

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES

EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

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*Section 11*

*Thomas E. Thomas*

*Winter Haven City Manager  
Candidate Report*

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*Cover Letter and Resume*

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**Thomas Thomas  
2919 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Court  
Rock Island, Illinois 61201  
(309) 644-2445  
thomasedwinthomas@yahoo.com**

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November 8, 2016

Colin Baenziger & Associates  
2055 South Atlantic Avenue, Suite 504  
Daytona Beach Shores, FL 32118

Dear Mr. Baenziger,

Enclosed is my resume for the City of Winter Haven, Florida's City Manager position advertised on the ICMA Website. I welcome the opportunity to further discuss my qualifications and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "T".

Thomas Thomas

**Thomas Thomas  
2919 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Court  
Rock Island, Illinois 61201  
(309) 644-2445  
thomasedwinthomas@yahoo.com**

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**Career Objective**

A highly professional position in City or County government as the City Manager/County Manager/Chief Administrative Officer/Deputy City Manager responsible for all governmental operations.

**Experience**

**City of Rock Island, Illinois (Population 40,000, Daytime Population 60,000 )**

**City Manager**

**October 11 – September 16**

- ❖ City of Rock Island employ's 468+ FTE. The General Fund is budgeted at \$38M, Enterprise Fund is budgeted at \$49M and Internal Service Funds at \$13M.
- ❖ Supervise department directors regarding short and long term goals and objectives. Departments included: Police, Fire, Public Works, Economic & Community Development, Human Resources, Finance, Parks & Recreation, Information Technology, Martin Luther King Jr. Center, Library, and City Clerk.
- Invested \$15M in purchasing a 22.94 acres site at the Watchtower Plaza for retail development. In preparing for this retail growth, we assisted 12 businesses in relocating within the City. By keeping those businesses we retained approximately 180 full-time positions and are projected that another 20 to 30 positions will be created among the businesses in the next 12 months. Hill & Valley, the largest employer we retained (140 jobs and projected growth of 20 new positions), was about to move its operation out of state. A New Market Tax Credit deal was structured to assist them in renovating a new facility to expand their operations and remain in the City. The site is now cleared and build ready for retail.
- Negotiated sell of City owned land to site a 10 acres commercial and retail development. Developer has invested \$5M to date on an engineering & insurance company and satellite community college. Additional \$5M to be invested in the remaining four lots when client is signed.
- Negotiated sell of City owned land and incentives to site 45,000 square foot Medical Marijuana Cultivation Facility valued at \$10M which created 100 jobs. One of the first in Illinois.
- The Quad Cities Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees (QCAIR) is a public/private organization that arose from a series of public dialogues in Rock Island, Illinois in 2011. The mission is to build community among refugees, immigrants and citizens of the Quad Cities. The identified action items: Education, Health, Housing Advocacy, Employment and Positive Interaction with Police.
- Revitalized the Human Rights Commission that had been dormant for years. The mission to review complaints regarding discriminatory actions and to mediate disputes that arise from those complaints.
- Provided oversight to developing/implementing the 20-year Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The Comprehensive Plan includes: 1) an inventory of existing conditions; 2) an assessment of current and future needs; 3) maps depicting current and future conditions; and 4) a community vision.
- Negotiated five year labor agreements with FOP, FOP Command, IAFF, AFSCME A, AFSCME B and UAW. First time these groups have ever agreed on a five year labor agreement.
- Implemented Zero Based Budget, which required budget requested be justified in complete detail by each department for an average savings of \$1M a year. There has been no property tax increase in five years.
- Completed a 65,000 square foot Police Facility valued at \$22M within budget to provide a central location for all police operations for the first time.

**City of Macon, Georgia (Population 97,000, Daytime Population 200,000)**

**Chief Administrative Officer**

**November 08 – September 11**

- ❖ City of Macon employ's 1,280+FTE. The General Fund is budgeted at \$72M, Enterprise Fund is budgeted

## Section 11

- at \$14M, and Internal Service/Special Revenue/Governmental Funds is budgeted at \$21M.
- ❖ Supervise department directors regarding short and long term goals and objectives. Departments included: Police, Fire, Emergency Management Agency, Public Works, Economic & Community Development, Human Resources, Finance, Central Services, Engineering, Airport, MIS, and Parks & Recreation.
- Implemented Public/Private Merger: Noble's Marriott Macon City Center Hotel and the City's Coliseum, Convention Center and Auditorium. Noble invested \$37M and the City of Macon invested \$10M. Negotiated transition of 43 City employees to Noble employees outlining salaries, benefits and retirements.
- Implemented Main Street Program thru the GA Department of Community Affairs. A local Main Street program represents and involves a public/private coalition of organizations, agencies, businesses, and individuals from throughout the community.
- Continued partnership with Mercer University implementing the College Hill Corridor Master Plan to revitalize surrounding neighborhoods toward eventually reconnecting to the downtown area.
- Partnered with Macon Water Authority and Bibb County to develop a 20 year Stormwater System Plan. Continuing partnership towards implementing a Stormwater Utility to fund repairs.
- Partnered with Bibb County and Bibb County School System to implement Tax Allocation District (TAD) regarding the redevelop of downtown blighted areas. Main focus to make Second Street the center of downtown, connecting it with Little Richard Boulevard. Referred to as a TIF in other States.
- Implemented web-based system modeled after Baltimore CITISTAT that records and tracks work orders both internally and externally. Will also be used as management tool to improve service delivery.
- Right-sized organization by 100+ FTE, which included prioritizing services and restructuring departments for a savings of \$3M. Future vacancies are all assessed before being filled.
- Redesigned employee health insurance plan, which included premium/contribution and eligibility changes for a savings of \$5M. The City's Governmental Accounting Standards Board's (GASB) Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) accrued liability was reduced from \$160M to \$80M.
- Implemented Zero Based Budget, which required budget requested be justified in complete detail by each department for a savings of \$3.8M.
- Developed Reserved Policy to maintain an average fund balance in the General Fund greater than three months expenses. Funds can only be used in specified emergencies.

### County of Dougherty, Georgia (Population 96,000, Daytime Population 160,000)

Assistant County Administrator

January 03 – October 08

- ❖ Dougherty County employ's 700+ FTE. The General Fund is budgeted at \$47M, the Special Tax District Fund is budgeted at \$7M, the Solid Waste Fund is budgeted at \$3M, and the Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST) is projected at \$108M for six years.
- ❖ Supervised department directors regarding short and long-term goals. Departments included: Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, Finance, Public Works, Emergency Medical Services, Jail, Court Services, Tax & Tag, Solid Waste, Library, Human Resources, Facilities Management, and Police.
- Represented Dougherty County in negotiations with the City of Albany to be in compliance with House Bill 489 Service Delivery Strategy. Some of the services contracted from the City of Albany include: Fire, Recreation, Planning and Development, Code Enforcement, Information Technology and Purchasing.
- Provided professional support to implementation of a 10-year \$210-million downtown master plan creating a new mix of commercial, institutional, and residential activities financed by SPLOST.
- Partnered with City of Albany to implement Tax Allocation District (TAD) regarding the redevelop of downtown blighted areas. Referred to as a TIF in other States.
- Provided oversight to developing/implementing the 20-year Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Zoning Ordinance. The Comprehensive Plan includes: 1) an inventory of existing conditions; 2) an assessment of current and future needs; 3) maps depicting current and future conditions; and 4) a community vision.
- Oversaw all fixed assets (property – buildings and contents, equipment, and automobiles) valued at \$161M.
- Oversaw all insurance plans (self insurance, health plan, property, liability, and workers compensation).
- Provided oversight to the Rural Transit System to provide efficient transportation service for residents living in the unincorporated areas of the County.
- Oversaw inspection, maintenance, and coordination of events at Riverfront Park. Riverfront Park is an 8.83 acre tract passive park in the downtown area along the Flint River which includes a children's playground, festival gardens, and a multipurpose facility used for special events.
- Provided oversight to the pre-disaster mitigation competitive grant program for pre-disaster mitigation

## Section 11

planning and projects primarily addressing natural hazards.

- Completed a 5,205 square foot Animal Shelter valued at \$781,647 within budget to provide animal control to the unincorporated area for the first time.
- Supervised with the Chamber of Commerce in developing an economic diversification plan for the Marine Corp Logistics Base land site.
- Represented Dougherty County on the Convention and Visitors Bureau Committee to promote community awareness and support for tourism and convention efforts.

### City of Pinellas Park, Florida (Population – 46,139)

Associate Planner

June 01 – December 02

- Developed, and implemented the Service Improvement Survey. On average received two thousand responses. Developed survey analysis and report to Mayor and City Council. These results are used in developing the five-year Service Improvement Program.
- Coordinated all matters related to planning for the Business and Neighborhood Development Division.

### Audiology by Gott (Mount Vernon, Illinois)

Manager and Co-Owner

April 99 – May 01

- Coordinated the hiring of new employees and marketing of Audiology by Gott.

### City of Largo, Florida (Population – 70,000)

Assistant to the City Manager

June 98 – March 99

- Participated in negotiations for a new three-year labor contract with the Communications Workers of America (CWA) spelling out wages, benefits, and working conditions.
- Supervised a space assessment/space utilization study for the Largo City Library to identify current and future needs.

### City of Rockville, Maryland (Population – 57,000)

Assistant to the City Manager

April 96 – June 98

- Functioned as legislative liaison to influence decisions for the benefit of the City on issues involving the City and State legislature, Council of Governments, Maryland Municipal League, and Montgomery County Government.
- Planned, implemented, and coordinated follow-up on issues resulting from Walking Town Meetings during which the Mayor and Council walk the streets and meet directly with citizens to address concerns and other aspects of the neighborhood.
- Developed a hotline number and a CGI form on the Internet for people to submit requests as part of the Citizens Service Request program.

### City of Tallahassee, Florida (Population 140,000)

Budget Analyst

July 94 – March 96

- Received, analyzed, developed and provided technical assistance to City Departments (Fire Services, Community Improvement, City Manager's Office, Downtown Development, Neighborhood & Customer Services) regarding the Operating Budget and five year Capital Improvement Program.

### Florida Department of Labor & Employment Security

Worker's Compensation Case Analyst

June 93 – July 94

- Advised, assessed penalties, and filed petitions on employers and insurance companies to ensure that employees received proper and timely compensation in compliance with regulations.

### Consultec, Incorporated

Medicaid Claims Examiner

January 93 – June 93

- Investigated Medicaid claims filed by doctors for compliance with State of Florida law.

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### **City of Albany, Georgia (Population – 78,122)**

#### **City Manager's Office Internship**

**January 92 – March 92**

- Reviewed City facilities for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and assisted the City Manager in developing a 10 year strategic plan to bring the City into compliance with the law.

### **Education**

**Master of Public Administration  
BA in Political Science**

**Georgia College and State University - 1992  
Valdosta State University - 1990**

### **Professional Organizations**

- International City/County Management Association (ICMA)
- National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA)
- Illinois City/County Management Association (ILCMA)
- Rock Island Rotary

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*Candidate Introduction*

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**Thomas Thomas**

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**EDUCATION**

Master of Public Administration, Georgia College and State University  
BA in Political Science, Valdosta State University

**EXPERIENCE**

City Manager, Rock Island, IL	2011 – 2016
Chief Administrative Officer, Macon, GA	2008 – 2011
Assistant County Administrator, Dougherty County, GA	2003 – 2008
Associate Planner, Pinellas Park, FL	2001 – 2002
Manager and Co-Owner, Mount Vernon, IL	1999 – 2001
Assistant to the City Manager, Largo, FL	1998 – 1999
Assistant to the City Manager, Rockville, MD	1996 – 1998
Budget Analyst, Tallahassee, FL	1994 – 1996
Worker’s Compensation Case Analyst, Tallahassee, FL	1993 – 1994
Medicaid Claims Examiner, Tallahassee, FL	1993 – 1993
City Manager’s Office Internship, Albany, GA	1992 – 1992

**BACKGROUND**

The City of Rock Island has a current population of approximately 40,000 which has declined over the past decade to this number. The City employs 468 FTEs including police, fire, economic development and public works, to name a few. The general fund budget is approximately \$38M while the total budget is approximately \$100M.

- **Revenue:** The primary revenue source of ad valorem tax revenue has plateaued over the past 15 years, while expenses have continued to increase. The challenge this presents is compounded by the fact that Rock Island City is 95% built out and has been since 1975. In addition there is little retail sales tax revenue or commercial property tax revenue because of the lack of commercial development.
- **Streets:** Streets are in perpetual need of repair and replacement (50% of streets have been evaluated to be either in fair or poor condition) due to the Midwest weather conditions and the lack of funds to do timely repair and maintenance.
- **Housing:** Issues with aging housing both for purchase and rent have presented significant challenges in attracting young adults and families to the city.

### **GENERAL, MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE**

The size of the community along with the reputation of the schools, are two of the first characteristics of Winter Haven that caught my eye. For the past five years I have served a community of similar size which has proven to be a comfortable environment for my family. I have two children who remain at home (10<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup> grade) so the reputation the schools enjoy is of significant import to me and my family.

Having spent 20+ years in public service leadership I am excited about the potential to continue my career in a community like Winter Haven. My service in multiple states and communities has yielded experiences in nearly every aspect of the industry and a sense for what works and what does not. Generally my management style reflects one of collaborative consensus building.

My greatest strength also reflects the most positive feedback I receive from those I work with at many levels, and that is consensus building. The approach I utilize brings together visioning, planning, budgeting, designing, project management, operations and stakeholders. Elected officials, subordinates and peers, as well as community partners all reflect highly on the success of this approach to management.

A highly adaptive management style has been the hallmark of my career. In every organization where I have worked, I have found some professionals who operate with minimal input while others need significantly more feedback and oversight. Some of the latter, even after very reasonable effort has been made, just do not succeed. Over the course of my career I have taken almost every personnel action possible, both positive and punitive. Except in extreme cases I have been able to approach actions in a progressive manner such that employees had opportunities to remedy their issues and were not surprised by any final actions.

In terms of weaknesses, I recognize that at times my tendency to “give the benefit of the doubt” to individuals can be a weakness. Time has taught me to “trust but verify” while remaining positive and ensuring diverse perspectives are carefully and thoroughly considered.

For the past 8 years I have utilized Performance Pro as an evaluative tool to set goals, monitor progress, offer and receive feedback and nurture growth and development. In addition, I budget annually for tuition reimbursement program for employees who may want to attend college. I set annual goals with Directors that are measurable and get monthly updates on the progress. I make sure every department has a strong second in command in the event the Director is not available and take action to allow staff to develop those managerial skills.

My crowning achievement in Rock Island was the \$15M purchase for a 22.94 acre site at the Watchtower Plaza for retail development. In preparing for this retail growth, we assisted 12 businesses in relocating within the City. By keeping those businesses we retained approximately 180 full-time positions and are projected that another 20-30 positions will be created among the businesses in the next 12 months. Hill & Valley, the largest employer we retained (140 jobs and

**Thomas Thomas**

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projected growth of 20 new positions), was about to move its operation out of state. A New Market Tax Credit deal was structured to assist them in renovating a new facility to expand their operations and remain in the City. The site is now cleared and build ready for retail.

My biggest failure includes the perpetual need to find fiscally responsible solutions to meet pension funding needs in most communities where I have served. It has been my experience that most communities/governments are struggling with this issue. While I have experienced some success in modifying pension programs (Macon, GA) this approach has not been universally transferrable.

I have had the occasion to discharge people but my approach often includes utilizing a corrective action plan that reflects back to their goals and deficiencies. In the instances where they are unable to meet set goals with redirect they would be subject to termination. Termination is an often unpleasant but necessary course of action for those who are not able to meet the needs of the organization as agreed upon.

