

Dispatches from DeFuniak



From Councilman Ron Kelley

D E F U N I A K S P R I N G S F L O R I D A

SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Walton County Heritage Museum on Circle Drive
- The DeFuniak Springs Library on Circle Drive
- DeFuniak Springs Golf Course and Country Club on U.S. Hwy. 90 West



OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS!

Greetings!

If a person manages to live long enough and is blessed with a modicum of good sense, it is possible to understand certain truths about life. For instance, I have learned that an enormous weakness can also be an enormous strength.

With regard to the city, the weakness is that we have three major, upper-level job openings: City Manager, Finance Director and Utility Billing Supervisor.

Fortunately, we have a staff full of experienced professionals that are doing outstanding work and filling these slots while we look for permanent employees. Still, that much space at the top creates more work for all our employees in the short term.

It was a terrible blow to the citizens and staff when we lost Interim City Manager Tilman Mears, but that loss was forced on us because of some other people's private agendas. Now Sandra Arnold, our utility billing

supervisor, is retiring after more than 18 years. Though she has earned her rest and we wish her well, it certainly creates a void.

As for a finance director, after three times of hiring the "expert from out of town," we are now in worse shape than ever. So, obviously, all of that is definitely a weakness.



However, looked at another way, this is also a great opportunity. We will be filling these spots with qualified, proven professionals who will have to work together closely and rely on each other to get the job done. They will also have to work closely with staff in order to understand the existing system. This should

create a bond of trust and a unity of purpose that will move the city forward in an amazing way. Obviously, a cohesive, unified staff is always an enormous strength.

Recently, city staff researched what other Panhandle cities are requiring to hire a city manager. We found that some wanted more qualifications and some wanted less. We kept what we had, since it gives us the flexibility to choose from a wide range of qualifications. We also restructured the voting requirement so that no single council member can hold up the entire process. It now only takes four "Yes" votes to hire a permanent city manager and the person can still live anywhere in the county.

So while it may be a weakness to currently have all that space at the top, it is a great strength to be able to start over and rebuild our city government.

See what I mean?

— Ron Kelley
May 25, 2017

SKATING ON BY

All faithful Dispatch readers are aware that I have been talking a lot about our greatly anticipated, "new and improved," fully refurbished Skateboard Park, located next to the DeFuniak Springs Community Center, just off North 9th Street (Hwy. 83).

I may be as excited by the prospect as the eager young people that will actually use it. However, do not look for me inside the park. In fact, if it looks like I am about to attempt to mount a skateboard, please call a doctor



and tell him I have finally gone 'round the bend and standing out there where the buses don't run.

Still, I am excited because this will give our youth a safe, contained, well-lit and well-appointed place to enjoy this particular form of transportation/recreation.

Interim City Manager Craig Drake tells me that staff is working diligently to get the park ready in time for the summer break. Yay!!!

GETTING OVER THE HUMP

In response to requests from several citizens in various neighborhoods, I asked the Council to take a second look at our policy regarding speed humps and other traffic calming actions. The Council agreed to allow me to work with staff on a new policy draft.

Working with Interim City Manager Craig Drake, we discussed the problems with the current policy and came up with several ideas for changes that would make it easier for residents to request a speed hump and easier for

the city to respond.

The current policy calls for a person to get 10 of their neighbors to agree in writing and once approved, the citizens would have to pay the cost for the speed device and its installation.

That process seems like a great method for avoiding having to install speed humps at all.



The proposed new policy would allow the city manager, working with the Public Works Department, to make the decision. The city manager could talk to other residents in the neighborhood and initiate whatever kind of traffic study that seems appropriate.

If the city manager is

satisfied that the request has merit, the speed hump would be installed at no cost to the residents.

If the request is denied, the residents can appeal the decision to the Council.

I presented the draft proposal to the Council for consideration. The Council seemed to approve of the new policy. Attorney Clayton Adkinson offered a couple of good suggestions, so I asked him to include his recommendations in the policy and bring it back to the Council at our next meeting for final approval.

Success is not final.
Failure is not fatal.
It is the courage to continue that counts.

- Sir Winston Churchill

DeFuniak Springs Airport

Slowly but surely, our DeFuniak Springs Municipal Airport is growing. Our hangar space occupancy is at 100 percent and this includes box hangars and T-hangars, with six planes still on the waiting list.

Regarding our plan to move the electrical lines underground, the project design has been completed and estimates have been submitted by Gulf Power. Utility conversion projects like this are costly and the city is currently awaiting a decision by the

Florida Department of Transportation on the funding eligibility of Gulf Power to perform the main body of work, including the installation of underground conduit. The estimated cost would be \$135,000.

The city still plans to extend Runway 9/27 from its current 4,146 feet to 5000 feet, but there are some discrepancies between the Airport Master Plan and other documents, which will have to be resolved.

In the meantime, we are seeking some discretion-

ary funds from the Federal Aviation Agency to relocate Gene Hurley Road, which will have to be done before the runway is extended. FDOT has funded the road relocation design and FAA is considering the Airport Airspace Analysis report.

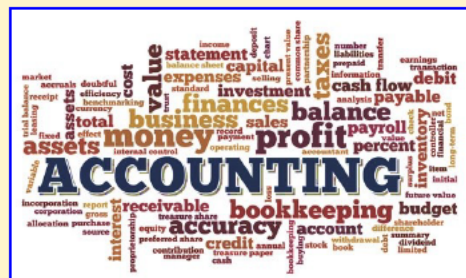
The process is slow and multi-faceted, hampered by the bureaucracy and red tape that accompanies all government projects.

Still, we continue to move forward and will one day be able to fully spread our wings and fly!

DOLLARS AND SENSE

After the recent resignation of former City Finance Director Joe Brown, the Council was greatly disappointed to find that virtually no progress had been made on getting the 2016 annual financial accounts ready to be audited. Faced with that daunting task ahead for an incoming financial director, the Council made the decision to hire a separate accounting firm to bring all our books up to date.

Although this will be costly, the Council felt that getting the books in order must be done without further delay and that it would be unfair to expect an incoming finance director to start from behind on a such a serious project while trying to become familiar with the current day-to-day operating system. We also felt that fewer candidates would apply for the job knowing that such a monumental task would have to be accomplished first. No accounting firm has yet been selected but the city is actively engaged in looking for the right company to get the job done.



LAKEFEST 2017

Photographs by Cathy Mosley

