

speakers. The audio files

## Dispatches from DeFuniak



## From Councilman Ron Kelley

D E F U N I A K

F L O R I D A

S P R I N G S

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Lakefest at Lake DeFuniak, Saturday, May 20, 8 am—3 pm
- Family Movie Night, sponsored by DeFuniak Springs Special Events Committee, Friday, May 12, 2017 at 7 pm at Lakeyard Amphitheater
- Women's Health Symposium, May 18 at DFS Community Center, 5:30 pm

## LIVING IN INTERESTING TIMES

Dear friends,

"May you live in interesting times" is an English expression said to be a translation of an old Chinese curse. Though it sounds like a blessing, the clear implication is that 'uninteresting times' of peace and tranquility are better than interesting ones, which usually include great disorder and conflict.

Since former DeFuniak Springs City Manager Tilman Mears resigned due to harassment from two elected officials, the city has certainly been experiencing interesting times.

At the May 8 City Council meeting, the Council took action on several issues that cleared the way for the city to move forward with filling the position permanently.

After reviewing what similar-sized Panhandle

cities require to hire a city manager, the Council voted to keep the current, existing qualifications for the job. The Council also voted to leave the residency requirement as it is now, meaning that a city manager must live in Walton County but is not required to live inside the city limits.

At our April 24 meeting, the Council unanimously agreed to amend the requirement that calls for a 5-0 vote to hire a city manager. Only four votes are needed under the new rule.

Last, but not least, the Council voted this week to begin the advertising process for the position.

Let me say that Interim City Manager Craig Drake has done an excellent job of keeping the city on track during these interesting

times, but he has made it clear that, at this time, he is not interesting in seeking the top job permanently. Instead, Craig is anxious to get back to managing our Public Works Department.

By the way, in the wake of former Finance Director Joe Brown's wise decision to resign, the Council has decided to temporarily hire an accounting firm to bring our overdue accounting ledgers up to date. This will allow the next finance director to start with a clean slate, instead of having to clean up someone else's mess first.

We are not quite out of the woods yet, but I can now see the clearing up ahead. Hopefully, it will not be too interesting.

— Ron Kelley  
May 9, 2017



## DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know that you can listen to audio from the City Council meetings by going to the city website? It is a free service, but many people are unaware it exists. Here is how it works:

Go to our website, [www.defuniaksprings.net](http://www.defuniaksprings.net). Beneath the city seal, you will notice several headings—Government, Departments, Residents, Visitors and Business. Place your cursor over Residents. This will open a drop-down menu of options. The third choice is City Council. Place your cursor over that. This will open another menu of options. Click on Agendas and Minutes. This will open a new page. Scroll down the page to find Meeting Dates—Agenda—Audio. These are filed by the date. Simply click on the audio button for whatever regular City Council meeting you want and turn up the volume on your computer speakers. It is complete, easy and free. If you have problems, call 892-8500, ext. 223

## THE NEED FOR LESS SPEED

A famous line from the movie *Top Gun* goes: "I feel the need—the need for speed." But what about when you feel the need, the need for *less* speed? That is the dilemma currently facing a couple of neighborhoods in the city. Changing traffic patterns and having more cars on the road can lead to unsafe traffic conditions in traditionally quiet neighborhoods, especially those that host families with small children.

Police can and do patrol city streets, but they can't be everywhere all of the time. That is where traffic calming devices, like speed humps, can play a vital role in keeping small neighborhoods safe and preventing a tragedy.

Several years ago, the Council approved a new ordinance that removed the decision of whether or not to install speed humps away from the city administration. Instead, it forced residents to get 10 other residents to approve the installation of speed humps *and* pay for the cost of installation. It has been a resounding success in stopping the installation of any and all speed humps, but it has been a disaster in terms of making these neighborhoods safer for pedestrians and children.

At the May 8 meeting of the Council, I proposed repealing that ordinance and creating a new one that places the decision of whether or not to install a speed hump back under the authority of the city administration. The city manager would consult with the public works director and conduct a brief traffic study that monitors speed and the amount of traffic on a given road to determine whether the traffic-calming device is needed. If so, the city manager could order it done. We would dispense with getting the approval of 10 property owners and the city would pay for the cost of installation, not private citizens. The item is slated to be on the agenda for the May 22 Council meeting.



## POLISHING THE JEWEL

The Chautauqua Hall of Brotherhood is the single most recognizable structure in DeFuniak Springs. It is the jewel of the city. But time and heavy use have taken its toll. The century-old building needs some serious repairs and remodeling. The problem seems to be in finding someone who wants to do the work. Though it is a big deal to local residents, to most contractors, it is considered a small project. When we recently put it out for bids, no one submitted a single bid.

We checked with the state, which is providing grant funds for the project, and the state agreed that we could renegotiate with the one original bidder—since the scope of work has changed. If that fails, architect Victor Bowman, of Pendleton & Bowman, said he has contractors that can do the job. He said he did not offer this initially because it could appear to be a conflict of interest since Pendleton & Bowman are the architectural designers of the project. I appreciate Mr. Bowman's integrity and honesty, but using his contractors might be the best solution, since they are already trained in working on historic preservation sites.

**"A man can fail many times, but he isn't a failure until he begins to blame somebody else."**

— John Burroughs

## HAPPY FACEBOOKING

In the Age of Social Media, Facebook has become the go-to site for everything from broadcasting the drama of dysfunctional families to airing one's political beliefs and generally sharing the personal details of events and photos from our everyday lives.

However, too much of a good thing is still too much. A baker's dozen "city" Facebook pages have spouted up, without approval or administrative oversight. This has created a

plethora of problems, especially as the pages qualify as Public Records and have to be preserved and archived.

Councilwoman Griffith has recommended numerous ways to address the various challenges that the Facebook pages and posts represent. Following a workshop meeting on Monday, staff is working on a set of policies that will allow the posts to continue, while protecting the city. Bravo, Janie!



## COUNCIL MEMBERS SWORN IN

With help from Walton County Judge David Green, who conducted the swearing-in ceremony, three men took the oath of office on Monday, April 24, at City Hall.

Councilman Henry Ennis was also returned to the Council by the people. He drew no challengers and went back in unopposed. Councilman Ennis and Councilman Graham both joined the council in 2007. “Mr. Henry” has served continuously for the last 10 years.



Wayne Graham begins his third term as councilman. He had previously been elected in 2007 for a two-year term, then re-elected in 2009 for a four-year term that ended in 2013. Outgoing Councilman Charles “Mac” Carpenter served from 2013 to 2017.

Mayor Bob Campbell was also returned for his second term. He drew no challengers.



This council is now set to move forward quickly and effectively and resume its forward momentum. Things are already looking up!