Pensions stand out as a challenge in Winter Haven that most communities/governments are not immune to. Managing the \$20M in capital projects and developing a strategic plan for the City both seem significant prospects. In addition, the retiring of significant personnel presents both challenges and opportunities.

The first six months would include assessing operations within every department, meeting with community stakeholders and meeting with the Mayor and Council to determine their goals and objectives.

I offer open communication with the media, answering questions as they arise and offer factual information. With regard to my history in the media, working in an environment that influences taxes, economic development and infrastructure it is quite common any electronic search will identify support for and criticism of the service I have provided in any given community. Every project or change proposed or implemented always had full support of the respective governing body.

As an individual I have not utilized social media in a way to connect with constituents. However, I have been instrumental in the implementation of utilizing social media to inform and inquire citizens through police, public works, parks and recreation and other departments within any given organization.

A quick Google search of my name and presence in any community I have served will yield support and criticism for actions I have taken as City Manager/CAO.

My leisure time activities can be summed up in two words; family and football. With two children still living at home, many of our evenings are filled with events that revolve around their participation in extracurricular activities.

**Thomas Thomas**

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**SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES YOU WOULD USE TO DESCRIBE YOURSELF**

Stoic, organized, frugal, family man, responsible, 'the buck stops with me' kind of guy.

**REASON FOR WANTING TO LEAVE MOST RECENT JOB**

To pursue other opportunities and interests.

**CURRENT/MOST RECENT OR RELEVANT SALARY**

\$154,000 per year.

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*CB&A Background Checks*

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**Background Check Summary for  
THOMAS E. THOMAS**

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**Criminal Records Checks:**

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Rock Island County, IL	No Records Found
Bibb County, GA	No Records Found
Dougherty County, GA	No Records Found
Pinellas Park County, FL	No Records Found
Jefferson County, IL	No Records Found
Montgomery County, MD	No Records Found
State	
Illinois	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found
Illinois	No Records Found
Maryland	No Records Found

**Civil Records Checks:**

County	
Rock Island County, IL	No Records Found
Bibb County, GA	No Records Found
Dougherty County, GA	No Records Found
Pinellas Park County, FL	No Records Found
Jefferson County, IL	No Records Found
Montgomery County, MD	No Records Found
Federal	
Illinois	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found
Florida	No Records Found
Illinois	No Records Found
Maryland	No Records Found

**Motor Vehicle**

Illinois	No Records Found
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**Credit**

Excellent

**Bankruptcy**

No Records Found

**Education**

Confirmed

**Employment**

Confirmed

**Background Check Summary for  
THOMAS E. THOMAS  
Personal Disclosure**

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**Personal Disclosure Questionnaire**

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Name of Applicant: Thomas Thomas

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?  
Yes  No
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?  
Yes  No
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?  
Yes  No
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes  No
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes  No
6. Have you ever been convicted of driving while intoxicated?  
Yes  No
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?  
Yes  No
8. Do you have a personal My Space, Face Book or other type of Web Page?  
Yes  No
9. Do you have a personal Twitter Account?  
Yes  No
10. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?  
Yes  No
11. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.  
None

Attested to:   
Signature of Applicant

**Section 11**

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*CB&A Reference Notes*

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**Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas**

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**Mr. Crowdis – County Administrator, Dougherty County, GA 229-431-2121**

Mr. Crowdis hired Mr. Thomas in 2003. They worked together until Mr. Thomas left in 2008. He was a good Assistant County Administrator.

Mr. Thomas' job performance was satisfactory. He was a very quick learner, a hard worker, and he paid attention to detail. Mr. Crowdis naturally delegated more to him over time because of the way he completed assignments he was given. By the end of his tenure he was ready to be the Manager or Administrator instead of the Assistant.

When making decisions Mr. Thomas analyzed the situation. He exhibited good common sense, researched well, looked at pros and cons, and was always open to different options. He was a good decision maker and has most likely improved this skill set further since leaving the County.

Mr. Thomas attended community meetings and events. He had a good rapport with the public. He kept Mr. Crowdis informed to the appropriate level. Mr. Crowdis did not want to know everything, Mr. Thomas exercised good judgment on what information to share.

Mr. Thomas is a problem solver. He conducted research and came back with options and solutions. After discussing these options Mr. Crowdis would ask Mr. Thomas to be the lead agent or project coordinator. He showed a great deal of initiative. He paid attention and was very focused in meeting timelines and deadlines.

Mr. Thomas had a good overview of the budget. He understands that you have to monitor departmental budgets, do quarterly reports, make sure that department heads are adhering to their budgets and more. He was not specifically involved in the day to day financial operations, but he was aware of the process and had a good grasp of it.

Mr. Crowdis cannot recall anything controversial related to Mr. Thomas on a personal or professional level. He left Dougherty County to work in the City of Macon, which is three times larger than the County. He was well thought of in the community.

Mr. Crowdis would not hesitate to hire Mr. Thomas if he moved back to Dougherty County and a position was open. Mr. Thomas has the right background, diversity, and experience to be a good City or County Manager. He is very qualified for the position.

**Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Detailed,
- Initiative,
- Resourceful,
- Responsive,
- Accountable, and
- Organized.

**Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas**

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**Strengths:** Hard worker; paid attention to detail; well organized; good project administrator; followed up well; very responsive; good bit of initiative which is very helpful.

**Weaknesses:** In Dougherty County he was an Assistant Manager for the first time. He was learning the County and the departments, while building relationships with the department heads and elected officials which takes time. Also working on budgets. His financial skills increased and improved during his tenure and he has had even more responsibility for budgets since leaving Dougherty County.

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**Dennis Pauley - Mayor, City of Rock Island, IL 309-798-8685**

Mayor Pauley was involved in hiring Mr. Thomas in 2011. They worked together until 2016. Mr. Thomas did a great job as City Manager, but he felt it was time to move onto other challenges.

Hiring employees was a large part of Mr. Thomas' job throughout his time in Rock Island. The majority of the senior management team retired during this tenure. He hired excellent people to replace the long standing department heads. As a manager he did not micromanage, but trusted in his staff's ability to accomplish their tasks on their own.

Mr. Thomas came from Georgia, but did not take long to acclimate himself to the nuances of Illinois law. He brought with him ideas that worked well in his previous positions and configured them to meet the needs of Rock Island. He was able to analyze a situation from all angles.

Customer service was important to Mr. Thomas. He listened to the public's concerns and ensured that they were addressed. Generally he would take the issue to the director that oversaw the area involved. He followed through on investigating the core problem and made changes when possible. Initially he struggled getting out in front of the citizens. After some time though, he became comfortable speaking with individuals in public.

Mr. Thomas successfully balanced the budget every year. He did a terrific job of managing the finances and keeping departments aware of spending. On occasion he was forced to make cuts to the budget in order to keep it balanced, but services and customer service were maintained at a high level. He completed tasks on time.

Economic development was a main focus for Mr. Thomas. Rock Island was in need of diversifying its tax base. He brought in a FedEx facility, local businesses and more. In addition, he worked with Walmart for four years to bring them to the City. However, after all that time, Walmart backed out at the last minute. Although this situation was controversial, he was not to blame because he was following the guidance of the Council.

Mr. Thomas would do a great job as a city or county manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Amicable,
- Quiet,

Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas

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- Engaged,
- Strong work ethic, and
- Knowledgeable.

**Strengths:** Analytical; ability to see issues from big picture and daily perspective; and delegates appropriately.

**Weaknesses:** In beginning residents complained that they did not know him, he made great effort to get out in public and by end of time he was recognized on the street.

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**Jeff Ven Huizen - Chief of Police, City of Rock Island, IL 309-781-2688**

Chief Ven Huizen was the Deputy Chief in 2011 when Mr. Thomas was hired as the City Manager. In 2012, Mr. Thomas promoted Chief Ven Huizen to the top position in the Police Department. They continued to work closely until Mr. Thomas' departure in 2016. He did an outstanding job as City Manager.

Participative is Mr. Thomas' management style. He looks for feedback from his employees and encourages them to develop their own ideas in order to feel ownership for their work. He allowed the department heads to manage their own staff with little interference as well. He met with each director biweekly in an organized meeting. Throughout the week he made each one aware of any situation that affected their department. He hired strong managers who have made a positive difference in the organization and brought stability.

Mr. Thomas was extremely involved in the budget process. He was the brains behind transitioning from a fiscal year budget, to a calendar year budget. He also streamlined and simplified the process. The changes made a huge difference in the amount of time it took to put the budget together. In fact, it no longer felt as though the organization was constantly working on the budget.

Rock Island has seven Alderman, which represent seven wards within the City. Mr. Thomas attended meetings in the various wards in order to educate and inform the residents. He came across as comfortable speaking in public. He also promoted regular media meetings with each department for the local station. By doing so, he created more transparency and a feeling of accessibility for the public.

Mr. Thomas openly shared information that the Chief needed to be aware of. Chief Ven Huizen has experience with other managers in which they kept secrets in order to maintain control. However, Mr. Thomas is quite the opposite. He wants his staff to be successful and recognizes that for them to be successful he must keep them informed. If he knew that the Council was going to ask the Chief a question at the next Board meeting, he made the Chief aware.

**Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas**

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Rock Island is part of what is called the Quad Cities, which includes municipalities and counties from Illinois and neighboring Iowa. Rock Island has a negative perception within the Quad Cities due to a higher low income population, higher crime rates and less retail/commercial development. Mr. Thomas went out of his way to turn that perception around. He recognized the importance of recruiting new development and put together a marketing plan to assist in that endeavor. As for crime, he worked with the Chief to be as open and transparent as possible. He made a point of notifying the media of good stories. He was also instrumental in the construction of a new public safety facility and acquiring new technology. The steps he took helped improve public safety.

Mr. Thomas is an ethical and intelligent individual. He was successful in Rock Island and will be successful in another organization as a city or county manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Honest,
- Supportive,
- Accessible,
- Recognized in community,
- Family participates in community, and
- Best interests of city at heart.

**Strengths:** Communication with department heads; genuine; easy going; and forthright.

**Weaknesses:** At times get involved in items that, as the manager, he did not need to.

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**John Thorson - Director of Human Resources, City of Rock Island, IL 309-737-0194**

Mr. Thorson worked with Mr. Thomas from 2011 to 2016. Mr. Thomas was a good City Manager and it is a shame he is no longer with the City.

Through weekly staff meetings, and as needed, Mr. Thomas ensured that his staff were informed. He was responsive and open to speaking with members of the community as well. He had a solid understand of the direction that the Council wanted to go and he was able to discuss the details with those that needed and/or wanted to hear them.

Mr. Thomas is a hands-on manager. He relies on the directors but he wants to make the final decision. During his time there, he hired all department directors except Mr. Thorson. The individuals he hired have fit in well and proven to be experts in their field.

An on-site health clinic was implemented thanks to Mr. Thomas. A nurse practitioner ran the clinic for City employees, dependents and retirees. In addition, he developed contracts with a

**Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas**

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nearby township and a local business to use the facility as well. He also made changes in public works that saved money on paving streets.

Mr. Thomas made good decisions. He was a positive force in leading the organization forward. He should be highly considered for the City or County Manager position.

**Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Above the board,
- Physically imposing,
- Direct,
- Initially quiet, and
- Integrity.

**Strengths:** Decisive; stick to convictions, and takes blame without complaint.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Tara Barney - Executive Director, Quad Cities First Chamber of Commerce, Rock Island,  
IL 563-823-2679**

Ms. Barney worked with Mr. Thomas from 2011 to 2016. Mr. Thomas came into the City with specific strategies to bring more economic development. His ideas were thoughtful and impressive.

Mr. Thomas embodied the concept of maintaining a high performance organization. He spoke frequently about how to continually monitor the temperature of the environment in City Hall. He had a healthy relationship with the elected officials as well as his staff.

On three separate occasions, Mr. Thomas was selected as a leader to assist in the hiring process of regional management positions. His questions posed to candidates were thoughtful and brought out aspects of the person's abilities that were required for the job. He was also not afraid to ask for help when he thought the Chamber could be useful. Often times city managers do not think to take advantage of resources outside the city. Not Mr. Thomas. He recognized opportunities that could benefit all parties and brought in people from other businesses and organizations to push the Council's agenda forward.

Although Ms. Barney personally did not witness Mr. Thomas working with the everyday public, the City as a whole had a strong reputation for being customer service oriented. That type of culture generally stems from the leaders at the top. He was always responsive to her requests but was not shy in saying no. He worked positively with the business community. He is articulate and made eye contact that portrayed confidence.

**Reference Notes  
Thomas Thomas**

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Mr. Thomas proved to have a good grasp on the budget. He understood the financial challenges and had a sense for what services could be negotiated out to other municipalities. One of the biggest challenges he faced was growing the tax base. He developed an economic development plan to strengthen the retail and business presence in the City. Some of the companies that he was able to get settled were Hidden Valley, FedEx, a community college campus, an engineering firm and six retail anchor stores.

Mr. Thomas' experience transferred well and benefitted Rock Island. He is able to maintain a healthy family/work life balance. He is an extremely capable city manager and would do well for any organization he applies for.

**Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Listens,
- Personable,
- Reserved,
- Clear professionalism,
- Neutral, and
- Frank dialogue.

**Strengths:** Economic development; thoughtful on personnel matters; and self starter.

**Weaknesses:** Listens to other people's ideas, but not always welcoming to incorporated them.

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**Decker Ploehn - City Administrator, City of Bettendorf, IA 563-349-4595**

Mr. Ploehn worked with Mr. Thomas from 2011 to 2016. Bettendorf and Rock Island are separated by the Mississippi River. The two municipalities are members of the same regional organizations, such as Quad Cities First Chamber of Commerce. From an outside perspective, Mr. Thomas did a great job as City Manager.

During a normal month Mr. Ploehn and Mr. Thomas would see each other five to seven times. Some of those meetings were as members of regional boards. Mr. Thomas was informative and insightful. He was not innovative per se, but his ideas were practical. He had a good grasp on finances and daily operations as a whole.

The region is known as the Quad Cities, which encompasses five cities, two counties and two states. Mr. Thomas did not have any trouble transitioning from a standalone city in Georgia, to a more regional based way of thinking and working in Illinois. One of the projects he was intricately involved with prior to his departure, was working to get all of the organizations in the Quad Cities on the same radio system for emergency services.

## Reference Notes Thomas Thomas

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Mr. Thomas left his post with honor. Despite being left on his own to take the blame for Walmart not moving to Rock Island, he never spoke negatively or tried to pass the blame back to the Board. He will do a great job as a city or county manager.

### **Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Capable,
- Knowledgeable,
- Well-liked by peers,
- Practical, and
- Ethical.

**Strengths:** Collaborative; recognized viability of regional collaboration; advocate for economic development; and optimistic.

**Weaknesses:** Somewhat naive to the speed in which political winds change.

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### **Robert Reichert – Mayor, City of Macon, GA 478-447-0565**

Mayor Reichert was elected as the Mayor in 2007. He hired Mr. Thomas in 2008. Mr. Thomas left in 2011 to take a position in Rock Island.

Mr. Thomas is very efficient, task oriented, and very regimented in his approach. He relies heavily on email and text messages because he likes to leave a paper trail. He wanted everything in writing so there was no opportunity for miscommunication or denial.

When making hiring decisions Mr. Thomas worked jointly with human resources. He had input in hiring the department heads who reported to him. His decisions are considered, evaluated, and then implemented. He is very smart. Methodical comes to mind when you think about Mr. Thomas. His dedication makes him a good manager.

The Mayor was responsible for community outreach in Macon, Mr. Thomas' role was to oversee operations. However, because he is very businesslike the arrangement seemed to suit him. For the most part he kept everyone informed. He was not asked to relay every piece of information, but when issues came up he alerted Mayor Reichert and brought him up to speed. He can be given a task and he will complete it without any reminders.

