

Wednesday, June 27, 2001

Council Members Clash Over Administrator's Job

CEDAR GROVE: Melanie Sirmans holds on to her position by a 3-2 vote.

TODD TWILLEY
The News Herald

The efforts of two Cedar Grove commissioners to eliminate a second city administrator in as many weeks failed Tuesday night.

Commissioners Eddie Curti and Jerry Walsh voted to eliminate the position held by Administrative Assistant Melanie Sirmans. Commissioners Ricky McNeil, Jerry Clemons and Mayor Hildrie Peel voted against the motion in a 3-2 result.

The vote came 11 days after commissioners eliminated City Administrator James Woods' position.

"Well, you've got your lawsuit," Peel told Sirmans after Curti's motion failed, to which both Curti and Walsh responded at the same time.

Curti shouted at Peel, "You're out of order."

Meanwhile, Walsh yelled at Sirmans, "You go ahead and sue me and I'll love it."

Sirmans, who was in tears after the meeting, told The News Herald she has talked to an attorney about her problems with the city.

"I want the harassment to stop," she said. "I want Jerry Walsh to make a complaint against me if he thinks I've done anything wrong. I haven't done anything wrong. I have sought counsel against Commissioner Walsh."

Walsh, at previous council meetings, has attempted to have the governing body fire Sirmans.

Curti said he wanted Sirmans' position eliminated based on auditors' recommendations to weigh the need for the two administrative positions against their cost to the city.

The latest auditors' report for Cedar Grove recommended that all city positions be reviewed, and made no specific mention of the positions held by Sirmans or Woods.

After the meeting, Curti said that the recommendation regarding Woods and Sirmans was communicated to him by auditors in "personal notes."

"They (Woods and Sirmans) were never productive for the city

and they didn't produce one nickel," Curti said. "We are operating at \$1.17 million in debt due to lack of grants on their part."

Commissioners recently passed a balanced budget after operating at a \$1.17 million deficit for four years.

Curti's motion to eliminate the position came after a motion by Walsh to fire Sirmans without cause. Walsh's motion died for a lack of a second.

In other business, commissioners:

Voted 3-2 to form a committee to investigate material that has "come up missing" from City Hall within the past few months. Peel suggested the committee be formed because several items in City Hall had been missing for days or weeks before reappearing. Peel mentioned the city's minutes book, a utilities billing report and Walsh's lobby portrait as items that had recently vanished and reappeared.

Commissioners passed the motion to include Curti, City Clerk Ruth Fuqua and representative from the civil service board, Sue Parker, on the committee. Because Curti voted against the motion, Peel changed his appointment to McNeil without commissioners revoting on the motion.

Voted unanimously to change the time of all regular meetings, held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month to 6 p.m.

*Created by: Patricia McAdams
"Politics: Who Is In Control?"

Roosenwald Middle School, Bay District June 28, 2001