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## State deals KCB funding blow

By RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen

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All the city unrest in Key Colony Beach for months regarding whether to rebuild or refurbish its City Hall may be moot now that the state has vetoed a \$1 million funding request from the city.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed more than \$500 million from a legislatively approved budget on June 15, which included KCB's request.

It's becoming increasingly clear that KCB will come up significantly short in the funding needed to rebuild City Hall.

City Administrator Dave Turner unveiled the only two bids received by the city-imposed June 5 deadline: one by general contractor Hands on Builders (HOB) out of Miami for \$8.375 million and the other by J.C. Pierson Construction out of Alabama for \$12.487 million.

Commissioner Tom Harding said at a recent city commission meeting that if an accepted bid for the rebuild turned out to be more than \$8 million, a complete rebuild would likely be out of reach.

But while one of the bids is close to that \$8 million threshold, it's unknown whether either comprehensive bid is fully inclusive. One local contractor strongly believes landscaping, for one, is not included, and one city commissioner believes the parking lot may also be excluded.

If that's the case, the city will likely need \$10 million or more to completely demo and rebuild City Hall. The two received bids are not available for public viewing, and City Commissioner Freddie Foster believes the bid details reveal what's excluded. Even then, Foster feels the city will need to borrow \$4 million or more for a rebuild, while Harding believes "the city is still in good shape," only needing to borrow about \$3.2 million.

Turner was banking on the \$1 million from the state as part of accumulated funding the city earmarked for the rebuild. He said in a statement, "I'd like to thank Sen. Ana Marie Rodriguez and Rep. Jim Mooney for all the help lobbying for Key Colony Beach in Tallahassee.

The governor made cuts to infrastructure projects across the state, and we accept his decision."

One curious aspect on the State Legislature Veto List was that the \$1 million request from KCB was titled "Key Colony Beach City Hall Repair and Hardening (HF 0220) (SF 2933)." This differs from the DEP grant request, which stipulated a rebuild.

According to Foster, KCB has approximately \$2.2 million in reserves set aside for a City Hall rebuild. The rest of the planned funding is complicated.

KCB received a Public Safety Facility Hardening grant from the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for a new building in February 2022 for \$2.3 million. That grant requires at least a 66% match on the part of the city, meaning KCB is responsible for providing more than \$4.4 million through cash or third party in kind toward the project.

The new City Hall construction financing plan, posted on the city's website, reveals that with the \$2.2 million in reserves, \$400,000 each in 2023 and 2024 itemized as infrastructure cash funding, the DEP grant of \$2.3 million and \$750,000 in general cash, the city would have about \$6 million. But most importantly, the DEP grant is predicated on a complete rebuild and would be lost if the city elects to repair City Hall.

Mooney, who lobbied on behalf of the city, said by phone this request "is completely dead" and "cannot be resurrected this year." He lamented that the state took a pencil to a lot of municipality items, specifically upgrades to municipal facilities. And while he added that "you don't get if you don't ask," he admitted that every funding request faces "one last hurdle, which is the governor's pen." He also said he's gotten no explanation for why this or any other request in his district was cut.

Key Colony Beach's City Hall has not been home to city staff for almost six years since Hurricane Irma damaged the structure. Turner has maintained the building is below flood level and needs to be demolished. But others, including former KCB Building Official Ed Borysiewicz, who served the city for more than 30 years until 2019, firmly believe the building can be salvaged, and at a third or less of the expense of a brand-new hall.

Without any additional funding avenues to pursue, Key Colony Beach may be forced to acquiesce to resident pressure and instead refurbish the current City Hall. If the city doesn't go that route, the only other option may be to delay the situation even further, until 2024.

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