Macon was going through a rather turbulent time in the community's history. The previous Mayor and Administrator were estranged from the City Council. The city had a 15 member Council and the situation was almost open warfare. Mayor Reichert and Mr. Thomas were then hired and walked into a significant amount of strife. Mr. Thomas was trying to heal old wounds. The overarching problem was distrust and almost resentment by the City Council of his role as the Administrator. Mr. Thomas led the effort to improve the situation and win the confidence of the Council and the community at large, who had received mixed signals from the previous

## Reference Notes Thomas Thomas

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administration. He also walked into a challenging budget situation. He put together an administrative team that made significant progress in that regard. He has a number of strengths, and is organized and diligent. He will pursue a goal or objective but likes to be in charge. One or two times he had to be reminded that Mayor Reichert was the Mayor.

Mr. Thomas oversees the Finance Officer; he was not involved in the day to day finances. However, he asked to be notified if the numbers fell below a certain level, and he made sure that employees complied with his request. Because he is task oriented, he is always timely in completing assignments.

Some decisions Mr. Thomas made were controversial, like the decision to terminate the employment of an individual. Mayor Reichert initially asked that they try and rehabilitate the employee. Mr. Thomas tried but he did not see as much improvement as he would have liked. They both agreed to proceed with the separation process. The employee then appealed to the City Council and gained a super majority vote to override the decision. He was reinstated which created a difficult situation for Mr. Thomas. All of the controversy that occurred stemmed from him trying to work with a recalcitrant City Council.

The City of Macon has been consolidated with the County, and Mayor Reichert is now the Mayor of the consolidated government. They have a new charter which is a strong Mayor form of government. Mayor Reichert relies heavily on his Chief Administrative Officer to do more of the interpersonal work, which is not Mr. Thomas' strong point. Mayor Reichert feels he is not a good fit for Macon Bibb County, but would do well in a city or county manager form of government.

### **Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Intense,
- Task oriented,
- Likes documentation,
- Technology oriented, and
- Thorough.

**Strengths:** Follow through; very task oriented; able to multi tasks; thorough in documentation.

**Weaknesses:** He lacks somewhat in interpersonal skills because he relies so heavily on email. He prefers impersonal but verifiable communication, sometimes people want to talk face to face.

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### **Randy Tweet - Interim City Manager/Public Works Director, Rock Island, IL 309-269-3902**

Mr. Thomas hired Mr. Tweet in 2013. They worked together until September 2016. Mr. Tweet enjoyed working for Mr. Thomas because he understood the importance of giving his directors freedom to use their expertise in running their departments.

## Reference Notes Thomas Thomas

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Mr. Thomas' decision making skills were superior. He had the ability to understand all angles and how each aspect would affect the organization. He took a unique approach to economic development, which is precisely what Rock Island was in need of. He successfully negotiated for a Dollar General, engineering firm and community college to locate there.

Mr. Thomas was not able to close the deal with Walmart to build a store in Rock Island which eventually led to his departure. Over four years the City took an old shopping center and helped relocate approximately fifteen businesses. Once the center was empty it was flattened. Some of the businesses were paid by the City to move, others were given incentives or construction loans. One in particular was a bakery that employed 250 people. On top of this, he redesigned an intersection to make the lot more easily accessible. Unfortunately, Walmart's headquarters changed their goals and direction, which resulted in the store not coming into the community. Throughout the process he kept the Board informed and followed their direction. However, due to the political backlash, the elected officials placed the blame entirely on Mr. Thomas.

Communication was a key component of Mr. Thomas' management style. He was in daily contact, usually via text, with his department heads. He did not do a great deal of public speaking while working for Rock Island. He tended to have his department heads make presentations that related to their area. He never had a problem being in front of an audience though, answering questions or clarifying information.

Mr. Thomas felt strongly about keeping the City's infrastructure safe and within limits given by the manufactures of the materials. He was instrumental in expanding street repair maintenance throughout the community. He also balanced the budget every year.

Mr. Thomas is a strong manager. He has the ability to lead a city forward to meet goals. He will do a wonderful job as a city or county manager.

### **Words or phrases used to describe Thomas Thomas:**

- Sees all sides of issue,
- Initially reserved,
- Sense of humor,
- Serious most of time, and
- Hardworking.

**Strengths:** Asks hard questions that make people think; and management style.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Prepared by:** Emilee Anderson and Lynelle Klein  
Colin Baenziger & Associates

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*CB&A Internet Research*

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**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search**

**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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October 13, 2016

**Former RI city manager files required statement one day after complaint**

Author: Stephen Elliott

ROCK ISLAND -- Former city manager **Thomas Thomas** on Thursday filed the required statement of economic interests paperwork with Rock Island County Clerk Karen Kinney's office, one day after an ethics complaint was filed against him. Mr. **Thomas** had no comment Thursday on why he didn't file the statements in 2013, 2014, 2015 or 2016, other than to say it wasn't intentional.

William Gass, of Springfield, filed a complaint against Mr. **Thomas** related to the statements. His claim was presented Wednesday before the Rock Island Ethics Commission during a probable cause hearing to determine if the case merited further investigation. The commission took the complaint under advisement. Ms. Kinney said state law requires the annual filings for various local and state government employees, including municipal employees such as Mr. **Thomas** who resigned in September.

Deputy clerk Dee Lyon said roughly 1,200 people receive annual notices stating Illinois law requires them to file similar statements of economic interests. Ms. Kinney said more than 200 of those people have not filed the required statements. Ms. Kinney said she does not police whether those required to file actually do. The statements seldom gather attention unless a complaint is filed, such as the one from Mr. Gass, she said. But that doesn't make the requirement any less important, she said. "I think it's in the best interests of employees that are required to do so to file a statement of economic interests in a timely manner," Ms. Kinney said.

Questions on the statement includes ownership in any entity doing business with the city, any professional organization affiliations in which income of more than \$1,200 was derived and the nature of professional services rendered by the person outside of the job from which income exceeding \$5,000 was received.

In his filings Thursday, Mr. **Thomas** replied "None" to those and other related questions. State law says anyone required to file a statement who willfully files a false or incomplete statement can be found guilty of a Class A misdemeanor. Rock Island city attorney David Morrison could not be reached for comment Thursday afternoon to determine if the commission will proceed further with the complaint.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search**

**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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September 19, 2016

**RI council accepts Thomas Thomas' resignation as city manager**

Author: Stephen Elliott

ROCK ISLAND — On a 7-0 vote, the Rock Island City Council on Monday accepted the resignation of city manager **Thomas Thomas**. Mr. **Thomas**, city manager since October 2011, entered into a severance agreement and general release of his services with the city on Tuesday, Sept. 13. Mr. **Thomas'** employment with the city will end today. Mr. **Thomas'** letter of resignation and signing of the 8-page severance agreement came exactly one week after retail giant Wal-Mart pulled out of a plan to build a supercenter at the former Watch Tower Plaza site on 11th Street.

Monday's council meeting brought questions from some residents and responses from some council members. Resident Dennis Heggen questioned the city's judgment in chasing the retail giant and spending millions in an effort to bring Wal-Mart to Rock Island. "We've doubled our debt in the last three years," Mr. Heggen said. "This is terrible. I think the council, whatever decision you make, you need to be honest with the people, define a plan, tell the people how you're going to pay this off. "That's what we haven't heard."

In his resignation letter dated Sept. 13, Mr. **Thomas** said, "it has been a unique honor to serve as Rock Island's city manager. I am proud of the important work we completed during my tenure as your city manager." The severance agreement provides Mr. **Thomas** with six months' salary — about \$77,500 — along with accrued and unused vacation time and sick leave in a lump sum. In the agreement, the city agrees to provide a favorable reference letter regarding Mr. **Thomas'** employment with the city from Mayor Dennis Pauley.

The Wal-Mart project came to an end after five years of negotiations and deadline extensions. The city spent roughly \$15 million on the project, clearing the 22.5 acre Watch Tower Plaza site, buying out and relocating businesses to other parts of the city. The city expected to recoup \$4.5 million from the sale of the property to Price Properties, which would transfer it to Wal-Mart. The agreement, though, included a stipulation where Wal-Mart could cancel the deal for any reason, which it did earlier this month. Wal-Mart officials never gave a specific reason for cancelling the project.

Rock Island resident, Kevin Matter Jr., asked the council why Mr. **Thomas** was the only one resigning. "I don't mean to be rude, it's not a personal thing," Mr. Matter said. "It's kind of ridiculous he's the only one resigning as far as I'm concerned." Ald. Virgil Mayberry, 2nd Ward, said he, along with city officials, did everything in their power to bring Wal-Mart to Rock Island. He accused some residents of trying to sabotage the project, along with others outside of the city. "I hear all this trash in the radio, newspapers, everywhere else about Wal-Mart," Ald. Mayberry said. "None of you out there have any idea what the staff went through, what **Thomas Thomas**

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**Thomas Thomas**

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went through, what the mayor went through before I came on the council. "We had naysayers that was calling Wal-Mart, texting them, telling them, 'Don't come to Rock Island.'

"Perhaps some of you out there in the audience, OK. We know some of our neighboring cities did this. We needed those 400 jobs. I had people talking to me all of the time asking me, "Can I get a job at Wal-Mart?' People want to work. They want jobs. We will put something in there. "I assure you." Ald. Joshua Schipp, 6th Ward, said there are legitimate public criticisms on the failed Wal-Mart project, but said the \$15 million spent on the site, "was not handed to some outside group in a suitcase and disappeared from the community."

He said some of the buyouts and relocations were successful, including the Hill and Valley factory now in the 6th Ward at the former Farmall plant. Ald. Kate Hotle, 5th Ward, said the city is facing real challenges with population loss, growing pensions, and ways to find new revenues to pay for city parks. "None of us here (council members) wake up in the morning wanting to hurt Rock Island, wanting to waste taxpayer dollars, which is our dollars," Ald. Hotle said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search**

**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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May 5, 2016

**As deadline nears, RI city manager says Wal-Mart is coming**

Author: Stephen Elliott

ROCK ISLAND -- With Wal-Mart's feasibility study deadline scheduled Monday, city manager **Thomas Thomas** said he wanted to reassure residents the giant retailer is coming. The 180-day feasibility period allowed Wal-Mart to cancel, for any reason, a proposed supercenter in Rock Island. He said Wal-Mart has not asked for an extension to the feasibility window, nor has it asked for incentives beyond the variances requested last month with the city's board of zoning appeals. "Wal-Mart is still coming to Rock Island," Mr. **Thomas** said Thursday. "They are still going through due diligence on the site." Efforts to bring Wal-Mart to Rock Island began in 2012 and have cost the city about \$15 million so far. The city is banking on Wal-Mart to bring in millions of dollars in sales tax revenue, as well as 250 to 300 jobs.

In October, the Rock Island City Council approved selling the former Watch Tower Plaza -- about 20 acres at approximately 3750 11th St. -- to Price Properties, the retail giant's development arm, for \$4.5 million. Price Properties will transfer the property to Wal-Mart if the deal is not cancelled. The sale launched the 180-day feasibility period for Wal-Mart. It is scheduled to end at 5 p.m. Monday, Mr. **Thomas** said. Rock Island Ald. Joshua Schipp, 6th Ward, said he would not be surprised if Wal-Mart does seek an extension. But he said the fact that Wal-Mart officials requested and received several variances from the city's board of zoning appeals last month adds to his confidence the store is coming to Rock Island. "I don't think they (Wal-Mart) would go to that trouble of bringing a representative here if they weren't serious," Ald. Schipp said.

Ald. Schipp also referred to an April 18 city council meeting where aldermen agreed to donate two parcels of property, 2101 and 2117 11th St., to the owners of Pawn King to allow them to move. Pawn King now has a store at 3940 11th St., where Wal-Mart plans to build a gas station to complement the proposed 189,541-square-foot Wal-Mart Supercenter "Obviously, this project is going on Wal-Mart's timeline," Ald. Schipp said. "I'm anticipating we (city) get a request for another 30 or 60 days. "I think the council will be happy to approve that. They're getting close to the point where they will make that final decision." Ald. Schipp said an extension request would not discourage him. "If anything, I'm encouraged by what I've seen of late with the acquisition of the Pawn King property," he said. "These aren't political tricks. These are real, authentic moves that paint a good, optimistic picture of Wal-Mart's intentions in this area. "Really, the only people who know if they are coming are the people at Wal-Mart," he said. "If I read their signs of late, I think it reads a positive image." Wal-Mart spokesperson, Delia Garcia, and Rock Island Mayor Dennis Pauley could not be reached for comment Thursday.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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January 4, 2016

**Mayberry, council to revisit pay raises**

Author: Stephen Elliott

ROCK ISLAND — Hoping the second time's a charm, Rock Island Ald. Virgil Mayberry told council members Monday he wants the city to revisit his request for a pay increase for aldermen. According to the city, the last raise for aldermen was in 1994. Any pay increase for aldermen could not take effect until after the next election for each council seat. Ald. Mayberry said that would be in 2019 for his ward. "Let's get real," Ald. Mayberry said. "There's no one that I know of that hasn't had a raise in (at least) 15 years." Ald. Mayberry asked that it be on the council agenda for a vote, possibly later this month. He brought the issue up last November, but the council did not vote on it. In other business Monday, the council approved a 2 percent general wage increase for the city's 47 non-union employees. City human resources director John Thorson said the wage increase covers employees in the departments of general administration, human resources, information technology, finance, community and economic development, Martin Luther King Center, police, fire and public works.

The increase compares with a 2.5 percent increase in 2015, a 3 percent increase in 2014 and a 2.75 percent increase in 2013. Total cost of the pay increase is \$67,800, Mr. Thorson said. The city has approximately 450 full-time employees, Mr. Thorson said. Many of the city's union employees are under five-year contracts, some of which extend into 2019. City union contracts are with the police Command Officers Association (COA), International Association of Firefighters (IAFF), Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) and United Auto Workers (UAW). According to the city, the average employee wage increase for all city union and non-union employees from 2006 through 2019 is 2.92 percent per year. In other business, the council, on a 4-2 vote, approved an ordinance to purchase eight properties at the site of the former Norcross/Servus Rubber plant in Rock Island. Aids. Chuck Austin, 7th Ward, and P.J. Foley, 3rd Ward, voted against the ordinance. Ald. Stephen Tollenaer, 4th Ward, was not present.

Back in September, the council agreed to spend \$274,779 to buy the former Norcross plant at 1136 2nd St., along with seven other vacant parcels on the city's west side. Aldermen approved the purchase after city officials reported a deal was being negotiated with a developer who would buy the site from Rock Island later for a new project. In December, city manager **Thomas Thomas** said the potential development deal was no longer on the table. On a 5-2 vote in December, aldermen backed Mr. **Thomas** and voted to buy the eight properties anyway, which cover about 18 acres combined. On Monday, that purchase agreement was in the final form of an ordinance. Mr. **Thomas** said it is a duplicate ordinance from September, the reason for approving the purchase a second time is because the intent of the purchase changed from the last time it was approved. Mr. **Thomas** has said even though the original deal fell through, he believed it was in the city's interest to buy the properties and market them to developers. Ald.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Joshua Schipp, 6th Ward, agreed. "It's an eyesore," Ald. Schipp said. Ald. Austin was against the purchase, saying demolition costs will likely be another \$500,000 or more.

"I look at this as speculation tying up a million dollars of taxpayer money," Ald. Austin said. "I don't see it as a wise maneuver." Aldermen also approved a request from Ald. Chuck Austin to change the yield signs at Denkmann School, 4101 22nd Ave., to stop signs and refer the motion to the city attorney for an ordinance. The signs are located at 42nd Street and 22nd Avenue.

