

Kilgore council picks firm to search for city manager

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Longview News-Journal

Posted: Wednesday, May 25, 2011 4:00 am

KILGORE - City council members selected a Metroplex search firm Tuesday to guide Kilgore toward its next city manager.

Ron Holifield, one of three search firm leaders interviewed during a roughly one-hour session, told council members he viewed pairings between potential chief administrators and city clients like a marriage.

"We see it very much as a discovery process," said Holifield, who will be the sole point man from Strategic Government Resources.

Holifield's firm will charge Kilgore a base of \$19,500 to compile candidates for about 45 days. He said he will then pare them, and their families, by the city's character, analyzing leadership styles of each as the list narrows through interviews and questionnaires to final interviews.

Kilgore is seeking a replacement for Jeffrey Howell, who resigned in April citing philosophical differences with the council over management style. Former Marshall City Manager Tony Williams is serving as interim.

Holifield, of Keller, told the council he will interview each of them and key city staff. He also promised exhaustive background checks include any blogs, Facebook and You Tube activity the candidates might have.

"And you'd be surprised what kind of stuff turns up," he said.

Holifield finally said he tells applicants whom to give as references, based on their work resumes.

Holifield's \$19,500 cost can rise another \$4,500 for unexpected expenses but is capped at \$24,000, his proposal reads.

His selection capped a night that began with some 75 residents of neighborhoods along Stone Road east of town largely upset at potential annexation.

"You chose to live inside the city limits," Howard Waldrop told council members. "We chose to live outside the city limits, and we want to keep it that way."

Waldrop was one of nine speakers in the second public hearing on taking in 301 acres to the city. The proposed annexation area does not include the Greenwood Ranch subdivision, but many among the crowd attended on the mistaken belief it is.

Those residents said they suspect they will be annexed eventually.

Speakers cited a large retiree population in the proposed area, people on fixed incomes who don't need to add city property taxes to their costs of living. Many said available water, sheriff's office and fire services are adequate without the city's promise of utilities and police protection.

Mayor Ronnie Spradlin and others cited Longview's imposing extraterritorial jurisdiction, or ETJ, as a reason to annex.

"Kilgore and Longview are moving toward each other," the mayor said. "At some point in time, everyone in that area will be in Kilgore or Longview's ETJ."

Spradlin also has said Kilgore is running out of places to look for housing developments that are not in a flood plain or tied up in mineral drilling.

Councilman Harvey McClendon told the audience the two cities are on a path to take them in.

"Reality is what it is," McClendon. "Our desire is to protect that area. It's going to grow."

Finally Tuesday, the council OK'd the second phase of the city's Downtown Improvement Project.

The work, under the Main Street Program, will add Commerce Street between North and Main Streets to downtown refurbishing to restore the World Richest Acre to its heyday appearance.

Project Manager Jeremy Buechter said the \$1 million project has time to be finished by the 2011 holiday celebrations.

"North Street will be closing entirely for a period of time," he added.

Williams, who also served as interim city manager six years ago, noted the project is "within the money that we originally talked about."