportation to help with stormwater drainage projects, but the city’s requests were rejected. The notice of the denial, he added, was received by the city a month ago.

King said a previous dip in the land that existed on the park side of the street has been graded out, flattened out, so that now the water that used to be in that “ditch” now flows across the street to her property and the Fugate property.

Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson suggested creating a new ditch there. Council President Nancy Winger suggested that City Manager Lippmann and Utilities Director Zimoski find an engineer to find a solution.

“It goes back to a very simple philosophy,” Zimoski said in response to Winger’s suggestion of hiring an engineer. “Do you want the edge of the road three feet deep to hold the water? Or do you want it to be on the road? There’s no other choices in this.

“There’s nowhere to divert the water to,” he continued. “We got as many complaints about the water sitting on the edge of the road, with the depth it was, as we are getting now.”

Zimoski said the illusion that elevations have been changed exists because hills were graded. The elevation of land upstream from the Fugate property has not changed, he explained. The placement of sod in areas there, he added will provide for rainwater to be better absorbed than when it was just dirt.

A Florida Department of Transportation retention pond a couple of blocks away in Heritage (or Linear) Park that accepts runoff from the road, is at a higher elevation than this intersection on Main Street. City Manager Lippmann said to put water from the low point near the King and Fugate property would require the water to go uphill.

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King mentioned that any development which adds impervious structures is required to provide drainage or retention. Fugate said she saw no exemption for the city government from codes related to stormwater runoff and development.

“I can’t put in a development and swamp my neighbor,” Fugate said. “And really, that’s what’s happened here. We all acknowledge both of those houses (the Fugate and King office buildings) have been there forever, and it is the lowest place on the street.”

It was not until after Heritage Park-Linear Park had improvements that this level of flooding was experienced by those two property owners, Fugate said. No person mentioned if rainfall had been abnormally high during these reported flooding events.

City Council President Wininger asked Fugate if she wanted an engineer to try to find a method for relieve from the reported flooding problem.

City Council Vice President Robinson said she anticipates seeing Fugate at the next City Council meeting.



WPD Deputy Chief Clay Connolly speaks to the Williston City Council giving them an offer that could save the city 50 percent in costs from covering his health insurance for three years after his pending retirement.

RETIREMENT HEALTH INSURANCE

Williston Police Chief Deputy Clay Connolly, 66, is on the brink of retirement from the Williston Police Department.

In the current Williston City Employee Human Resources rules, Connolly will qualify as the first employee ever to retire after serving 25 or more years. He has dedicated 31 years of his life to public service in law enforcement.

“An employee retiring from the City of Williston who is at least 62 years old and has worked for the city 25 years or more, and who at the time of retirement has been covered by the city’s health insurance plan for at least the past five years,” the city policy notes, “will be offered continuous health insurance coverage on him or her under the city’s group health insurance plan until he or she reaches age 65 or a maximum of three years at no cost to the employee.”

Connolly, who is 66, said he qualifies for three years of health insurance coverage by the city.

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He provided an opportunity for the city to simply pay one part of the Medicare benefits he receives, which would be about 50 percent less in cost than if the city provided to cover him for the next three years under the group health insurance plan.

City Attorney Koberlein was not present for the meeting. Connolly said the time is here for him to let the Social Security Administration know about his intent for coverage as he retires, and he hopes the city leaders can make a decision relatively quickly on his offer to potentially save the city money.

One potential side effect of Connolly becoming the potential first eligible retiring city employee for this benefit could be some revision to the city's human resources policies related to retiring employees.

Like the discussion with reported flooding levels increasing at an intersection in the city, the question of this benefit for the upcoming retiree may be answered soon by the Williston City Council.