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FEATURED

KCB installs new commissioner

By RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen
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Tom Di Fransico is sworn in as Key Colony Beach city commissioner by City Clerk Silvia Gransee.

Photo by Richard Tamborrino

Residents came out to attend the Key Colony Beach City Commission meeting on Thursday, Nov. 16, to witness the potential selection of a new commission member

to fill the seat previously occupied by Patti Trefry, who resigned last month, hoping it might provide a glimpse into the city's direction.

But while the introduction of the seven applicants followed form, the selection process did not, and there were multiple indications this commission still has performance and process challenges.

The candidates were Lynn Conkling Benton, Doug Colonell, John Dalton, Tom Di Fransico, Mario Di Gennaro, Joe Schmidt and Fred Swanson.



Ultimately, Di Fransico was unanimously chosen to fill the open seat, and the quick selection surprised some in attendance. Di Fransico, a naval veteran and retired engineer who explained the spelling of his last name as an Ellis Island “typo” when his family immigrated to the United States, opened the candidate introductions, stressing that this commission’s “lack of communication has led to a lack of resident trust,” while referencing his extensive KCB committee and community involvements.

One candidate, Schmidt, announced during his introduction he was withdrawing from the commission spot because he’s been asked to chair a committee to recall Mayor pro tem Beth Ramsay Vickery and commissioner Tom Harding from office. However, after all seven candidates had their five minutes in front of the commission, it was the sudden segue to Di Fransico’s appointment that surprised many.

Ramsay Vickery, within moments of those final introductions, launched into an impassioned endorsement of “the one person” who was “actively engaged in our community,” was a community voluntee, and had the community and committee experience. She urged consensus and stated that “to spend approximately \$10,000

for a special election” – which would have been the city’s direction if a candidate impasse occurred – “was fiscally irresponsible.”

Ramsay Vickery added that she “had no idea what Tom’s position is on City Hall because that’s not what we’re voting on.” However, she then immediately initiated a roll call vote, without giving the remaining commissioners an opportunity to make their own candidate endorsement. After Ramsay Vickery’s endorsement, the commission launched into a unanimous vote.

Many expected a virtual tug-of-war over the selection because of deep divides among the commissioners. But when Commissioner Joey Raspe, who has worked closely with Di Fransico, voted in favor, Ramsay Vickery and commissioners Harding and Freddie Foster followed suit. Di Fransico was sworn in immediately and joined the commissioners for the remainder of the session.

Afterward, Foster, who was expected, along with Raspe, to buck Ramsay Vickery and Harding, admitted Di Fransico was clearly the best choice. After a short recess, several residents in attendance seemed pleased with the choice, as Di Fransico is believed to be formulating his own opinion on the polarizing City Hall rebuild and is interested in exploring all options.

The city’s architect for the rebuild project, LIVs president Tony Rosabal, kicked off the session and prefaced his presentation by saying his firm’s fees have all been paid and they have no financial interest in how the city proceeds. He outlined the three primary options; a complete rebuild, a partial rebuild of the south end of the current structure for about \$2 million and a complete renovation of the 10,200-square-foot building for about \$5 million. He cautioned the last option would still be too small for city staff, the police force and the post office and would require some portable units.

There are conflicting reports about whether Hands on Builders is still in the mix

for a rebuild. The company and the city had 120 days to consummate the bid, which was to remain subject to acceptance for 120 days after the bid opening. That window closed Oct. 3.

But at the very end of the three-hour session, the commission demonstrated a clear need for greater consensus. Raspe said that many residents had asked if Marble Hall in the old city hall building could be used for more meetings, while a final determination on City Hall hangs in the balance. “Why can’t we use it now,” Raspe said and gave an example of how fishing and boating had to go off-site for large meetings and that “there is no place for social groups to go in this city.” Marble Hall was reopened for limited groups in July last year.

When Raspe was finished, Ramsay Vickery said this was not a subject that should be discussed at this meeting, and referred Raspe to City Attorney Dirk Smits, likely because of the pending referendum litigation. When Foster attempted to comment, she shut him down, causing Foster to call “point of order” on Ramsay Vickery for not allowing him to speak. She relented and Foster asked Smit’s attorney partner Roget if the litigation and the use of Marble Hall were distinct and unrelated, which didn’t elicit a clear response.

In other city business, there was brief discussion about the KCB canal water quality, acknowledging neighboring Marathon’s ongoing efforts to settle the Clean Water Act lawsuit brought by FOLKs.

Also, Di Fransico asked City Administrator Dave Turner to provide commissioners two months’ notice in advance of expiring city contracts, like the legal services agreement KCB had before them with the firm of Vernis & Bowling to begin Dec.1.

rtamborrino123@gmail.com

rtamborrino123@gmail.com

