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FEATURED

KCB Commission at crossroads in next meeting

By RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen
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The Key Colony Beach City Commission may reach a reckoning point this week as members attempt to deal with several polarizing yet critical agenda items slated for its Thursday, July 20, meeting at the Key Colony Inn.

KCB has undergone a high degree of public scrutiny regarding its handling of the City Hall bids, its building department surplus funds, a pending FEMA investigation into potential fraud and the overall shroud of secrecy that's denied residents clear city direction.

A FEMA investigation into allegations that former City Administrator Chris Moonis and former Mayor John Deneale ordered city staff to alter the condition of the current City Hall floor after Hurricane Irma is underway. Pursuant to that, the commission has an agenda item up for approval to decide whether to contract an independent investigative attorney to research the fraud allegations and to determine the statute of limitations and costs of such an investigation. This subject was raised at the June commission meeting by Vice-Mayor Beth Ramsay-Vickery.

Also scheduled is the disclosure of the detailed City Hall bid packets. Dozens of KCB residents have pressured the city to see the two bids received by the June 5 deadline.

Relative to this, an approval of recommendations by the “Bid Evaluation Committee for the City Hall Project” is on the agenda. It’s been speculated the city will be placing a great deal of stock in this two-member team, comprised of Terrence Justice, who served as Key West’s chief building officer for less than two years before suddenly retiring in 2021, and LIVS Associates representative Lazaro Cabezon. LIVS Associates is the Coral Gables-based, city-contracted architect that developed the rebuild plans.

The city had each assess and score the bids and is expected to rely heavily on their scoring, even though their recommendations have no effect on the city’s ability to afford and finance a complete rebuild of City Hall at a projected minimum expense of more than \$10 million. At the June 28 KCB Evaluation Committee meeting, Hand on Builders, LLC, the low bidder, received a combined score of 187 out of a possible 200 from the two-member team, while Persons Services Corporation, the only other bidder, scored 181.

Finally, the commission will introduce its Fiscal Year 2023-2024 budget plans. One aspect of the budget discussion involves the city’s Building Department surplus issue.

KCB’s handling of its Building Department surplus over multiple fiscal years could be a violation of Florida law, since a municipality’s Building Department cannot show a net profit in any given fiscal year. Accordingly, the City of Marathon conducted a plan to “balance” its building department budget by adjusting BPAS (Building Permit Allocation System) fees since the city had a Building Department budget surplus at the end of 2022.

However, while no KCB city official has publicly commented about any surplus situations, Commissioner Tom Harding, who is also KCB’s Secretary/Treasurer in charge of the city budget, said by phone last month that excess Building Department revenue had been traditionally rolled over to the following year to pay other city expenses and to limit tax increases on residents. Florida law doesn’t

allow such transfers.

Commissioner Freddie Foster, responding to mounting resident pressure, is expected to request a vote to conduct an independent audit of the city building funds at the meeting.

Thursday's meeting begins at 9:30 a.m. at the Key Colony Inn, 700 West Ocean Drive. For information, call 305-28-1212, Ext.2.