

A Special Meeting of the Apalachicola City Commission was held on March 4, 2025 at 4:00 PM at the Commission Meeting Room located at 74 6th Street, Apalachicola, Florida.

Present: Commissioner Anita Grove, Commissioner Despina George, Commissioner Donna Duncan, Commissioner Adriane Elliott, City Manager Michael Brillhart, Finance Director Lee Mathes, City Clerk Sheneidra Cummings, Legal Assistant to Attorney Hartman Josh Pascalone, Sergeant Ashley Webb, Officer Kevin Shuman.

Mayor Ash-recused.

Meeting was called to order by Mayor Ash followed by invocation and pledge of allegiance.

Agenda Adoption

A motion was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. None opposed. Motion carried, 4-0.

Public Comment

Elizabeth Milliken commented.

Unfinished Business: City Manager Applicant Discussion

The Mayor began by recapping the city manager hiring process. The position had been advertised for six weeks on multiple platforms including the Florida League of Cities website, Florida League of Counties website, area newspapers, Indeed, and the city's website. Seventeen applications were received, and after interviews, three candidates were selected and ranked. One candidate subsequently withdrew. The Commission's attorney was directed to negotiate with the remaining candidates.

Attorney Dan Hartman provided an update on the negotiations with the two remaining candidates, Michael Brillhart and TJ Fish.

For Michael Brillhart:

- Salary expectation: \$90,000 (though negotiable)
- Start date: 2-3 weeks after an offer
- Background check and references: All checked out with no issues

For TJ Fish:

- Salary expectation: \$112,500 (firm but negotiable) with FRS considerations
- Vehicle allowance request: \$800 per month in lieu of assigned city vehicle
- PTO request: 10 weeks annually to be utilized or cashed out each fiscal year
- Housing allowance: Requested for 1 year to acclimate to the community
- ICMA retirement account: Requested city contribution
- Start date: Approximately 1 month after an offer
- Background check and references: All checked out with no issues

Commissioner Elliott spoke in support of Mr. Fish, citing his strong background in municipal utilities and water management. He acknowledged Fish's salary requirements were tied to his Florida Retirement System considerations but suggested negotiating on some requests, such as denying the ICMA contribution, reducing the 10 weeks PTO to 6-7 weeks, and exploring housing support options rather than a direct allowance. She also suggested having the final candidate tour city facilities before making a final offer.

Commissioner George noted that Michael Brillhart had received 3 out of 4 votes as the top pick during the previous meeting, while Mr. Fish received 2 votes for second place with one first-place vote. She recommended proceeding with negotiations with Brillhart at his requested salary of \$90,000, noting this was only \$7,804 more annually than the previous city manager's salary of \$84,000. She confirmed the city had adequate reserves to cover this increase.

The Mayor expressed support for proceeding with Brillhart, noting his more extensive experience as a city manager compared to Fish, who had never held that specific position. The Mayor also expressed concern about Fish's requests being out of line with the city's budget, especially given the need to invest a quarter million dollars in the water system to resolve a sulfur issue.

Commissioner Elliott, while supporting the majority decision, noted Mr. Fish's qualifications including his Masters of Public Administration, experience with the American Institute of Certified Planners, and technical knowledge on infrastructure, which could have been valuable for managing the city's grants and building department challenges.

Motion to extend an offer for the city manager position to Michael Brillhart at a starting salary of \$90,000 and direct Attorney Hartman to negotiate an employment agreement along the basic outline of the previous city manager's employment agreement was made by Commissioner George, seconded by Commissioner Duncan. No further discussion. Motion carried, 3-1. Commissioner Elliott opposed.

New Business: City Manager Appointment- Interim or New Hire

Attorney Hartman explained that Bree Robinson had agreed to serve as interim city manager until the new hire could begin. In discussions about compensation, she requested an additional \$1,250 per week during her interim service period.

Commissioner Duncan expressed concern about Ms. Robinson becoming overwhelmed with responsibilities and asked about plans to assist with her ongoing duties.

Ms. Robinson responded that she was confident in her ability to manage the workload, noting that grants consume about 80% of her time and she was already involved in that aspect of city management. She mentioned the city had budgeted funds for grant consultants that could be utilized if needed, and she would reach out for help rather than becoming overstressed.

The Mayor expressed appreciation for Ms. Robinson stepping up while noting the desire to get Mr. Brillhart in place quickly.

Commissioner Elliott voiced support for the compensation request, stating it showed the Commission was serious about treating employees properly and compensating them appropriately.

Motion to appoint Brie Robinson as the interim city manager with additional compensation of \$1,250 per week was made by Commissioner Elliott, seconded by Commissioner George. None opposed. Motion carried, 4-0.

Mayor and Commissioner Comments

No formal comments were made. The Mayor announced the meeting would take a break until 6:00 PM when they would reconvene for the regular city meeting.

Meeting adjourned.

Anita Grove, Mayor Pro Tem

ATTEST:

Sheneidra Cummings, City Clerk