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**Thomas Thomas**

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Qconline.com - [http://www.qconline.com/news/local/judge-to-review-arguments-in-big-island-levee-dispute/article\\_0b5f7cc8-47a8-5617-a9ed-913966d90bbc.html](http://www.qconline.com/news/local/judge-to-review-arguments-in-big-island-levee-dispute/article_0b5f7cc8-47a8-5617-a9ed-913966d90bbc.html)

April 30, 2014

**Judge to review arguments in Big Island levee dispute**

Author: Stephen Elliott

ROCK ISLAND -- Circuit Judge Lori Lefstein on Wednesday took under advisement motions to dismiss Rock Island's efforts to move a section of levee on Big Island to build a road for a future multi-million dollar shopping and residential development. She did not say when a ruling might come. Rock Island plans to build a road over the levee and off Illinois 92 to connect a 90-acre site close to the intersection of Interstate 280 and Illinois 92. The city owns the site, and city officials want to develop it as a retail park. Big Island residents, along with the levee sponsors, Milan and the Big Island River Conservancy District, are opposed to the plan, saying it could pose a risk to the integrity of the flood-protection system. The city purchased the land from Riverstone Group Inc. for \$1 million in 2013. On Wednesday, 10 attorneys representing Rock Island, Big Island, Milan, BIRCD, Black Hawk Township and four Big Island residents, appeared before Judge Lefstein,.

St. Louis attorney Carrie Hermeling, representing Milan and the conservancy district, said the city's plans to cut into the levee would mean loss of Federal Emergency Management Agency accreditation. "This is not just a pile of dirt," Ms. Hermeling said. Loss of accreditation, in turn, could lead to residents being unable to obtain flood insurance or become eligible for flood programs. Ms. Hermeling said state court does not have jurisdiction over a federal levee. She said the levee was a federally-authorized flood construction project. "The question becomes how does a state court under state statute condemn a federally-regulated property?" Ms. Hermeling asked. There were arguments as to who actually owns the levee. Robert McMonagle, one of four Lane and Waterman attorneys representing the city, said the city owns the levee.

"This is not a federal levee," Mr. McMonagle said. "Right now, the city of Rock Island owns the levee. We're trying to jump start this project. There is no federal law at issue here." Mr. McMonagle said it is in the city's best interest to maintain the portion of the levee if it extinguished the easements held by Milan and the BIRCD. He said the city would fully comply with any work needed on a levee modification. Other issues are also on the table. Attorney Mike Halpin, arguing on behalf of Black Hawk Township, said the township has concerns about maintenance of a new road, saying the city has had no consultation with the township. Attorney John Doak, arguing on behalf of four Big Island residents, said the city's Board of Local Improvements, the advisory board used by the city, was never appointed by the mayor, Dennis Pauley, but instead, by the city manager, **Thomas Thomas**. He said state statutes do not provide for such appointments by the city manager.

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**Thomas Thomas**

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Dispatch-Argus (QConline)  
November 5, 2013

**Rock Island council backs pay bump for city manager**

Author: Eric Timmons

ROCK ISLAND - Aldermen voted Monday to give Rock Island city manager **Thomas Thomas** a pay raise to take his salary to \$147,441. The council voted 5-0 in favor of the raise. Alds. Chuck Austin, 7th Ward, and David Conroy, 2nd Ward, were not present at Monday's council meeting. The agreement raised the city manager's salary 3.25 percent. The council also agreed to pay a lump sum equal to 5 percent of Mr. **Thomas**' salary into his retirement account. The raise puts Mr. **Thomas** almost on a par with Moline city administrator Lew Steinbrecher, who is paid \$148,714. Davenport city manager Craig Malin has an annual salary of \$184,457.

Aldermen also approved a \$51,800 agreement with Shive-Hattery for a project to build a new District Plaza Stage. The proposal from the Moline firm covers design, production of construction documents, bidding and construction services, according to council documents. The existing stage in The District is uneven and damaged in places, and the canopy over the stage needs to be replaced, said the city's economic development director Jeff Eder.

Mr. Eder said construction likely will take place next summer, and city officials will work with downtown businesses to minimize any disruption for downtown events. Also at Monday's meeting, Mayor Dennis Pauley invited hunters who want to participate in the city's new deer management program to attend a meeting at 5:30 p.m. today at city hall. The meeting will outline the expectations, restrictions and procedures of the program in detail, including the process for obtaining a permit. An aerial count conducted last winter found 400 deer roaming within Rock Island's city limits. But city officials estimate the true deer population likely is larger than that, with the animals also blamed for attracting coyotes to Rock Island.

Bettendorf and Davenport both have deer hunting programs to control their deer populations. Rock Island parks and recreation director Bill Nelson has said he expects no more than 20 deer to be harvested in the city's first hunt. Hunters will have to kill two does before they can harvest a buck with antlers. Permits will cost \$25; any entrails left after a deer has been killed must be cleaned up by the hunters. Hunting sites will be designated by signs, and neighboring property owners will be notified by police that a hunt will take place.

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**Thomas Thomas**

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Quad-City Times - [http://qctimes.com/news/opinion/editorial/rock-island-needs-new-approach-for-big-island/article\\_614b4b34-0d35-5f48-b4a6-dca0e208cc82.html](http://qctimes.com/news/opinion/editorial/rock-island-needs-new-approach-for-big-island/article_614b4b34-0d35-5f48-b4a6-dca0e208cc82.html)

September 6, 2013

**Rock Island needs new approach for Big Island**

Rock Island's new management team certainly knows lots about expediting commercial development. But it could stand a lesson in how to win friends and influence people. At every turn, Rock Island leaders seem intent on aggravating their neighbors. Rock Island paid \$1 million for 90 acres on Big Island, lowland protected from Rock and Mississippi River flooding by a long-standing levee district. The land had been owned for years by Riverstone, the Quad-City gravel mining firm. City leaders bought the land and annexed it into city limits without effectively consulting the 200 Big Island residents or the leaders of the flood protection district that manages the levee. Rock Island City Administrator **Thomas Thomas** envisions a \$55 million Jumer's Crossing retail development accessible from Interstate 280, via Illinois 92, the Centennial Expressway. To make it happen, Rock Island will have to put a road over the flood levee. Regardless of the levee implications, development of this scale is bound to concern the 200 or so homeowners in the secluded refuge surrounded by rivers and interstates.

Rock Island's main overtures have been:

- Providing only bare minimum data about the size, nature and ownership of the development.
- Threatening some Big Island residents with a \$50 assessment to help pay for the road over the levee.

Naturally, the bigger city's clumsy tactics have won little support on Big Island, or from Milan, the other partner in the flood protection district. So Rock Island responded by threatening to file a lawsuit to wrest control of the flood protection district from Big Island and Milan.

Rock Island leaders tend to downplay the impact of their plans for the levee. It simply would require rebuilding a 300-foot section to accommodate a road. No matter how simple, modifying that levee will require approval of those protected by it. Rock Island tried and failed to modify the levee for the Jumer's Casino and Hotel, now operating safely and successfully outside of the flood protection district, south of Interstate 280. The city's tactics so far seem tailor-made to generate objections. With **Thomas** estimating sales tax revenue exceeding \$2 million annually, Big Island residents certainly need to know much more than simply how their levee will be protected.

Rock Island alderman Steve Tollenaer told the Dispatch in July, "We're going to have to negotiate with them and sweeten the pot." With each bitter threat, Rock Island's leaders are adding zeroes to the sweeteners needed to turn their needlessly estranged neighbors into partners.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Quad-City Times - [http://qctimes.com/news/local/government-and-politics/school-district-considers-second-option-for-closed-ri-school/article\\_9fc2dd05-e373-564f-8898-07162687fa55.html](http://qctimes.com/news/local/government-and-politics/school-district-considers-second-option-for-closed-ri-school/article_9fc2dd05-e373-564f-8898-07162687fa55.html)

July 12, 2013

**School district considers second option for closed RI school**

Author: Tara Becker and Jennifer DeWitt

One offer to buy the closed Audubon Elementary School is off the table, but the Rock Island-Milan School District has another one to consider. Superintendent Mike Oberhaus said Friday that the district is working with its real estate broker and attorney to review a \$475,000 offer from Joseph Lemon Jr. and his family. The same price previously was offered by the Boone, Iowa-based Fareway Stores Inc. If an agreement is reached between the district and Lemon, it will go before the school board for approval, Oberhaus said. Fareway had an option to purchase the historical building at 2617 18th Ave., demolish it and build a grocery store. The option was set to expire Aug. 1. Fareway announced late Thursday that it was not able to complete its due diligence in accordance with its purchase agreement with the school district. Fareway officials have indicated they still are interested in opening a store in Rock Island “and will continue to monitor all potential locations.” Fareway representatives could not be reached Friday for comment. Built in 1923, Audubon became the Center for Math and Science in 2009. It closed in June 2010 when the new Center for Math and Science opened at the former Villa de Chantal site. The Fareway proposal stirred controversy among residents in the Audubon neighborhood and others who did not want to see the school razed. Former Davenport resident Alexandra Elias, who now lives in San Diego, Calif., but who owns property in Rock Island, had filed the application to have the school designated a landmark in the hopes it would prevent demolition should Fareway buy the property. The city’s Preservation Commission voted 9-0 April 24 to designate the 90-year-old Georgian Revival-style building a historic landmark in the city. The city council overturned that by a vote of 6-1.

Earlier this month, several neighbors filed an injunction and temporary restraining order to halt Fareway’s plans. The request was dismissed by agreement Friday. Lemon, whose family owns Rock Island’s Abbey Station and The Abbey Addiction Treatment Center in Bettendorf, made a counteroffer for the property in June. If an agreement cannot be reached with Lemon, the school district will work with its broker to explore other options, Oberhaus said. “They are pretty savvy about our use of buildings,” he said. Meanwhile, city officials are waiting for Fareway’s next move. “We’ve tried to contact them and haven’t heard back from them,” Rock Island City Manager **Thomas Thomas** said Friday. **Thomas** said the city previously had proposed other sites to Fareway, including the vacant Rock Island Country Market, “but this was the No. 1 site for them. “Business is going to decide where they’re going to go, and this is the site they chose where they could be more successful. They haven’t mentioned any of the other sites we gave them.” According to **Thomas**, the city proposed about six or seven sites around the city. “But they were really interested in that corridor,” he said. “That’s where the traffic is.”

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Qconline.com - [http://www.qconline.com/news/local/ri-steps-up-compensation-for-properties-damaged-by-water-main/article\\_92ad234a-d0af-573c-a095-57cb51a33a5b.html](http://www.qconline.com/news/local/ri-steps-up-compensation-for-properties-damaged-by-water-main/article_92ad234a-d0af-573c-a095-57cb51a33a5b.html)

March 18, 2013

**RI steps up compensation for properties damaged by water main break**

Author: Eric Timmons

The Rock Island City Council has agreed to increase compensation to three homeowners whose properties were badly damaged by a city water main break in December. Earlier this month, City Manager **Thomas Thomas** had proposed offering 50 percent or just under \$80,000 of the estimated cost of the damage to the owners of 1523, 1525 and 1527 36th St. But at Monday's council meeting Ald. Joy Murphy, 6th Ward, proposed increasing the compensation to as much as \$160,000 combined. She received unanimous support from the council. A nearby water tower was drained of 500,000 gallons of water in a few hours as a result of the water main break. The homes at 1523 and 1527 36th St. were left uninhabitable after water gushed into the basements of the properties on Dec. 27. The home at 1525 36th St. suffered significant damage, but was not condemned by the city.

Under state law, the city had no obligation to pay any money to the homeowners unless it could be proven the city knew the water main was defective before the flood. Homeowners on 37th Street whose properties were damaged by a water main break last fall received compensation equal to 50 percent of the cost of the damages. But Mayor Dennis Pauley said the flooding on 36th Street was "unique" because the damage was so severe. As part of the agreement, the city will take ownership of the two condemned properties and demolish them. Lynette Anderson, whose basement at 1525 35th St. was damaged by the water main break said she was pleased by the council's decision. She was to receive about \$10,000 in compensation, but now will receive more. "It sounds like a good outcome," she said. City Attorney Ted Kutsunis will negotiate with homeowners to determine exactly how much compensation each will receive.

Brandon Foley, who lives at 1527 36th St., was to receive about \$40,000, or half the value of his \$80,000 home, which the city has condemned. He said he considered legal action and previously criticized the city for only offering to cover half the cost of the damages. In other business on Monday, the council agreed to provide \$135,000 to cover part of the cost of a project to build three new homes across the lots at 606, 608, 614 and 618 10th St. The money will be used by the Rock Island Economic Growth Corporation and includes \$90,000 in tax-increment-finance funds from the North 11th Street TIF. Property tax assessments are frozen in a TIF district.

But as property values increase, revenue above the frozen assessment all goes to the city and can then be spent on development projects. The total cost of the project could reach \$600,000, according to council documents, and money from a state program also will be used to support the development. Also at Monday's meeting, the council agreed to pay \$260,000 to engineering firm Missman Inc., of Rock Island, to design construction plans for improvements to 11th Street and 9th Street, and perform a traffic corridor study. The improvements will support a new development at the intersection of 11th and 9th streets where the new Black Hawk adult learning

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center is being built. The Black Hawk facility is moving from Watch Tower Plaza on 11th Street to clear the way for a new Walmart Supercenter.

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Qconline.com - [http://www.qconline.com/editorials/rico-has-bigger-priorities-than-bricks-and-mortar/article\\_5125537a-946c-562d-bd54-65d87081208a.html](http://www.qconline.com/editorials/rico-has-bigger-priorities-than-bricks-and-mortar/article_5125537a-946c-562d-bd54-65d87081208a.html)

October 1, 2012

**RICO has bigger priorities than bricks and mortar**

Author: Roger Ruthhart

Several months ago, I raised questions about the relocation of Rock Island County offices outside of downtown Rock Island. The special committee appointed to study the idea has since said it can't recommend the move. I have yet to find anyone in Rock Island who thinks the move out of downtown is a good idea. Most outside of Rock Island don't think it's a good idea either. But the opposition is not so much an indictment against the plan as it is of the culture and form of county government.

There seems to be a general distrust about anything that happens at the county. This is NOT an indictment of those in office, but the general form of government and how the county has been run over time -- regardless of who was sitting in which office. Earlier this summer I asked Rock Island city manager **Thomas Thomas** what his experience was in working with the county. They are, after all, located next door to each other. **Mr. Thomas** has been here a relatively short time and chose his words carefully, but still made his point well. "The county is a major force on local business downtown. It's frustrating that there is no administrator I can call regularly on mutual issues. I prefer to deal with an administrator before things get to the political level," he said. Others point out that issues must be taken to county board committees where politics and regional influences always are in play. Discussions usually must be held in public because they are elected officials.

I also talked with John Phillips, retired Rock Island city manager. To be fair, Mr. Phillips has been an outspoken proponent of professional administrative staff. I asked him about working with the county. Mr. Phillips said it was a difficult thing to do. He shared several stories illustrating instances in which the city tried to work with Rock Island County and was thwarted by either politics or a lack of professional administration. Others had similar stories. Several claimed that the real problem with the county buildings is not their age, but decades of deferred maintenance by the county board under numerous administrations with no long-term financial or capital plan. Politics, many claim, has kept the county from being a positive influence in many areas where it could have shown leadership. This is essential, several told me, in a county like Rock Island that has so many municipalities. Some point out that during campaigns many politicians over the years have promised to initiate programs to combat crime countywide, but once elected always fail to deliver the programs promised.

