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Council delays Bass Pro contract vote

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FLORENCE -- Councilman Scott Carrier delayed the vote for three weeks on an exclusive contract with a developer to research the feasibility of a Bass Pro Shops in Veterans Park.

Carrier gave little explanation during the council meeting for voting against immediate consideration of a contract with Anniston-based Southeast Capital Investments, except to say the deal caused a lot of concern.

The agreement would keep the city from considering any proposals other than Bass Pro as an attraction in Veterans Park for six months.

The city, the Retirement Systems of Alabama and the Shoals Public Park Authority must all agree on an attraction for Veterans Park.

Mayor Bobby Irons said the company has already done some research on a Bass Pro-anchored development and needed some assurances before investing more time and money in the project.

Irons said the city would examine the company's proposal when it's completed to decide if it wants to continue with a Bass Pro development.

The contract does not require any payment by the city, nor does it require the city to follow through with any proposal brought to it by the company.

Carrier said after the meeting that he wanted to make sure the public knew what was going on with the contract.

"It doesn't make sense. Why exclude other considerations?" Carrier asked. "You have a company that is the exclusive broker, even while they are waiting to be the developer on the project."

Several residents spoke to the council about the proposed contract, including Eugene Sak with ProSouth Commercial Realty in Florence.

Sak said he supported a Bass Pro Shops in Florence, but had some concerns with the Southeast Capital Investments contract.

"I want to make sure they are representing the city and are not a quasi-representative," he said.

Irons has said that Southeast Capital Investments will probably be a minor developer on the project.

Florence resident Matt Osborne spoke in opposition of Bass Pro.

"There is general agreement that this is not a good idea," Osborne said. "If you disagree, I dare you to hold a popular referendum."

Ronnie Ayers, of Killen, said there were too many Bass Pro Shops nearby for one in Florence to be an attraction, citing stores in Memphis, Nashville and one soon to be in Birmingham.

"This is not a good idea for our community to take \$20 million and put on this," Ayers said.

Incentives for Bass Pro when it was first discussed were around \$20 million.



Carrier

Irons has said that any incentive will likely have to be passive and not cash, such as tax abatements.

In other business, Carrier also blocked a vote Tuesday on the sale of city property on North Seminary Street to Marcus Thompson for \$25,000 with the city proving up to \$25,000 in work.

The council unanimously passed a sales tax holiday to coincide with a state sales tax holiday on the first weekend in August.

The council approved the following items unanimously:

- a contract with Hendon Engineering Associates to perform preliminary evaluation of problems and establish alternatives at Cypress Creek low-head dam for \$22,000.
- a \$3,800 contract with TTL for spill prevention and countermeasures plan for the electricity department.
- a grant application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Urban & Community Forestry Financial Assistance Program for funds to initiate a tree inventory and update city's urban forest management plans.
- the submission of actions taken by the water/wastewater department to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management regarding water pollution prevention program and correction program of sanitary sewer overflows.
- an application to the Federal Emergency Management Agency for a Hazard Mitigation Grant to provide an outdoor warning siren at McFarland Park and the sports complex. The federal grant will be \$22,612 with the city matching \$7,572.
- ordinances allowing for the sale and use of fireworks in the city limits during certain times of the year.
- the expenditure of \$187,004 to the Shoals Economic Development Authority for labor force training and capital equipment reimbursement as part of an incentive package for North American Lighting.
- the settlement of a lawsuit filed by a city employee for \$175,000.
- an alcohol beverage application for Fiesta Mexicana No. 4, 1516 Florence Blvd.
- an alcohol beverage application for Pizza Hut No. 2935, 1608 Florence Blvd.

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