

Siuslaw News

P.O. Box 10

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Opinion

“I never considered a difference of opinion in politics, in religion, in philosophy, as cause for withdrawing from a friend.” —Thomas Jefferson (1800)

Clarification on our coverage of the March 18 City Council Meeting

Due to several emails regarding last Monday night’s Florence City Council meeting, including discrepancies in each of the emails we received regarding the number of those “for” and “against” approving the current system of appointing FURA members, we felt it important to review the tape from that meeting, which was made available Wednesday, so that we could respond as comprehensively as possible.

Our intention as a newspaper is to reflect the clearest and most accurate representation as possible in our reporting. When that intention is called into question, we take it seriously and treat it as such. In addition, if we are incorrect, we will be the first to admit and rectify it as quickly and succinctly as possible.

For that reason, we are including this lengthy clarification in an effort to provide context to our reporting, as well as specific references that our readers can verify for themselves.

Each comment referenced below is time stamped from the video of the meeting available on the City’s website at the following link: <https://vimeo.com/325454727>.

At last Monday’s City Council meeting (March 18), a total of eight individuals spoke on the subject of council approval of City of Florence Ordinance 1, Series 2019. In addition, there were 29 written submissions, according to Mayor Joe Henry, none of which were read aloud.

What follows is a recap of who spoke during public comment (included below, with time stamps) in their own words. While some were specific in their point of view, there was also some ambiguity — whether it be due to assumptive knowledge of the current process (noted below) or through an effort to keep a neutral tone.

The comments from speakers Mark Tilton (24:00), Sally Wantz (27:50) and Pat Riley (41:30) were made in opposition to the approval of Ordinance No. 1, Series 2019. It should be noted that Pat Riley retired from the Siuslaw Public Library District’s Board of Directors in 2017 but continues to serve on the FURA Board of Directors. Mark Tilton, a current member of the Siuslaw Library Board of Directors, sent

the following email as a clarification regarding his comments:

“At no time did either one of us [Mark Tilton and Pat Riley] say that the library and other Special Districts should “appoint” representatives to the FURA Board. Unfortunately, the Siuslaw News report was a critical misrepresentation of our testimony. We asked that the language currently in the FURA bylaws and city code stating that ‘special consid-

eration shall be given’ to FURA board applicants submitted from these agencies be honored.”

It is worth noting that the wording “special consideration shall be given to” is the current policy regarding these appointments.

Looking back at our reporting, the word “recommend” would have been a more accurate representation of Mark Tilton’s intent rather than “appoint.” (i.e., ...as members of the library district, they should be able to *recommend* members from their district to the FURA Board and given special consideration.)

- Comments from Bill Prosser (31:45) and Sherry Harvey (36:05) were supportive of the adoption of the ordinance.
- Comments from Jo Beaudreau (37:40) were conciliatory in nature, taking no clear position on the ordinance itself, stressing instead for non-partisanship and “working together.”
- John Scott (39:23) stated in his comments, “We should maintain the tradition of having each taxing district select a representative and have that representative accepted by the city... and by allowing the City Council to be part of the appointment of the non-special district representatives would be a perfect way to do this.”

This is where some ambiguity comes in. The statement indicates support for the current process (“We should maintain the tradition of having each taxing district select a representative...”) but then adds “...and have that representative accepted by the city...”

The last part of his statement isn’t the current process; as it stands, each special district makes its own recom-

mendation as a representative on the FURA board and are given “special consideration,” with final approval given by the mayor, not “the city.”

For example: In an email to Mayor Henry from previous SVFR Chief Jim Langborg (Wednesday, Nov. 15, 2017) regarding John Scott’s retirement from the SVFR Board and the need to replace him on the FURA board as a representative of the SVFR

special district, Langborg wrote: “Just a quick note to pass along the SVFR Board selected Woody Woodbury to serve as the District Representative for FURA. It is our understanding the Mayor is the person who makes the final appointment for FURA appointments...”

In that context, John Scott’s statement would suggest he is aware that the Mayor has final say in appointing FURA members, and that “maintaining that tradition” would be to support the current process, not oppose it.

So, counting him as “against” is murky.

- The eighth speaker, Don Drozdenko, made it clear that he was in support of keeping the current process: (35:00) “I want to support the recommendation of the City Attorney.”

In looking back over the meeting video, we did feel the need for a correction on two things:

- 1) The term “recommend” rather than “appoint” should have been used in referencing Mark Tilton and Pat Riley’s position on the process of Special Districts representation on the FURA board.
- 2) The tally of those “against” changing the current process of FURA board appointments, and those “for” making that change to the current city charter.

In our March 20 article (“Committee Appointments Remain With Mayor After 3-2 Vote”), we stated that the tally was “six of eight speakers supporting the Mayor’s position.”

After additional review of the tape and the eight public statements made March 18, we feel a more accurate tally would have been:

Against: 3 (Riley, Wantz, Tilton)

For: 3 (Prosser, Harvey, Drozdenko)

Neutral/Unclear: 2 (Scott, Beaudreau)

Lastly, yesterday (Friday) afternoon, we received the following email from Jo Beaudreau, who wanted to clarify her position on the matter.

In the end, our objective with this clarification is to be as accurate as possible regarding the positions of those who spoke on March 18. To that end, I felt it necessary to include her email here:

“I wanted to clarify my position on the FURA matter. I am opposed to having one person be able to choose FURA members. It should be a non-partisan, full-council vote with transparency and proper representation. FURA-type agencies are ripe (too easy) for misapplications of funds and corruption. This has happened in Chicago (and other cities?) and I would hate for our town to have this happen (I was also laughed at when I made this comment on March 4).

I am still working on my public speaking ability and apologize that my thoughts were not as clear as they could have been.

Additionally, I’d like to note that during the March 4 City Council meeting, myself and Harlen Springer voiced our concerns and a letter was read by Susy Lacer at the request of Councilor Ron Preisler when there was little notice to the community about this important matter.

Furthermore, I do feel like my comments have opened me up for retaliation, both personally and professionally.

Sincerely,
Jo Beaudreau”

I hope that this in-depth clarification, along with the link to the meeting where public statements were made on March 18, will answer any questions regarding what was said, why we reported on it as we did, where we felt corrections were warranted, and most importantly give community members the opportunity to determine for themselves what was communicated and by whom.

As always, my door is open for anyone who would like to discuss their thoughts or concerns.

— Ned Hickson, editor
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