So what does a professionally-trained administrator bring to the job that an elected political powerbroker doesn't? For that I, again, went to Mr. Phillips, who now works as a range rider for the Illinois City and County Management Association, helping cities and counties (as well as their administrators) deal with difficult issues. Under the current system, the county in general is run by the county board and the all-powerful county board chairman who makes day-to-day

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operating decisions. Other elected officials administer their individual departments. The chairman is elected by the county board and all county board members are politicians elected by those who vote in the county. There is really no guarantee, many point out, that the county board members and the chairman they elect, will have any real administrative talent. Also, many of the management decisions are made by county board committees or their chairmen.

Those who are critical say a better system would be to elect a smaller part-time county board which would just make policy decisions with the county run on a day-to-day basis by a professional administrator. This, said Mr. Phillips, is the direction more and more counties are going. Many larger counties already have made the switch and now even some smaller ones, like Henry to the east and Lee to the north, have professional administrators. "We don't expect our school boards to run the school without a superintendent. Why should a multimillion dollar operation like a county be run without a professional to oversee day-to-day operations?" Mr. Phillips asked.

Mr. Phillips suggests reducing the size of the county board and the number of committees; examining pay and benefits; modifying the county board chairman's job into a part-time position and establishing an ordinance to create the appointed position of county administrator to coordinate county operations, look for efficiencies, prepare the budget, apply for grants, implement economic development activities and provide management reports to the board. He would like to see the county consider a comprehensive ethics policy that covers relationships with vendors, conflicts of interest, hiring and promotions, nepotism, gifts and political influence. He also would recommend training for all elected and appointed officials and staff on state laws governing ethical conduct. The board and administrator, he thinks, should consider establishing an economic development strategy for the county. Also a five-year financial plan; establish policies on investments, purchasing, fund balances and debt and require that products and services be bid competitively. Finally, he would like to see opportunities expanded to share services with other governmental entities to reduce costs or improve services. To achieve all of this, the county needs a professionally trained administrator, he claims. I agree. Which brings us back to the issue of where the county offices should be located. The county has issues it needs to address as does Rock Island, which is contemplating building a new police station. Couldn't the city and county work together to develop a government campus at the foot of the Centennial Bridge and address both issues? Might the city even finance the project and lease it back to the county? Mr. Phillips said that while something like that is feasible, "it is not something I would ever recommend given the current situation. Their decisions are made in a way that is foreign to how we (Rock Island) operate." Instead of being a leader and facilitator, Rock Island County government is seen by many as a hindrance and roadblock. I think most agree the county has a bigger issue to address than bricks and mortar. It needs to chart a path that embraces ethics and sound management. Its path for the future first needs to embrace professional government management.

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Qconline.com - [http://www.qconline.com/news/local/thomas-wants-to-aggressively-pursue-r-i-development/article\\_400c33ea-6004-5ce7-8289-3b85096159f8.html](http://www.qconline.com/news/local/thomas-wants-to-aggressively-pursue-r-i-development/article_400c33ea-6004-5ce7-8289-3b85096159f8.html)

May 16, 2012

**Thomas wants to aggressively pursue R.I. development**

Author: Bill Mayeroff

**Thomas Thomas** believes that, to bring development, Rock Island needs to work with potential businesses. "I always believe it's a partnership," said Mr. **Thomas**, who became Rock Island's city manager a little more than six months ago. During a meeting Wednesday with the editorial board of The Dispatch and Argus, Mr. **Thomas** said Rock Island is poised to lure new business to the city. "We've got TIFs for the incentives," he said. "We have industrial sites. Now it's just a matter of going out there and aggressively pursuing opportunities." Incentives are an important tool for a city trying to bring in new business, he said. "Those incentives you give out, you're going to get those back," he said. "I'm not saying give away the farm." To help bring new development to the city, Jeffrey Eder will step into the position of community and economic development director on June 4. "He brings to the table that supervisory experience," Mr. **Thomas** said. "I'm looking forward to him getting started."

A major target for development, Mr. **Thomas** said, is about 100 acres owned by the Riverstone Group near Jumer's Casino. He said he plans to emphasize development of the Interstate 280 corridor and hopes to bring "high-level retail opportunities" to the area. Though he plans to aggressively pursue business opportunities for Rock Island, Mr. **Thomas** said he does not want the city to grow too quickly. In other cities, he said, development has outpaced the city's ability to build infrastructure to keep up with it, which he does not want to happen to Rock Island. "You don't want your growth to be too fast," he said. "It's a balancing act."

Since he took office, Mr. **Thomas** said he has developed a good working rapport with Rock Island Mayor Dennis Pauley and the city council. "This is a great council," he said. "I have a mayor and council who leave the day-to-day operations to me, and they stick to making policy." In addition to keeping the lines of communication open between himself and other city leaders, Mr. **Thomas** said he tries to have as much communication with residents as possible.

"There's always citizens involved in all kinds of issues," he said. "I get emails from citizens all the time. That's how I learn about stuff." Mr. **Thomas** said he also hopes to talk to Rock Island County officials about whether it would be best to consolidate the county's aging courthouse and administrative building in the old Farmall building at the QCIC on 44th Street in Rock Island. County officials said the move could save the county nearly \$1 million a year. Mr. **Thomas** said he worries about the impact such a move would have on downtown Rock Island businesses that rely on courthouse and county office traffic. "I have never seen a courthouse or county administration building moved from the downtown," he said. "There's a reason why they're always downtown."

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Another old building Mr. **Thomas** said needs work is the police station at 316 16th St. He said an architect has stated it would be almost as expensive to rehabilitate the station built in 1940 as it would be to replace it. But Mr. **Thomas** said that, before he agrees with that conclusion, he would need to have the architect take him through the building and explain how he arrived at it. "I have some pointed questions I'd like to ask," he said

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Quad-City Times - [http://qctimes.com/business/ri-hires-economic-development-director/article\\_0c918d34-9988-11e1-a65c-0019bb2963f4.html](http://qctimes.com/business/ri-hires-economic-development-director/article_0c918d34-9988-11e1-a65c-0019bb2963f4.html)

May 8, 2012

**RI hires economic development director**

Author: Jennifer DeWitt

An economic development leader with nearly two decades of experience working in government and business has been hired as Rock Island's new community and economic development director. Jeff Eder, who most recently worked as community development director in Franklin Park, Ill., will begin his new duties on June 4, Rock Island city manager **Thomas Thomas** said Tuesday. Eder fills the position left vacant by the retirement of longtime development director Greg Champagne. "I was impressed with Jeff Eder and his experience in economic development," **Thomas** said, adding that Eder has extensive experience in planning and zoning, economic development and small business development. "He brings that local knowledge, and combine that with his Illinois experience, the learning curve is a lot less." Eder will be responsible for planning, organizing and directing the activities of the community and economic development department. He will oversee the city's planning and redevelopment division, economic development division and inspections division.

Eder's annual salary will be \$90,000, **Thomas** said. The city launched a nationwide search when Champagne announced his retirement. He retired March 30 after 35 years with the city. According to **Thomas**, the search produced a healthy pool of candidates, from which five finalists were interviewed. Since 2000, Eder has worked in a variety of capacities for Franklin Park, including community development director, planning and development director, and economic development director. Before joining the village, he worked for Locus Information Systems, in Champaign, Ill.; the Greater Champaign-Urbana Economic Partnership; the North Central Indiana Private Industry Council in Peru, Ind.; Grissom Redevelopment Authority in Bunker Hill, Ind.; and the Peru/Miami County Economic Development Corp.

He earned a master of business administration degree from Indiana University (1997) and a bachelor of urban planning and development and a bachelor of science in environmental design from Ball State University (1993). In addition, Eder is a 2002 graduate of the University of Oklahoma Economic Development Institute.

**Thomas** said that with a lot of key economic development projects ahead, "I'm looking forward to bringing in the kind of energy level I need for that position. Upcoming projects include planning for new businesses on the Interstate 280/Illinois 92 corridor, assisting businesses that are opening in Rock Island, and improving our tax base." Bob Hawes, the city's public works director and assistant city manager, is serving in the position in the interim.

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Qconline.com - [http://www.qconline.com/news/local/rock-island-oks-video-gaming-in-businesses/article\\_9efe3940-9c10-5471-bc4c-296fea0b1cbc.html](http://www.qconline.com/news/local/rock-island-oks-video-gaming-in-businesses/article_9efe3940-9c10-5471-bc4c-296fea0b1cbc.html)

April 23, 2012

**Rock Island OKs video gaming in businesses**

Author: Bill Mayeroff

The Rock Island city council on Monday voted unanimously to amend the city code to allow video gambling in businesses with a liquor license, if the state implements the Video Gaming Act passed in 2009. After Monday's meeting, city manager **Thomas Thomas** said he did not want to speculate on whether allowing video gambling within city limits would make money for Rock Island. "It's hard to predict something like that," he said. Mr. **Thomas** said he has not heard directly from any businesses that would be interested in having video gambling. He noted there may be more interest since the ordinance passed. Mr. **Thomas** said passing the ordinance is only the first step. The council still must figure out how video gambling will be licensed and regulated within the city, he said.

Rock Island is alone among the Quad-Cities in clearing the way for the video gambling machines. In January 2010, Rock Island approved an annual licensing fee of \$250 per video gambling terminal for establishments that set up such devices. The city has about 26 liquor license holders eligible for video gaming machines, former city manager John Phillips said in February 2010.

Also on Monday, the council unanimously approved two ordinances related to a plot of land at 606 24th St. One ordinance allows the city to buy the land from Rock Island County at a cost of \$4,750. The second lets the city sell the land to the Rock Island Economic Growth Corporation (GROWTH) for \$5,500. Last week Renaissance Rock Island president Brian Hollenback said the county took possession of the home because the owner was delinquent on taxes. He said GROWTH plans to tear down the house.

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Quad-City Times  
March 3, 2012

**RI city manager brings changes**

Author: Alma Gaul

When **Thomas Thomas** was hired as chief administrative officer in Macon, Ga., three years ago, the city had a negative financial reserve and was heading toward bankruptcy. When he left to take the job as Rock Island city manager beginning Oct. 24, Macon was debt-free and had a three-month reserve. The ability to do more with less and to make unpopular recommendations are achievements that impressed Rock Island aldermen whose city is facing financial challenges, too. That, and **Thomas**' ability to get to the point. "He is succinct and has a clear vision," Alderman Jason Jones, 5th Ward, said. "That stood out to us. Some people talk for five minutes, and you're not sure you got anywhere."

In meeting **Thomas**, there's always the question about his name. The answer is that he was named after his grandfather. Yes, it raises some questions, but at age 44, he's used to it. Middle name: Edwin. Given his height — he's 6-foot-4 — he also gets the inevitable "did you play basketball?" question. The answer is yes, and baseball and football, too. But for the past 20 years, **Thomas** has been doing the work of professional government at increasingly higher levels of responsibility, and that is what he wants to talk about during an interview in his office. "I get up energized, and I enjoy doing what I do," he said. "Running a city is fun to me. It's constant motion."

**Thomas** follows in the footsteps of John Phillips, a city manager who was widely popular and had been on the job for 24 years. For some employees and the public, **Thomas**' management style — businesslike and simply different — has been an abrupt change. "He's not a yuk-it-up, socialite kind of guy," said Robert Reichert, the mayor of Macon, who worked with **Thomas** for the past three years. "He's not trying to butter up to people. He's trying to get the job done right. He doesn't want to be friends with you. He wants to be fair. He's a no-nonsense kind of guy."

Macon Telegraph newspaper reporter Jim Gaines said **Thomas** stepped into something of a financial "disaster," including overvalued assets and a devalued bond rating, "and he had a tremendous amount of work to do. He may be a little wary of new people." **Thomas** said his role in Macon was "strictly operational" in that the city has a strong-mayor form of government, and he is relishing his more visible, interactive role in Rock Island with its strong city manager model. "I adjust," he said. "I am enjoying it immensely." **Thomas**' office at City Hall offers few clues to his personal life.

There are no photos on the wall or his desk and only two obvious mementos. One is a "**Thomas** Pl" street sign that came to him when a community where he worked was replacing its signs, and the other is an ornate brass magnifying glass his mother bought at an antique shop for the day when he would need it to read fine print. Prominent on his desk are a laptop computer and an iPhone. "I'm constantly brainstorming, constantly emailing," he said. "I'm very focused. I

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average 100 emails a day, some at midnight. There is no downtime. That’s the way I am.”

**Thomas** “would prefer to correspond via email rather than talk on the telephone,” Reichert said. “That way he can go back and show exactly ‘what I told you and what you told me’ so as to create a record. He has a tendency to document everything.”

Move to RI motivated by family

**Thomas** is dedicated to his family, and that is a primary reason he is in Rock Island. With his oldest daughter beginning her freshman year as a theater major at Columbia College in Chicago and his wife’s mother living in Peoria, it made sense to look for a job in Illinois. The city manager position is a step up in responsibility from his previous job in Macon, although Rock Island is smaller, about 38,000 in population compared with Macon’s 92,000. The pay is the same: \$140,000 a year. In addition to his daughter in college, he has a son in fifth grade and a daughter in second. **Thomas** declines to share their names. “I’m available 24/7, but I make a delineation between my personal life and my professional life,” he said. “I’m the public person.” Any free time out of city government is spent with his family and their sports activities. Being involved with children “consumes a great deal of your time,” he said. The family is living in an apartment while looking for a house.

Background, the South and California

**Thomas** is an only child, born in 1967, and he grew up in Tallahassee, Fla. His father worked for the state in workers’ compensation and emergency management, and his mother was a real estate agent and legal secretary. Growing up, **Thomas** watched “Soul Train” with his older cousins on Saturday mornings. It was one of the first TV programs to showcase African-Americans prominently, and **Thomas** learned about the “fashions and the lingo.” When his parents divorced, he moved with his mother to Long Beach, Calif., for junior and senior high school. “From being in an elementary school, a Catholic school where the nuns still taught, from going from the South where it was black and white to southern California where there were Hispanics, Samoans, Koreans, Japanese ... it was a huge cultural shift in who I socialized with,” **Thomas** said. “It was phenomenal.”

The 1980s brought an explosion in terms of music and related videos, and those were part of his youth, too. After high school, he returned to the South, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in political science from Valdosta (Ga.) State University and a master’s in public administration from Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville. “I always knew I wanted a job of public service, to work in government,” he said. He chose local government because of its potential for making “the biggest impact on improving the quality of life of a community.” Along the way, he made the acquaintance of Shakespeare, drawn to histories such as “Richard III” and “Henry V.” His favorite movie is “Citizen Kane,” and his favorite actor is Marlon Brando, particularly in “The Wild One” and “The Godfather.”

Change, getting to know people

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“I’m still in the meet-and-greet stage” **Thomas** said of his job. “That’ll probably continue for the next year.” Stops have included the Rotary, various businesses and a Quad-Cities Chamber of Commerce event at the i wireless Center. He also has had the directors of various departments, including police, fire, public works and parks and recreation, take him around to meet employees. He hasn’t met everyone yet, but he will get back to that when the budget work is finished, **Thomas** said. And he is making it a point to meet every new employee before they start work and remind them “I have an open-door policy.”

Andrew West, the president of the International Association of Firefighters Local 26, said he met **Thomas** in November and he and the union are excited to have someone with a new outlook on the city and its relationship with employees. Some residents got a different impression from their first contact with **Thomas**.

Diane Oestreich, a member of the Rock Island Preservation Society, said she and several others wanted to meet with him to introduce themselves and to stress the significant role preservation has played in making the city what it is today. She was disappointed that her alderman had to intervene in order to get the meeting scheduled and noted that “there seems to be a new movement to make the administration less accessible.”

