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Key Colony Beach seeks more sewer oversight

JILL ZIMA BORSKI Free Press Contributed
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KEY COLONY BEACH — The Key Colony Beach City Commission has given the mayor authority to hire a sewer plant operator in response to citizen and state concerns about spills and other issues.

“We have had too many issues at the plant to not do something. [We need to] protect the city from possible fines, retribution, whatever you want to call it,” Mayor Freddie Foster said during a May 21 meeting. He said the city received “bad letters from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and citizens.”

“At least we have our pump-outs controlled and we have a contract that is working well,” he said. “But I think we need to ... hire an individual, one, to be trained, two, for oversight, and three, to protect the city’s interests for the safe operation of the sewer plant. This has been something I’ve been

thinking about for a while, and at this point, I think the city needs to put themselves in a position where we're protecting ourselves and our interests."

Commissioner Tom Harding agreed.

"We've had a number of spills, which in my history with the utility board and commission, I've not seen it anywhere near this bad," Harding said. "And that's not only affecting us potentially by health, it is affecting us financially and to the point that you know we haven't seen the fine from the DEP, but we'll see those fines. I think we need to take some ownership and oversight that we can directly control. So, I support the mayor's suggestion."

Harding made a motion to allow Foster to advertise for and hire an operator who is skilled for the city's plant configuration.

"We'll continue to monitor that after the person has started and what our relationship is with the current contractor," he said.

Foster said, "There is the individual [who is] already a licensed operator. So, [he] will be able to operate, and... [he] also has to be qualified in the 'Managed Direction and Response' system because our system is unique.

There are people out there — I’ve spoken to them — that have the background in our system.”

Commissioner Doug Colonell sought clarification.

“So, this would be in addition to [city contractor] U.S. Water?” he asked of the proposed hire.

Foster answered yes. “So, for various reasons, I kind of want to keep the conversation to protection of the city for the benefit of us keeping] the system running,” Foster added. “And we’ll address the issues as we go.

Foster reminded the public that the sewer system is an enterprise endeavor that pays for itself through fees and grants.

“And so I’m not concerned about the cost of it as much as I’m concerned about if we lose that plant, what is going to be the cost to us?” Foster said.

The motion unanimously passed to hire a plant operator.

The city commission is set to meet next on June 18.

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