

COUNCIL *from page 1A*

Allen continued, “Therefore, I request that the mayor and city council produce a resolution that pledges to join forces with community, state and federal entities to address our climate crisis, and I further request the mayor designate a commission that includes a wide range of interested parties in order to develop concrete actions for the City of Florence to take.”

The next items on the meeting agenda were the consent items forwarded to the attention of councilors by staff. Both approving a modification to the city’s fee schedule, Resolution No. 19, Series 2019, and the acceptance of Public Works Director Mike Miller’s recommendation to ratify City Manager Erin Reynolds’ decision to accept a second proposal for masonry work at Miller Park were passed with little discussion.

Miller also recommended the council approve his request

to authorize an expenditure of \$40,574 to Ray Wells Inc. to pave the entrance driveway to the Water Treatment Plant and the parking lot for the Munsel Greenway Park.

One consent item that did draw some attention was a request from the city to approve a long-term lease of the Pacific View Business Park, located on property owned by the Florence Municipal Airport, to Larry and Crystal Farnsworth.

With approval, the lease would potentially be in effect for 60 years.

Councilor Ron Preisler was the only dissenting vote on the approval. He based his concern on the fact the rental amount to be received for the first five years of the lease agreement was less than \$200 a month.

Since at least the beginning of the year, the debate over what role the city should play in supporting the purchase and placement of art around Florence has been a point of

contention during Florence City Council meetings. The topic was again brought up Monday for discussion by Henry, who made clear his intentions to sever official ties between the city and the PAC.

Greene, an ex-officio member of the PAC, has been criticized by Henry for his performance in spearheading efforts to bring diverse art that has received mixed responses from the public.

As a result, funding through Florence Urban Renewal Agency (FURA) for the PAC has been curtailed at the urging of Henry, and the future of projects envisioned and planned by the committee are now on hold.

The city’s workplan for the next two years and the priorities given to city staff do not include providing support or a grant writer to the PAC. This lack of support for the PAC was at the heart of comments made by Henry, who made his position clear.

“It is my personal belief

that the Public Art Committee and the city council have reached a point where we cannot continue under the current conditions. There are perceived injustices in setting priorities, though they were agreed upon by the city council during our goal sessions in early 2019,” Henry said. “That ship has sailed, and we are going to have to live with that for a time. There is a substantial amount of negative media and name calling and unsubstantiated allegations that are hurting the image of our city. There is a negativity and a lack of support for the city council in public art meetings and comments made by members of the committee and ex-officiaries that are inappropriate and show a lack of respect for the City of Florence.”

There are at least three separate city entities that have become entangled in the crux of confusion that is public art in Florence.

The PAC, FURA and city council have all discussed the relationship between the city and the PAC, and tensions at those meetings have been evident.

There is a divergence in thought on the council as to whether there should even be a PAC.

This was at the heart of the discussion initiated on Monday by Henry, which later led to Greene’s angry exit from the council meeting.

The debates in the PAC and city council have frequently centered around the differing views of Henry and Greene, who seem unable to put aside personal differences in order to move forward on city business. Greene believes the development of an extensive and varied art collection in Florence will reap enormous benefits for the community; Henry made it clear he disagrees strongly with that opinion.

“I just don’t buy it,” Henry said when responding to Greene on the importance of art as a significant economic driver in the future. “I’ve listened to you and I’ve listened to enough public art presentations — and at the end of the day I just don’t buy that it has the kind of impact on our community that you describe. In my heart I do not buy that.”

The tipping point for Henry seemed to be the approval by the PAC to place two murals on the east and south sides of the Lincoln Public Utilities District building on the corner of Highway 126 and Quince Street.

The public uproar that surrounded the content and placement of the mural led to a continued discussion among community members about all aspects of the process surrounding public art in Florence.

During the July 15 meeting, Lucio was openly irritated with Greene and directly confronted him with her opinions of his professionalism and his temperament.

“I publicly and privately have been bashed by Joshua Greene. He is quite frankly impossible to work with. He continues to talk negative about the city council, myself and the mayor and call us by name. I think they (PAC)

should become their own 501(c)3,” Lucio said, echoing a suggestion made earlier by Henry. “I don’t support what they are doing, and I repeatedly get harassed at my business. People come in and ask how could I have done this, and it’s what the PAC has done. So, I don’t support the PAC.”