**Thomas** said he understood the group wanted to talk about the old Lincoln School — a historic building scheduled to be demolished if a developer is not found by July 1 — and he wanted to tour the building before meeting with them. He requests that only top department managers attend council meetings. In the past, other staffers not only attended, but they also addressed the council and were part of the information exchange. “I expect department heads to know all the operations of their department,” **Thomas** explained, adding that their grasp of issues as reported to the council “is part of my ongoing evaluation process.” If they are doing their job, it “should not require them to have their middle managers there.” This has been a change for aldermen, too, but the council needs to give **Thomas** leeway in terms of running things his way, Alderman Joy Murphy, 6th Ward, said. “If it doesn’t work, we can always change.”

As for accessibility, “I think that’s going to take some time,” said Jones and fellow Alderman Terry Brooks, 1st Ward. **Thomas** “is trying to use his time as best he can,” Jones said. “He’s going to have to get comfortable with us and us with him. With transitions, it’s never easy on either party, and when you’ve known somebody for the length of time we’ve had with John Phillips, you get comfortable with that leadership style.” Some people might not notice much difference, but for others, it will seem “upside-down,” Jones added.

The dissemination of information to aldermen is different under **Thomas**, and “it’s uncomfortable for me even,” Jones said. “Change is difficult,” Murphy said. “It’s not fair to judge him simply because he’s different than John Phillips. Whether or not he has an outgoing personality ... I think what the city of Rock Island wants is someone to look out for their best interests, and he’s the guy.” Added Brooks: “We’re not paying him (**Thomas**) to be our friend; we’re paying him to do what’s best for the city. He wants to make sure he gets off on the right

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foot.” Part of the feeling that things are different at City Hall is that **Thomas**’ arrival coincides with other changes.

Finance Director Bill Scott retired in late 2010. Sally Heffernan, the special projects manager, left earlier this year for a job in Normal, Ill. Greg Champagne, the longtime community and economic development director, has announced his retirement effective at the end of March. Even Mayor Dennis Pauley, elected in April 2009, is relatively new after 20 years of Mark Schwiebert at the helm. In addition, the city is getting a new staff member: an assistant to the city manager, a position **Thomas** requested and one the city had in the early 1980s. The job is different from “assistant city manager,” a role filled by Public Works Director Robert Hawes, and one he will keep. He is responsible in that position for labor negotiations with six bargaining units.

Goals: The budget, retail development

Jones, Murphy and Brooks agree that they have been impressed with **Thomas**’ work on the city budget, which was his first and more urgent task, one he stepped into midstream since goal-setting was done in September. His \$108 million proposal is balanced, has no tax increase, no cuts to personnel and no big cuts to city services. In another change, there was not the public input before putting the budget together last year when the city conducted four meetings and used an online survey asking what cuts or changes residents would approve. The main reason is the city was not facing the need to make the big cuts of previous years, Murphy and **Thomas** said. “There was nothing dramatic that needed to be addressed,” **Thomas** added.

Residents still will get a chance to comment on the budget during a public hearing at the March 12 council meeting. The budget will be adopted March 19. Among the reasons the council liked **Thomas** during the interview process is “he believes he can bring retail into the city,” Brooks said. This is a major council goal, and **Thomas** has a past record of success in that area, he said. So, in addition to getting acquainted and working on the budget, **Thomas** is particularly excited about the potential for developing a mega commercial site in southwest Rock Island. “I work year-to-year on the budget, but I’m trained to think in the five- to 10-year perspective and where we want to go,” he said during the interview in his office.

And at that, he rose from his chair and walked to a large aerial map showing the proposed development, a 90-acre tract in the northwest corner of the Interstate 280 and Illinois 92 intersection, next to Jumer’s Casino and Hotel. “This is the big project that attracted me to this job,” he said, his face lighting up. “I love this kind of stuff. I’ve dealt with this kind of stuff. I’ll be hands-on on this project. This is really our big shot.” The map is across from his desk so he can see it whenever he looks up. “I keep this as a visual,” he said.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
October 13, 2011

**Mayor Reichert ‘dumbfounded’ over Powell decision  
Reinstated Macon Public Works director to get over \$51K in back pay**  
Author: MIKE STUCKA

Richard Powell will resume work as Macon’s public works director at 8:30 a.m. Monday, more than eight months after Macon Mayor Robert Reichert fired him. Reichert said he was “disappointed” and “dumbfounded” by City Council’s 10-4 vote Tuesday night to reinstate Powell, but the mayor said he would work with Powell once he returns to work. Powell will also collect \$51,307.20 in back pay, but no attorney’s fees, Reichert said during a Wednesday afternoon news conference. Reichert said he wouldn’t seek a “witch hunt” against Powell but would make certain he was held to the same standards as other department heads. “I’m sure going to make him toe the line,” he said.

Macon City Council members, by the minimum vote of 10 of the 15 council members to overrule the firing, decided to reinstate Powell about five minutes before midnight Tuesday after a seven-hour hearing and deliberations. One of the deciding votes came from Councilman Charles Jones, who arrived at the hearing several hours late, after Powell summoned him, according to Councilwoman Nancy White. Councilman Mike Cranford was absent from the hearing. Council members White, Lauren Benedict, Ed DeFore and Jaime Kaplan voted against reinstating Powell. Voting to reinstate Powell was Jones, along with council members Tom Ellington, Henry Ficklin, Rick Hutto, Elaine Lucas, Lonnie Miley, Larry Schlesinger, James Timley, Frank Tompkins and Virgil Watkins. Watkins and Miley said Wednesday that city administrators failed to prove that Powell should have been fired.

“I don’t see where there was a good proof of incompetence,” Watkins said. Miley, chairman of the council’s Public Works and Engineering Committee, said he didn’t see enough evidence against Powell. “The administration didn’t prove their case that he should have been fired and that he was inadequate for the job,” Miley said. Benedict disagreed, saying administrators correctly gave Powell a performance review, then a plan to improve, then moved to fire him when he didn’t. “I felt the administration met its burden of showing good cause for the termination, and of course that’s what the administrative law judge recommended as well,” Benedict said. The person who acted as a judge in the case, to the City Council’s jury, was attorney Robert Gunn of Macon. His recommendation, called a determination, was not binding. Powell will start Monday by filling out insurance forms and other paperwork before moving into a transitional period in the department.

The city’s interim public works director, Shawn Fritz, will finish this week in that capacity and stay on the city’s payroll for another three weeks as a consultant. Reichert said he is looking to see if Fritz is suitable and available for another city job. A letter from Reichert and then-Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said Powell was fired for “incompetent, negligent or inefficient performance.” City administrators claimed, among other things, that Powell had never

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written a complete strategic plan; caused \$50,000 worth of damage to an excavator during a demonstration at Durr's Lake; illegally hunted wild hogs at the city landfill; mismanaged efforts to sweep streets; and drew at least 143 complaints after Powell changed trash collection routes without telling residents. Miley said many of those complaints were incorrectly portrayed by administrators. The city's Public Works directors have always been hands-on people, making certain all the work is being done correctly. He said they're not people who sit in offices at a computer working on plans. Miley also disputed the account of the excavator, saying Powell got it stuck but it was undamaged until crews tried to free it.

Watkins said he considered some of those charges against Powell to be anecdotes that aren't so different from other operations in the city. Watkins, chairman of the council's Public Safety Committee, said he's been trying for perhaps six weeks to get a satisfactory strategic plan out of the Macon Police Department. Those employees also damage city property, such as after patrol car accidents, but are not fired as Powell was, Watkins said. In a recorded deposition, **Thomas** said Powell consistently overspent his budget without explanation, didn't tell him about the excavator accident and didn't improve under a correction action plan after failing a performance review. **Thomas** testified that Powell was given nearly 10 months to improve

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
September 20, 2011

**Macon-Bibb firehouse ‘prank’ video leads to probe**

Author: AMY LEIGH WOMACK

Macon-Bibb County fire officials are investigating a video posted online Sunday depicting what appears to be a masked man threatening firefighters with a gun inside a fire station. The video, posted on YouTube, is titled “Rookie prank,” and it reportedly was filmed at the department’s firehouse on Peake Road. Chief Marvin Riggins said he first learned of the video Monday morning and has plans to talk with the firefighters involved. “I’ll get to the bottom of it and see what occurred,” he said. Riggins first viewed the video about 11:50 a.m. with Macon’s chief administrative officer, **Thomas Thomas**, and mayoral spokesman Clay Murphey. It was clear that the video exhibited behavior “that would not be condoned in his department,” Murphey said of the chief’s reaction. “I imagine there will be repercussions.” Riggins said he’s “deeply saddened” by the video. “This isn’t the way we treat our employees,” he said. The video, which lasts about a minute and a half, shows a man with a gun, wearing a yellow bandana over his face, entering a common area near the firehouse kitchen. At least five people are on the floor, face down, when the gunman leads one firefighter from his spot on the ground off screen while waving a gun. Moments later, you can hear what sounds like a gunshot. The video was removed from YouTube on Monday morning by the poster, then re-posted by someone else. Riggins said he didn’t know the identity of the original poster who used the online handle “FirefighterBoomer519.” The department has policies prohibiting hazing and firearms, he said. Riggins said he’s going to keep “an open mind” during the investigation.

County Commissioner Lonzy Edwards had not viewed the video before he received a call from The Telegraph on Monday. His first reaction? “I was absolutely shocked,” said Edwards, who serves as chairman of the commission’s Public Safety Committee. If the investigation determines that the video is what it purports to be, “it is an outrage of the first order,” he said. Even if the investigation finds that the video recorded a prank in progress, the behavior is inappropriate and “way, way across the line,” he said. Besides the video seemingly showing public safety employees in positions of responsibility wasting time paid for by taxpayers, Edwards noted that it also comes at a time when Macon and Bibb County have been trying to find solutions to recent gun violence.

There could have been tragic consequences if someone who didn’t know the encounter was a fake had walked in or been present with a gun, he noted. The behavior in the video reflects negatively on the fire department and the community, he said. “I think it can’t help but somehow make it appear that this kind of behavior is acceptable,” Edwards said. “This is not something you can play around with for even a moment. “It does not set a good example.” He said he’s especially interested in knowing whether what appears to be a weapon is a real weapon, whether the gun was loaded with live ammunition, and if all the participants knew the encounter was a prank. “I hope that a message is sent that is strong enough and loud enough that this won’t happen again,” he said.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
September 10, 2011

**Ethics complaints coming against Elaine Lucas**

Author: JIM GAINES

Macon City Councilwoman Elaine Lucas is the target of another round of ethics complaints, sparked as before by her posts on Facebook. Wednesday, the Facebook group “Remove Elaine Lucas From Office” posted a copy of the city’s ethics complaint form with a request for people to send it to City Hall along with screen shots of her “racist” posts. “Maconites, we must flood City Hall with complaints and demand action,” the page said. Friday afternoon, local Republican Party leader Bill Knowles wrote in his “We Are Politics” blog that he mailed his complaint against Lucas on Friday and at least one other person is filing against her. He cited four city ethics code sections, which say public officials should “act with integrity,” “exercise sound judgment and apply ethical principles,” treat all citizens with “courtesy, impartiality and equality,” and avoid any action that would decrease confidence in their integrity. “Mrs. Lucas cannot be allowed to get away with the type of nonsense that she has spread over the last several weeks,” Knowles wrote. “I can promise that she will play the victim in this scenario, which is far from the truth. The victims here are her constituents, citizens of Macon and Bibb County, and especially the racial relationships between members of the white and black communities that she is trying so hard to tear apart.”

Lucas, reached Friday evening, said little. “It’s clearly harassment and an attempt at intimidation,” she said. “I will not be a part of it, and I have no further comment.” Knowles’ ethics complaint, which he provided to The Telegraph, is accompanied by 18 pages of printouts from Lucas’ postings. Among them are allegations of conspiracies by her “enemies,” who are “all Republican tea baggers.” She compares former Councilman Erick Erickson to a pyromaniac, wishing his “little Hitler-like family” would move to the other side of the world. Erickson, her frequent antagonist, left the council in February to become a full-time talk-radio host in Atlanta, but he still writes a column for The Telegraph. She claimed that Telegraph Editorial Page Editor Charles Richardson works for Mayor Robert Reichert.

“Charles Richardson is a stooge controlled by the good old boy system. He is a token who sold his soul a long time ago,” Lucas posted. She sarcastically refers to Republicans as “our masters,” seeking to perpetuate slavery. “All they want us to do is behave like good little children and pick dis here cotton,” Lucas wrote. Knowles said all those filing complaints will use the same posts as evidence. “I think that the one that broke the camel’s back was the one that was actually posted on our website,” he said. That one described the group Move Macon Forward as a “replacement” for the Ku Klux Klan. Move Macon Forward spent more than \$21,000 on phone campaigns supporting Reichert and former Council President Miriam Paris during one week in August. In the Aug. 16 runoff election, Reichert narrowly defeated former Mayor C. Jack Ellis, but Paris handily beat Elaine Lucas’ husband, David, for a state Senate seat.

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Move Macon Forward’s backers included Democratic activist Amy Morton and former Democratic adviser Chris Carpenter, Republican state Reps. Allen Peake and Robert Dickey, Republican consultant Mitch Hunter, businessman Roy Fickling, and former Mercer University President Kirby Godsey. As of Friday afternoon, city Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** had received only one complaint against Lucas, filed in July by the Rev. Victor Hunt, though someone recently asked **Thomas** for a copy of the complaint form, mayoral spokesman Clay Murphey said.

Hunt, who ran against Lucas in the 2007 Democratic primary, alleged in July that one of her Facebook posts described him as a drug user and delinquent on child support payments. Hunt was backing former Telegraph reporter Chris Horne in a bid for a City Council seat, but Horne lost to Lucas in this year’s primary election. At that time, Lucas noted that she didn’t name anyone specifically, called Hunt’s allegation a publicity stunt and wouldn’t comment any further.

When Knowles’ complaint and any others arrive, they’ll be forwarded to Municipal Court Judge Robert Faulkner. Faulkner said he ruled against Hunt’s complaint because Lucas’ words didn’t amount to an ethics breach, and even clearly untrue statements don’t necessarily do so. The new complaints face a similar uphill climb. “Just because you say something that’s not nice about someone doesn’t make it a violation,” Faulkner said. “There are a lot of things that I think would be a whole lot better if they weren’t said or done, but that doesn’t make them a violation of the ethics code.” Knowles said by phone Friday that he’d like to see Lucas ejected from office, or at least reprimanded. He asked her for evidence after she alleged that people were being paid to remove her campaign signs, he said. “She said I was ‘harassing’ her and that her husband wouldn’t like it,” Knowles said. “Then she told me to go beat up on somebody that I loved, that I should really get a thrill out of it.”

That’s the sort of statement that shouldn’t come from a holder of public office, he said. Knowles said he hopes community leaders and other elected officials will step forward to support the ethics complaints. “Something needs to be done about this, because she’s a loose cannon,” he said. “She’s putting such a bad face on the city, it’s just incredible.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
September 2, 2011

**Macon CAO Thomas leaving for Illinois job  
Thomas says he wants to be near Midwest relatives**  
Author: JIM GAINES

**Thomas Thomas**, chief administrative officer of Macon since November 2008, will leave Sept. 30 to become city manager of Rock Island, Ill. “I’ve enjoyed my time here. I’ve been allowed to run this place like a business,” he said Thursday. “I’ve had a boss who’s given me latitude to run it like a manager, and he’s supported me in making some tough financial recommendations that ... politically could easily have been avoided but made good business sense.” For the moment, **Thomas** will be replaced by Finance Director Dale Walker, who was himself just hired in May. “He makes my leaving a whole lot easier,” **Thomas** said. “I’m not leaving the mayor in the lurch.” Walker said via e-mail that he looks forward to the challenge but couldn’t do it without a couple of “key people” in the finance and mayor’s offices, who worked closely with him on this year’s budget. **Thomas** said he’d been thinking about finding a job in Illinois since his daughter graduated from Macon’s Central High School. She starts classes Monday at Columbia College in Chicago, he said. The chance to be closer to her, and to his wife’s family in Peoria, Ill., was too good to pass up, **Thomas** said.

