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Apalachicola Mayor Appoints Citizen Budget Committee

By David Adlerstein
Times City Editor

In a break from tradition, Apalachicola Mayor Van Johnson has secured the support of the city commission for the creation of a citizens' budget committee to "ensure an open and transparent budget process and make certain that spending levels reflect current fiscal conditions."

By unanimous consent, the commission approved the new committee and agreed to its four volunteer appointees: Jim Philyaw, of 248 U.S. 98; Rose E. McCoy, of 70 7th St.; Rita Sawyer, of 9 11th St.; and Dick Dosik, of 47 11th St.

Finance Commissioner Frank Cook will also serve on the committee, which is intended to draw citizen volunteers with "strong backgrounds in finance and/or business."

Philyaw is a retired insurance agent, while McCoy is a longtime educator, now retired, who served as principal of Chapman Elementary School.

Dosik is a trained economist,

retired from the staff of the World Bank, while Sawyer is a retired medical transcriptionist, who for the last five years has been chairman of the board of trustees of First United Methodist Church in Apalachicola.

Two of the appointees are to serve for a two-year term and two for a four-year term.

In introducing his plan for the new committee, Johnson noted that the city will experience a 10.6 percent decline in the taxable value of property for the upcoming budget year.

"This reduction is due in part to a sluggish real estate market and to legislation passed by voters aimed at reforming Florida's property tax codes," he said. "As we prepare for tough economic times ahead, we must adopt ways and means that ensure an open and transparent budget process."

Johnson said the committee's role in the budget process

will be "to help assure that the City's budget and fiscal practices are in harmony with each other and with current economic conditions."

The committee has been charged with reviewing "last year's budget to actual income and expenses in all departments departments including grants, engineers etc."

It is also to review "the limitations on revenue that have been established by the legislature and determine the net effect this will have on the City's revenues."

In terms of recommendations, the committee is asked to review the staff's recommendation for a 2008-09 budget, to make recommendations to the city commission for a budget "using the principle of 'zero based budgeting' as a guide," and to make any additional recommendations it believes "would improve the overall fiscal operation of the city."