

Rain
40% chance of showers. Low in 72a. High in 80s. Southerly winds 5 to 10 mph. Data: 2-4.

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Newton refuses to pay bill for work at Green Key park

Pasco Times Bureau

NEW PORT RICHEY — Pasco County Circuit Court Clerk Miller Newton said Tuesday he will not pay a \$2,644 bill to Casson Engineering of New Port Richey until ordered to do so by a court.

Newton told the County Commission that he has been advised by his attorney that the contract for work at Green Key Park never was properly authorized. As a result, Newton said his attorney has recommended that the clerk exercise his duties as auditor to the County Commission and refuse to pay the bill.

The county has been interested in formulating a plan which will expand the current park area to include acreage now owned by the City of New Port Richey and the Pasco County School Board.

THE CITY, School Board and county each hold title to about 15 acres. The county already has developed its holdings.

"My problem is the legalities involved," Newton said. "If I pay this bill without a court order, no matter what action the board may

take now or in the future, I could be liable."

Newton said the contract for the engineering work was signed by the former county engineer John Sampson in violation of the Competitive Negotiations Act.

He said there is no quarrel over the quality of the work done by Casson — merely the method through which the work was authorized.

"Apparently Sampson thought he had the power to sign such contracts," Newton said.

THE COMPETITIVE Negotiations Act requires that the county advertise the work to be done, review the qualifications of the firms offering to do the job and then negotiate on an established priority basis with each firm.

Once a firm is rejected in the negotiation process, the county cannot return to that firm if it subsequently eliminates the other offers without re-advertising the project all over again.

"This may be fun to see who wins this one," Commission Chairman Mike Olson observed.

The refusal by Newton to pay the bill is the first such use of his auditor's powers since the new commission was formed last November.