“I always told the mayor if I ever left the city of Macon, it wouldn’t be for somewhere in Georgia. It would be somewhere in the Midwest so my wife could be closer to her family,” **Thomas** said. Rock Island, a city of about 44,000, is a three-hour drive from Chicago and 90 minutes from Peoria. The Quad City Times, which serves Rock Island, reported that **Thomas** was chosen from among 60 applicants. John Phillips, city manager there for 24 years, announced a year ago that he would retire in October 2011, the newspaper reported. Rock Island and Macon announced **Thomas**’ selection on the same day. Rock Island City Council is expected to vote on his hiring Friday, and he should start work Oct. 24, according to the Quad City Times. The Macon CAO job will be immediately advertised by the city, the International City Managers Association, the Georgia Municipal Association and the U.S. Conference for Mayors. A pool of applicants may be ready for interviews by the end of the month, **Thomas** said.

The position pays about \$140,000, up 27 percent from the previous year due to the recently enacted pay plan for all city employees. Walker said he would be eligible to fill the permanent position. He has maintained his annual qualifications through the International City Managers Association, he said. Walker began his career as finance director for Owosso, Mich., from 1970 to 1974, according to his rĒsumĒ. He spent 30 years as finance director and deputy city manager of Cadillac, Mich. He was three months into the job in Cadillac when the city manager there resigned, so Walker served as Cadillac’s interim city manager for nearly a year, he said. “So this quick turnaround is nothing new, but I have enjoyed working with **Thomas** and will be working (with him) closely so that nothing falls through the cracks before a full-time replacement can be named,” Walker said.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
August 28, 2011

**SPLOST project breakdown**

**Funding includes debt payoff, fire stations, recreation and storm drainage**

Author: JIM GAINES and MIKE STUCKA

Now that Macon and Bibb County officials have agreed, however reluctantly, on a list of projects for a proposed special purpose local option sales tax, gears are shifting from that negotiation to selling the six-year plan to voters on Nov. 8. The final list leaves out major renovations to the Bibb County Courthouse, central to earlier versions, and includes many recreation projects; but its authors stress three other features as the most important: debt relief, public safety and infrastructure.

“I know there are people out there that talk about being upset about one or two particular things on the SPLOST, but overall it is so important to our community to move forward,” said City Councilwoman Jaime Kaplan, who served on a city-county joint committee on recreation needs. Although dollar figures are attached to each item, most of the actual costs remain “guesstimates.” That’s to be expected, according to Bibb County Board of Commissioners Chairman Sam Hart and City Attorney Martha Welsh. “The voters are primarily approving the project with the estimate, not a precise dollar figure,” Welsh said. The funding for some other projects was arbitrarily reduced. If one project costs less than projected and another costs more, money can be shifted around to some extent, Hart said. “We’ve really got to go back and do a heck of a lot of work and put some costs to some of the things that are being proposed, and we’ve not done that,” he said. “We did get the director (of recreation) to do some due diligence at what those costs are going to be.” Solid or soft, the estimates for each project are broken down into seven categories: Debt relief

Paying off city and county bond debt would take a quarter of the predicted \$190 million in SPLOST revenue. The city is slated for \$14 million, but another \$7.3 million classed as “capital outlay” would go to pay off equipment leased through the Georgia Municipal Association. It appears that \$4 million of that would go to pay off city leases, and \$3.3 million to county leases. Altogether, city Finance Director Dale Walker has said that could save the city up to \$4 million a year in payments. The county is down for \$30.7 million to retire debt. Hart said the county has yet to figure out which bonds it can pay off early. “One thing we do know, it would be a savings,” he said.

**Public safety**

Three new fire stations, one in the city and one each at the north and south ends of the county would get a total of \$12 million. Soon the ISO ratings for city and county -- used to determine fire insurance rates -- will be combined, city Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said. Unless coverage improves in the unincorporated area, that could mean higher rates for city residents; but if the county is brought to the same level as the city, county dwellers’ rates

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should go down, he said. Eight million dollars is set aside to upgrade the 800 MHz emergency communication system, which **Thomas** describes as “critical.” The current system was inherited from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. “That gives you an idea of how old it is,” he said. A new county juvenile justice center is down for \$7 million, and \$5 million for law enforcement vehicles and equipment, split evenly between city and county. The final piece under public safety is \$3 million for a new animal control complex; some council members sought to reduce that amount, but Mayor Robert Reichert said the price was based on a comparable shelter being built in Alpharetta.

**Recreation**

A wholly new “Sub South” recreation complex in the Hartley Bridge area is down for \$8.2 million, just \$300,000 short of what the recreation committee proposed. “There’s nothing down there right now,” Kaplan said. “I guess I could say that’s the most underserved area of the county.” The plan calls for a new tennis center, ball fields and multi-purpose fields, a playground and clubhouse. Six million dollars are earmarked for Central City Park, but that’s a far cry from the committee’s \$15.8 million recommendation. The plan called for a duck pond with paddle boats, extensive playgrounds and ball fields, and several new buildings. What’s left will probably buy another set of ball fields, some parking lot work and renovation of current buildings, but that remains to be decided, city Parks and Recreation Director Dale “Doc” Dougherty said. There’s \$4.4 million for a replacement Rosa Jackson Recreation Center. The current center has no room to expand, so city officials want to renovate the former Martin Luther King Elementary School a few blocks away as a full-scale cultural arts center for all of east Macon.

“It won’t be just another recreation center with a basketball court and a meeting room,” Dougherty said. But city planners haven’t had talks with the Bibb County Board of Education to see if the school is even available; they just figure the site isn’t currently in use, he said. Initially, \$5.3 million was sought for construction of a new senior citizens’ center and renovation of city Parks and Recreation offices. In the final version that’s cut to \$2 million. That definitely means adjustment of plans, but Dougherty said they’ll do their best with what they’re given. Nearly \$1.3 million is slated for the John Drew Smith Tennis Center, which hosts tournaments of up to 1,200 people, Dougherty said. That makes it a “serious economic driver” for the area, but current facilities are inadequate for those numbers -- especially the restrooms, he said. “The plan there would be to make it a two-story building,” Dougherty said. Most of the rest of the money is spread among the city’s other recreation centers, the long-stalled Filmore Thomas Recreation Area, and a few smaller parks. The recreation centers in particular are in need of renovations, some expansion, and air conditioning.

**Economic development**

One of Reichert’s priorities is redeveloping Second Street as a landscaped, walkable commercial corridor, eventually stretching from the convention center through downtown and curving up to Mercer University. The plan includes \$8 million for the first phase of that project. Another \$6 million would go to buy land at the south end of Bibb County, clearing the “noise and crash

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corridor” for Robins Air Force Base. That should give this area an edge in avoiding the next round of military base reductions and closures, **Thomas** said. The Macon-Bibb County Industrial Development Authority would get \$5.9 million to buy more land and develop infrastructure; Reichert has said they’re out of prepared 100-acre sites for attracting large industries. Finally, \$5 million would go to upgrade the Macon Coliseum and City Auditorium.

Infrastructure

City and county would evenly split \$14 million for drainage projects and \$10 million for street repairs, according to the proposed agreement. “We don’t have specific projects identified,” City Engineering Manager Bill Causey said. He previously told City Council that \$10 million would take care of the most pressing drainage needs. Causey said he expects to be asked for a master list of the streets most in need of repair, and there are plenty: in a current round of work, city crews are finding streets in worse shape than they thought.

Capital projects

Besides the leased-equipment purchase, there’s another \$6 million in this category for unspecified “public safety and other facilities and equipment.”

Cultural arts

The most expensive and controversial project is \$2.5 million to finish the Tubman African American Museum building. But for it to get SPLOST funds, the city may have to take legal title, though not operate the museum. If that can’t be done, the money would be redirected to other cultural projects. Fort Hawkins is down for \$750,000, though its backers sought \$3 million to fully rebuild the historic fort. Bowden Golf Course, which the city would keep even after handing over recreation to the county, would get \$600,000. That would replace the 25-year-old irrigation system and rebuild the greens, Dougherty said. “Without grass, it’s not much of a golf course,” he said. A final \$300,000 would go toward repairs at Rose Hill Cemetery.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)

June 16, 2011

**Macon council panel passes \$116M budget**

Author: JIM GAINES

Macon City Council's Appropriations Committee took just 45 minutes Wednesday to unanimously approve the city's \$116 million budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. But that speedy and cordial acceptance came at the end of several weeks of department-by-department questioning and review, numerous math corrections and policy debates before the final version was made ready for a June 21 council vote. "To my knowledge, all of the changes we asked to be made have been made," Committee Chairman Mike Cranford said. Even so, council members had a few last questions. Councilman Rick Hutto, who attended the meeting but is not a committee member, asked where about \$900,000 in previously planned spending was listed. The city pledged \$250,000 extra to support the Georgia Music Hall of Fame, and \$2 million over three years to the Macon Housing Authority, which was seeking a match for a federal HOPE VI grant application. The state decided to close the music hall, and the grant application was denied. But that wasn't known when the budget's first draft was prepared, Hutto said. Finance Director Dale Walker said those spending items do not remain in the budget. Councilman Tom Ellington pointed out one recurring problem with the ordinance to approve the budget: While the council has repeatedly said any changes in spending should have council authorization, the ordinance presented to the committee by the mayor's office says changes up to \$5,000 could be done at the department level. Ellington moved to cut the sentence short, requiring council approval for any changes.

"It seems like we have to do this every year, and I suppose I'll be the one to do it this year," he said. The motion passed unanimously. The committee decided earlier to move budgeted payments for lobbying firm Blank Rome into unallocated reserves, doubting the firm's effectiveness. But monthly payments were still earmarked for the firm, and Councilman Virgil Watkins wondered what would happen when the next payment comes due July 1. "We don't have authorization to pay it," Walker said.

Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said it would be up to mayor and council to agree on what to do next. Hutto warned that the firm could then perform work as usual, then demand back payment from the city for work already performed under contract. The city should send Blank Rome a letter stating its intent to cancel the contract, he said. Cranford said he'd like to rebid the lobbying job, but Councilwoman Elaine Lucas said the city can't really afford to spend \$15,000 a month on a Washington lobbyist at all -- especially when the city's new grants director, Aryn Johnson, has made more valuable contacts in a few months than Blank Rome ever has. "They just send us e-mails, telling us what we can read in the paper. And invoices," Lucas said. Ellington said he thinks there's some value in having a lobbyist, but he wants to look for a better one. Lucas argued against the precedent of keeping money earmarked for that function, but her motion to dispense with it entirely failed 3-2, with only Councilman Virgil Watkins supporting her.

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Lucas noted that funding for Municipal Court was still listed as unallocated. Cranford and **Thomas** said a decision on money for that department awaits an internal audit, now under way, and a report on the effectiveness of a scanner to speed some payments. Lucas said she's going to watch the issue. "There is a feeling that Municipal Court is being targeted," she said. "They are understaffed. We know that." Cranford said he agreed on the staffing issue. Claims of how much manpower the Finance Department had provided the court, and Municipal Court's own report of its work levels, were different as "night and day," he said.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
June 7, 2011

**More police presence likely in Village Green neighborhood**

Author: JIM GAINES

Residents of Macon’s Village Green neighborhood and similarly troubled areas around Bloomfield Drive may soon have more of a Macon Police Department presence on their streets. The three Macon City Council members who represent Ward 2, which covers that area, are asking the city to move a police precinct into the former AmeriCorps office at 3928 Bloomfield Drive, and that the reaction from Mayor Robert Reichert and Police Chief Mike Burns has been positive. A resolution making that request is on the City Council agenda Tuesday, to be referred to the council’s Public Safety Committee for consideration. “We’re trying to create as much of a police presence in that area as possible,” said Councilman Mike Cranford, co-sponsoring the resolution with Councilmen Ed DeFore and James Timley.

DeFore said he has spoken with Reichert, Burns and Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** about the building, which should take minimal work to serve as a fully functional police office. Several years ago DeFore lobbied to get an officer to live in Village Green, and one did for some time. But he was reassigned to patrol duty, and Burns said the department couldn’t afford to fix up another house in the area, DeFore said. So DeFore suggested the empty AmeriCorps office as a precinct site, 3.5 miles from the office in Macon Mall. Just the presence of officers between patrol shifts should serve as a good deterrent to crime in the area, he said. DeFore said Burns told him this week that he approved of the idea. Cranford said council members have been trying to get a greater police presence in the area for several years. “We just think that the time is right for it,” he said. The past sticking point has been money. Some locations the city can use for free, and on some it pays rent. Given current budget constraints, police have to choose spots that cost practically nothing to occupy, Cranford said.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
May 28, 2011

**City may not recoup money from damaged houses**

Author: JIM GAINES

Months after it came to light that Macon has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair vandalism and theft damage at 23 empty houses the city built, it's still unclear whether the city will recoup any of that loss even though the houses were insured. The city's Economic and Community Development Director Wanzina Jackson said the only word has been a March 28 letter from insurance agent Coleman Tidwell. The letter, addressed to Macon-Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council Executive Director Jimmie Samuel -- the Macon-Bibb EOC is one of the nonprofits that actually holds the house deeds -- essentially says that the city should eat the damage costs and have a coherent plan ready in case of future vandalism. So many months have passed since much of the damage occurred that insurers might not honor claims filed now, Tidwell wrote. And filing a big batch of claims at once will "almost assuredly" require the city to find a new insurer at a much higher rate, and a deductible higher than the current \$5,000, he wrote.

"Please understand my intent is not to avoid getting claims paid, but rather to help with a long-term plan of risk management that includes self-insuring on the small claims and filing only the larger claims we can't afford to self-insure on," the letter said. The city built the houses in depressed neighborhoods, using federal funds, but was unable to sell them when the real estate market collapsed. They are officially owned by nonprofit agencies, but the city paid about \$170,000 in insurance premiums -- and \$45,000 for burglar alarms, which failed to prevent repeated break-ins and the theft of fixtures and copper wire. Some houses were damaged half a dozen times, with repair costs totaling more than the value of the house.

Altogether the city spent more than \$300,000 on repairs -- with almost all of that coming from federal funds not specifically designated for repairs. Council members have argued that the city may have to pay that money back to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Mayor Robert Reichert has said HUD officials have said not to spend more federal money on repairs, but haven't asked for a refund. When it comes to seeking any reimbursement for the city's costs, however, it's not even her task to file insurance claims, Jackson said. That's up to the nonprofit deedholders, she said. Jackson said she's working on a policy to determine what level of damage should lead to filing an insurance claim, but it's not finished, though council members requested such a statement more than two months ago. "We don't have an actual plan at this time," she said. Jackson said she's contacted the state insurance commissioner to ask what's a "normally reasonable" time to file a claim. She was told some companies consider a year reasonable, while others give as little as three months.

Offhand, Jackson wasn't sure how many potential claims were older than those parameters. Lack of information and lack of action has provoked frustration and fury from some Macon City Council members. "To date, we have received NO further information that we were promised on

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**Thomas Thomas**

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this issue,” Councilman Rick Hutto said via e-mail to The Telegraph. “You will recall at the ECD budget hearing I had to ask (Jackson) four times before I was finally told that we have filed NO insurance claims on any of these damaged houses.” After Hutto’s exchange with Jackson, Committee Chairman Mike Cranford asked Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** to make sure insurers attended the next regular Appropriations Committee meeting with all relevant documentation and ECD’s administrative budgets for the last two years.