Greene seemed taken aback by the attacks directed at him and took a second to compose himself before responding.

“I feel on the spot here and I don’t want to be defensive. But obviously now I have to defend so many things,” he said. “I don’t remember saying anything negative about (Councilor) Woody Woodbury or Geraldine. I have issues with Joe, which has been well established and is well known. And I’ve said this at public art meetings, in the paper and privately. But that is a separate ongoing dilemma that exists that we need to settle and I’m still working that out.”

Henry then returned to his desire to change the way that the PAC interacted with the city council and city staff.

“We can continue as we are but that is not healthy for our community, it’s not healthy for the council and it’s not healthy for the staff. And I will do whatever I can to change the situation,” Henry stated. “We can disband the PAC and allow them to go do their own thing, wherever that might be, as a 501(c)3 or possibly with FRAA (Florence Regional Arts Alliance). We could suspend the PAC for 90 days until we can reach some agreement on what direction they are going to take ... but I believe everybody has had enough of what’s going on now.”

Woodbury was less strident in his desire to see the PAC disbanded and supported a 90-day cooling off period to allow the PAC to reimagine how the group might work within the framework that currently exists.

“I believe it is time to separate the PAC from the city. Too much time is spent by our staff, wasted hours that are not in our priorities scheduled for the next two years,” he said. “I appreciate the work they do but I think it’s time for them to stand on their own two feet.”

Discussion over a three-month reprieve before disbanding the PAC was initially opposed by Henry, without accompanying changes in PAC leadership — specifically the removal of Greene as chair of the committee — continued as Preisler interjected a different appraisal of the public art scenario.

“I believe the PAC did what they were supposed to do, and they did it very well. Most of the problems started when we decided to defund them from the FURA group and to change their management from FURA to the city,” Preisler said. “That created most of the divisions we are experiencing right now.”

He then made a motion to allow the PAC 90 days to come up with a plan that was acceptable to the council regarding some type of official relationship with the city.

This motion was one of the few points in the evening

where all of the councilors agreed on a path forward.

Greene said, “I would welcome the idea of taking a 90-day pause and letting public art put together a presentation that then is shared at a work session where a new direction is given as to how public art will function. I think that would be a very smart thing to do and it would allow a chance for everyone to see everything and to hear everything ... so that you can all really have the opportunity to go to the community and let them know what the new path forward will be.”

The motion was then passed unanimously, seemingly ending the dramatic discussion preceding it. However, a terse interchange between Henry and Greene about social media posts and the accusations Henry felt were made towards Lucio and Greene once again caused tensions to rise within the council chamber.

It was after this argument that Greene said he had enough of the tone of Henry’s comments and quickly rose and left while complaining about Henry.

The remainder of the meeting continued without incident, quickly concluding with comments by the councilors and the city manager.

Reynolds made a point of mentioning in her closing comments that she had taken the unusual step of asking the city attorney to investigate the validity of comments made by area resident Lea Patton on the opinion page of the July 3 issue of the Siuslaw News.

Reynolds said the comments made by Patton concerned the conduct of councilors at the June 26 FURA meeting.

In her guest viewpoint, Patton had leveled accusations of ethical wrongdoing against Henry.

Reynolds reported the accusations did not rise to the level of legal concern due to the vague and unsubstantiated nature of the accusations.

The disagreeable nature of the July 15 Florence City Council meeting was later addressed by Reynolds in an email response to the Siuslaw News.

“City staff are aware of the conflicts that exist and were observed at Monday night’s meeting at the city council level,” she wrote. “While the city supports and encourages a constructive and productive working environment for all its staff and volunteers, the city also recognizes that sometimes conflicts can occur. As staff, we continue to look forward and perform the work of the city. We are working on items outlined in the city’s work plan and towards our city goals and priorities. The city staff continues to operate to perform our day to day functions and is working to make our community a great place to live, work and play.”

The next Florence City Council meeting is scheduled for Monday, Aug. 5, at Florence City Hall. All city council meetings and meeting materials are available online at ci.florence.or.us.



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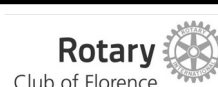
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