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KCB City Commission considers fraud investigation

By RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen
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The Key Colony Beach City Commission met recently and reviewed a rather general agenda overall, but Vice Mayor Beth Ramsay-Vickery proposed that allegations of fraud be entertained against the former mayor and city administrator regarding their actions after Hurricane Irma damaged the old City Hall.

Ramsay-Vickery suggested to those in attendance and her fellow commissioners at the June 15 that the city “enlist an independent attorney” to investigate news stories in the Keys Citizen that after Hurricane Irma former City Administrator Chris Moonis and former Mayor John Deneale had ordered city staff to further alter the condition of the City Hall floor so the FEMA 50% damage threshold for repair or rebuilding a structure was exceeded.



Ramsay-Vickery

Kathryn McCullough was the KCB city clerk during Irma and said that Moonis handled the FEMA reimbursement process. Later, McCullough served as a city commissioner and Ramsay-Vickery questioned after the meeting why McCullough allowed this to go

unchecked during that tenure.

At the heart of the allegation is that a center section of the City Hall floor, which had been filled in pre-Irma, was chipped out intentionally post-Irma to make the storm damage appear more serious during inspections. “The floor was sinking and had been for a while”, said McCullough. “Staff called it ‘the fault line’. She maintains, “Moonis had Public Works remove temporary concrete to make it look like the floor sank after Irma.” This way, the 50% threshold would be met.



Ramsay-Vickery said, “allegations were published in the paper, and we need to find out what may or may not have occurred” and that the “city stand tall amid these serious allegations we cannot ignore.” However, the rest of the commission was lukewarm to her proposal.

Commissioner Freddie Foster felt the statute of limitations had passed and was opposed to spending \$15,000 on the attorney support. Commissioner Tom Harding asked City Attorney Dirk Smits – who can’t represent the city in this instance because he’s part of city staff – how this would affect their FEMA reimbursement. Smits said the city “didn’t receive a dollar from FEMA,” but that flood insurance reimbursements were received. No immediate next steps were determined by the close of the session.

There were several general subjects addressed before commissioner comments closed out the session. City Administrator Dave Turner proposed contracting with Iguana Control for another year after he reported 975 iguanas were “dispatched humanely and recycled for fish food” during the first-year contract. There were also mentions of potential algae blooms and sargassum accumulations, as well as a recap of the KCB-Marathon Kids Fishing Derby and a potential Leadership Monroe

Alumni event at the Key Colony Inn in July.

But when it was Commissioner Foster's time for comments, he directly questioned Smits about remarks fellow commissioner Harding had made recently regarding surplus building department funds. Smits said there are two ways to treat those surpluses; the city could spend all the surplus funds within the building department or do as Marathon did, by reducing permit fees and refunding portions of those fees to residents to balance the account. He added that, "building department funds must stay in its own lane."

Turner was then asked by Mayor Trefrey how the city had handled the surplus in years past. He responded that, "Key Colony Beach became compliant in 2022, when I arrived. The previous administration never kept the annual surpluses separated, at least from 2018-2021."

Somewhat surprisingly, the City Hall bid process, which concluded on June 5 and has been a lightning rod subject among residents and city staff for months, was never discussed. However, Foster did address Turner on conducting the bid openings along the side of the road that day, calling it "unacceptable." Foster also asked how bid openings would be handled in the future.

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