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Newton, Dunbar spar with words

By CHARLES PATTON
Pasco Times Staff Writer

NEW PORT RICHEY — The verbal sparring between Pasco County commissioners, Pasco County Atty. Peter Dunbar and Circuit Clerk Miller Newton continued at Tuesday night's commission session.

The sparring involved a request by Newton that the board, by specific motion, approve general warrants or pay vouchers issued over several months.

Newton said the Florida auditor general's office suggested such a move during its current audit of County Commission records.

The current and previous commissions have been handling warrants merely with the signature of commissioners attending the weekly or bi-monthly sessions without specific motions to approve the documents.

"I FEEL it is merely a formality since the list (submitted for approval Tuesday night) includes only documents signed by commissioners at board meetings," Newton said.

But Dunbar recommended that the commission not give its blanket approval to the request without first double checking the clerk's list.

"I can't recommend that you take action tonight," Dunbar said. "There is a lot of money involved. There probably is no problem but it seems as though someone should do some checking."

"If we verify your representations, the action you have requested would be in order," Dunbar told Newton.

"I'm not about to give blanket approval for hundreds of thousands of dollars without checking them first," Commissioner Robert K. Rees said.

WHEN A MOTION to table the request was proposed, Newton said, "I'll withdraw the issue."

But commissioners voted unanimously to shelve the voucher list until it can be reviewed by Dunbar and County Administrator Richard Kelton.

Refusal to approve the list of old vouchers was the second shot fired in the clerk's direction Tuesday night.

Moments earlier, a motion by Commissioner Mathew Prahasky Jr. that the clerk provide verbatim transcripts of all commission meetings was unanimously approved.

Prahasky said he liked the verbatim treatment given by the clerk's office to a recent meeting transcript so well that he believes the commission should have such a record "all the time."

"Is the county prepared to hire another fulltime staffer for my office?" Newton asked. "We'll do our best but I can't guarantee we can do the job with the existing staff."

A spokesman in the clerk's office Wednesday said it has been the procedure in the past to provide commissioners with a record of relevant comments, motions and voting rather than the verbatim minutes.

Commissioner William Hamilton tried to discuss naming a successor to former building director John Cashion.

Cashion was relieved of both his building department and acting administrator duties several months ago in a "no confidence" vote of the commission. He has since filed suit against the commission claiming breach of contract and damage to his character.

Sherman Williams, Cashion's top assistant, has been acting building director since then.

HAMILTON'S efforts were thwarted when the issue

county commission

was tabled for study and recommendation by Kelton.

Commission Chairman Mike Olson pointed out that the recent adoption of the administrator's office gives Kelton full power to recommend the appointment of department heads subject to confirmation of the board.

"I don't think it is proper for us to get involved," Olson said.

Rees joined Hamilton in opposing the delaying action.

Hamilton said Wednesday he was prepared to recommend that the commission consider appointing James A. Brooks, 54, of Brooksville, as building director.

He said recommendations to him indicate that Brooks is qualified to handle the job.

Hamilton said he does not see his action as interference with Kelton's duties. He said he has discussed problems with the building department and other agencies with the administrator.

"I FEEL the building department is one of the most important in the county," Hamilton said. He added that he thinks that the department has some problems with its present setup and that "Brooks can get the job done."

Brooks is a former investigator for the Florida Building Contractors Licensing Board. He resigned from that post earlier this year, James Linnan, the agency's executive director said.

Brooks joined the state agency in 1969, became chief investigator in 1971 but took what Linnan described as a "voluntary demotion" in 1972 after "he became involved with a problem with management," Linnan said.

LINNAN said one of the problems stemmed from the fact that Brooks was working for the state at the same time that he was operating a real estate brokerage in Brooksville.

Linnan said Brooks continued as an investigator based in Brooksville until September 1974, when he was transferred to Miami, where he stayed about two weeks and returned to Brooksville without authority.

He said Brooks subsequently appealed the transfer to the state's personnel commission. The appeal was upheld and Brooks returned to Miami, where he worked for a few weeks and then resigned, Linnan said.

The commission also:
✓ Approved a \$2,800 project to improve the ventilation and circulation of air at the Pasco County detention center. The work involves relocating two existing fans and replacement of 18 others with larger, variable-speed units.

The recommendation was part of a study of jail facilities by the county's consulting engineers and architects, Stottler, Starg and Associates of Orlando. The recommended changes involving fans will provide the maximum cooling and air circulation short of installing refrigerated air conditioning.

✓ Approved a request by the Florida Division of Corrections to amend deed restrictions allowing the state agency to convert the Zephyrhills work release program site into a vocational-academic training program site.

✓ Authorized the engineering staff and other county officials to work with local interests in seeking a solution to salt-water intrusion in private wells by building retaining structures to keep salt water from flowing inland via natural channels.

✓ Agreed that new ordinances proposed by a commissioner first will be discussed in rough draft form before the legal staff spends time preparing a proposed document. The purpose is to avoid waste of time by the legal staff on matters ultimately rejected as unworkable.

✓ Rejected maintenance paving projects on Pinehill Road and in Leisure Beach subdivision proposed by Prahasky.

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