Cranford describes that lengthy delay in filing claims as “idiocy” on ECD’s part. While the council should have been notified immediately of the damage, legislators shouldn’t have to specify that an insurance claim should be filed immediately when serious damage occurs. Tidwell’s advice just makes it worse, Cranford said. “For all practical purposes, we’re self insured, because we’re paying for those repairs ourselves. So why do we even need insurance?” he said. “I would ask for the insurance commissioner to conduct an investigation into why the insurance company doesn’t want to pay these claims.” Some of the battered houses, at least, won’t cost the city any more money. On May 17, the City Council voted to give 10 of the houses to River Edge Behavioral Health Center for use as rental property. Those houses were estimated to still need perhaps \$180,000 in repairs. Jackson said she’s “in talks” with another nonprofit to dispose of the remaining 13 houses as rental units.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
May 27, 2011

**Radio deal leads to dispute at Bibb budget hearing**

Author: MIKE STUCKA

Bibb County officials said Thursday they were shocked to learn that Macon expects county money to fund decisions made without the county government's knowledge. City officials said county officials knew and agreed to everything. The city and county agreed in a contract to pursue upgrades to an ailing 800Mhz radio system, which helps emergency workers communicate. The system hasn't completely failed, but parts of it have been broken 30 percent of the time, officials have said. County officials said they hadn't known the city had already signed a contract with Motorola for a new system. County Finance Director Deborah Martin said she was expecting a \$1.5 million request for next year, not to hear that county money had already been obligated by a partner.

"I thought that was to consider whether we can include it in next year's budget, and basically, it's, for lack of a better term, it's being shoved down our throats," Martin said. "The money's been obligated, and we have to have it in the budget." Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** was surprised Thursday to hear county commissioners didn't know about the funding. They should have known, since Emergency Management Agency Director Don Druitt and Information Technology Director Stephen Masteller worked it out with someone from the county's IT department, **Thomas** said. "This is something we spearheaded a couple of months ago," **Thomas** said. Masteller said at a county budget hearing that the city was cutting important expenses to make sure it had enough money for the 800Mhz system. "This is life-and-death type stuff. Our next year's budget does include this project moving forward," he said. Masteller said the first payment to Motorola is due in November. But it's not just fiscal 2012 money the county was surprised by.

In Thursday's budget hearing for fiscal 2012, Masteller gave county commissioners a budget document listing payments for fiscal 2011, which ends in five weeks. One line called for "Total County FY11 Financial Obligation to City" of \$626,558.30, Another \$220,642 is listed as a direct cost for the county, while more money is expected for fiscal 2012, which begins in July. Bibb County Chief Administrator Steve Layson, **Thomas**' counterpart, said he'd never gotten a reply from **Thomas** on when funding would be required to build the three phases of upgrading the radio system. "The Phases do not have any time tables associated with them. Please provide me with your projections," Layson wrote in a Jan. 11, 2011, letter. "This is a budgetary issue and will be submitted for the 2012 budget under IT's capital request." Layson and Grant Faulkner, who has been running Bibb County's information technology department, said they had been telling Macon officials that the contractual agreement between the governments required a process of agreement and budgeting before money would be spent.

"They didn't seem to hear us," Layson said. Reached at a conference in Savannah, Druitt said he couldn't say county officials were present when the Motorola contract was signed. But the city

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and county chief administrative officers and information technology representatives were present at a planning meeting with Motorola, Druitt said. “Everyone agreed, and from that point it was up to (city) IT to do the implementation. I’m not sure where there’s a disconnect,” Druitt said. In other budget hearings Thursday: Commissioners reviewed budgets for agencies including the Middle Georgia Regional Library and Bibb County Department of Family and Children Services, but made no financial commitments.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
March 30, 2011

**Temporary leader coming to Macon Public Works**

Author: JIM GAINES

Starting Monday, Macon's Public Works Department will have an interim director, even as the former director's appeal for reinstatement goes on. Macon Mayor Robert Reichert notified Macon City Council members Thursday that he's appointing Shawn Fritz to the job. "We're looking forward to meeting him," Council President Miriam Paris said. Fritz said he is retiring from the U.S. Air Force on May 1, but is using up accumulated leave until then. He lives just outside Macon city limits in northern Bibb County, and has been a resident of the area for 12 years, off and on, with brief stints in Korea and Florida, he said. Public Works and Engineering Committee Chairman Lonnie Miley said Reichert called him personally to inform him of Fritz's appointment, and he asked for Fritz's résumé, which the mayor supplied.

Fritz said administration officials asked him not to comment on his appointment until it's officially announced Monday, but his résumé details a 20-year Air Force career that focused heavily on large-scale planning, logistics, analysis and personnel management. Much of that time was spent working from Robins Air Force Base. Richard Powell was fired as Public Works director Feb. 2. He's appealing that ouster, and a hearing should be scheduled within the next month. Miley said he wants that done as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Parks and Recreation Director Dale Dougherty has been handling day-to-day tasks at Public Works while Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** was formally in charge, according to **Thomas**. But **Thomas** has his hands full with the city's upcoming annual budget, while Public Works needs hands-on management, mayoral spokesman Andrew Blascovich said. Reichert sent a "courtesy notice" of Fritz's appointment to Paris and Miley, Blascovich said.

"The mayor has in the code the ability to make interim appointments," he said. "The power to appoint an interim is the power of the mayor, and the power to appoint a department head is the mayor with the approval of council." Paris agreed that Public Works needs full-time direction, especially during the budget process. Miley said he was unsure whether an interim appointment needed council approval, and that he and Council President Pro Tempore James Timley were checking on that. Meanwhile, he's eager to hear Fritz's plans, he said. "I'm hoping that he will be available to come before my meeting on Tuesday so that he can introduce himself," Miley said.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
March 15, 2011

**Macon council to consider fired public works director's appeal**

Author: JIM GAINES

Fired city Public Works Director Richard Powell's request to be reinstated will get some consideration from Macon City Council, but though council members agreed to discuss his appeal, the shape of that discussion is still undecided. In an Ordinances and Resolutions Committee meeting Monday, Powell's appeal was referred to the whole of council sitting as one committee, but no date was set; and council members are still considering how to handle that hearing. Out of 10 council members present -- the minimum number Powell would need to sway to get his job back -- only Councilman Henry Ficklin voted against acting on Powell's request.

Several council members, however, worried that the proceedings were growing out of control. "It seems like this thing is fixing to turn into a trial," Councilman Mike Cranford said. Macon Mayor Robert Reichert's administration, acting through Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**, accused Powell of "incompetent, negligent or inefficient performance" and fired him in early February. Powell has disputed those charges, also in writing; and said from the outset that he planned to appeal.

City Attorney Pope Langstaff has said that city rules are vague on the subject, but that Powell has a constitutional right to some kind of hearing. In the few previous cases, hearings have usually been before an administrative law judge, but while Powell asked the council to reconsider his termination, he also said that he doesn't want a formal hearing. The administration has already hired an outside attorney to present its case, Cranford said. But he wondered if the council could refuse to hear actual presentations from either side, and simply review the competing document trails. That should make it appear more fair for Powell, who otherwise might be at a disadvantage without an attorney of his own, Cranford said. New council member Blake appointed Beverly Blake was present for the Ordinances and Resolutions Committee meeting, and this time the resolution appointing her to the remaining nine months of Erick Erickson's term in Ward 5 sailed through unopposed. On March 1, the council voted to postpone the appointment of Blake, local program director for the Knight Foundation, until she was personally present. She was out of town on that day, but now the resolution is headed for a final council vote Tuesday.

Erickson resigned in mid-February to take a full-time job as a radio show host in Atlanta. If a council term expires in less than a year, it can be filled by appointment rather than special election. By tradition, that choice is made by the remaining council members for that ward, and Blake was tapped by Councilwomen Lauren Benedict and Nancy White. She has said she does not plan to run for office in the fall election.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)

March 3, 2011

**Macon leaders at odds over empty renovated homes**

Author: PHILLIP RAMATI

A controversy between Macon City Council and the city administration over houses built by the city with federal funds has been simmering for the past couple of years. Now the issue has come to full boil. During a City Council Public Properties Committee meeting last week, several council members blasted Mayor Robert Reichert and Wanzina Jackson, the city's director of the Economic and Community Development Department, about repeat issues pointed out in city audits that are related to that department. The main question from the council: Has the city spent money from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development correctly? And if Macon has spent federal money on expenses for which the funds aren't authorized, for how much is the city on the hook?

Councilman Mike Cranford has been among the most vocal critics and is frustrated that the city is now seemingly stuck with 23 rebuilt houses that it has been unable to sell for the past couple of years, when the sub-prime loan crisis hit communities across the nation. During last week's meeting, he said it was "idiocy" that the city has built properties that have cost the city more than they are worth on the open market. "It's ridiculous that (the administration) has allowed us to get into this hole," Cranford said Wednesday. "We've known about this in two years of audits, and they've done nothing."

**High costs**

The city has spent nearly \$750,000 in federal money in rebuilding or rehabbing houses designed not only to sell to low-income families but also to help improve blighted neighborhoods. But with the houses sitting empty, the majority of them have been vandalized, with costs ranging from few hundred dollars to about \$68,000 in one case. It's still unclear whether the city or HUD will ultimately bear the \$310,000 in vandalism costs to the properties. But council members Cranford, Rick Hutto and others have said they're worried that Macon could be on the hook for the entire \$750,000. Reichert himself has admitted that what once was a very effective and worthwhile program has gone by the wayside since the housing market collapsed. "It's been a real learning experience," he said. "It's inconceivable of what we've gotten into. Rehabilitating a neighborhood is not an easy thing. Even though we had the best of intentions and the program has worked wonderfully well for many years, we've been the victim of circumstances that have left us with egg on our face. It's pretty hard to defend our record with these houses." That might be the only point on which Reichert and members of council agree. Though city problems with the HUD program go back before Jackson was director, Cranford and others argue that the problems have persisted through the current administration.

Cranford noted that according to information Jackson gave to council members, most of the construction and repair work has been performed by the same contractors, which has been an

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issue for the city in dealing with the HUD funds going back to 1998. Cranford said any contracts the city awards over \$20,000 have to be put out for bids, and the federal government has similar guidelines. Reichert said that to his knowledge, the repair work by the contractors was part of the original construction contracts. However, he noted that when **Thomas Thomas** became the city's chief administrative officer in November 2008, **Thomas** required that a police report be submitted and that an ECD official inspect the damage in order to get a separate estimate from what the contractor submitted. "The previous ECD director had given them instructions to keep the houses in sale-ready condition, and their intention was to do so until we changed the policy," Reichert said. Reichert said he doesn't think there was anything unseemly done on the part of the contractors or Macon-Bibb County Equal Opportunity Council Inc., with whom the city was working in partnership on selling some of the houses.

Several issues

Among the current set of housing issues between the council and the administration, however, the bidding issue has taken a back seat to the more pressing question of how much money the city may have to repay HUD. Reichert told council members that he met with regional HUD officials in Atlanta once the 2009 audit issues -- that the city wasn't supposed to use HOME funds for vandalism repairs -- came to light. The officials told him to cease working on the houses immediately. Reichert was told to divide the costs for the houses into two categories -- holding costs and repair costs. Holding costs, Reichert said, include costs in maintaining the houses in sale-ready condition, which is part of the HOME funds requirement -- an alarm system, electricity, water, insurance, interest, taxes, general maintenance and lawn service. Reichert said he's been told by officials that holding costs are expenses that are eligible to be reimbursed. Repair costs, which is how the vandalism costs are being categorized, are a separate issue, Reichert said, and regional HUD officials will refer the question to the main office in Washington. Reichert said he is hopeful that regional HUD officials will visit Macon by the end of the month to inspect the houses for themselves.

Cranford and Hutto, however, said they haven't seen anything in writing from HUD, so they think the city could be on the hook for the overall costs until they get official notification. Hutto said he believes the monthly bills -- electricity, water and other costs -- for the houses are excessive. He said some of the costs seem to be higher in the empty houses than his personal monthly costs in his own home. "Why are we spending so much in lawn maintenance?" Hutto asked rhetorically. "Why does it cost \$100 a month for a water bill? Did we file any insurance claims, and if not, why not?" Jackson said the figures that she turned in to the council are cumulative costs the city has paid over the life of the house.

For example, a house at 587 Hall St. that the city built for \$36,000 has cost the city \$805 in alarm bills, \$207 in electricity, \$1,181 for water, \$5,812 in cleaning/maintenance and \$2,925 in lawn care. Jackson said the average monthly cost to the city for that property was \$246 and that those totals go back to 2008 for that property, which has an approximate value of \$70,000 on the open market. Several council members also have questioned why the city is paying insurance costs and is still having to pay repairs from vandalism. Jackson said in some cases the damage

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wasn't expensive enough to file a claim, which would have led to a higher premium. She said she's in the process of checking which claims have been filed on the houses that have sustained heavy damage. Reichert informed EOC last week that the city would stop covering costs of water, electricity and other expenses beginning March 1. He said Wednesday he hasn't received a response from EOC to his letter. Efforts by The Telegraph to reach EOC Executive Director Jimmie Samuel have been unsuccessful since last week.

The city also is exploring the possibility of turning the houses into rental properties in partnership with a nonprofit agency such as River Edge Behavioral Health Center. Reichert said the consequences of the national housing crisis have impacted most communities across the nation and that Macon isn't the only city facing this problem. The program, which goes all the way back to the Tommy Olmstead administration in the mid-1990s, has had its share of success, rebuilding 131 houses and selling 110 of them before the bottom dropped out of the real estate market. "We didn't do anything wrong," Reichert said. "We're a victim of circumstance of the sub-prime mortgage crisis. HUD has yet to change its eligibility requirements (to qualify for a house), and no one can meet the banks' eligibility requirements. It's having a very real impact on people."

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
February 9, 2011

**Macon council members want action on audit problems**

Author: JIM GAINES

Auditor Miller Edwards sought to put a positive spin Tuesday on an audit report recently delivered to Macon City Council, but council members were having none of it. At a long work session Tuesday evening, Edwards, a CPA from the Mauldin & Jenkins firm, said the overall audit for fiscal 2010 was “clean.” He said it fairly represented the city’s financial picture, for the first time in several years. The audit required fewer adjustments, and the city substantially increased its fund balance. There were a dozen “findings” of financial problems, down from 20 or more in previous years, but there were 17 findings of problems with following the rules for spending federal money, concentrated in the Economic and Community Development Department, Edwards said. “We’re not saying the money was inappropriately spent, but it may not have been spent following all the rules and regulations,” he said.

Some council members have argued that the discovery of about \$1 million in federal money spent on “unallowable activities,” such as utility payments, property monitoring, repairs and unnecessary or excessive contractor charges, means the money will have to be repaid. Mayoral spokesman Andrew Blascovich has said that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has not actually asked for the money back, and so far has not replied to city requests for a clear statement on the issue. The ECD problems and the fact that many are repeats from previous years set council members off Tuesday. Council President Pro Tempore James Timley called the city’s situation “ludicrous,” and called obliquely for the firing of ECD Director Wanzina Jackson, who sat quietly in the back of the room.

One city department, which had no negative findings, recently had its director fired, Timley said -- Public Works Director Richard Powell was fired last week -- while a department in which there were nearly 20 audit findings still has the same person in charge. “What kind of sense does that make?” Timley asked. If the problems are not corrected quickly, he said, “somebody’s head needs to roll.” The common theme in most of the audit findings, Edwards said, is a lack of oversight. There should be someone above department heads, probably in the Finance Department who is free to check on federal grant rule compliance among all the “fragmented” city departments, he said. “That’s still not there,” Edwards said.

Councilman Tom Ellington said he wants to hear the administration’s proposal to deal with the repeat problems. Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said he’s working on it, trying to consolidate some job functions. He can’t really hire a new person to do the job but hopes to have rearranged responsibilities for someone in the upcoming year’s budget, he said. Ellington said he wants to hear of action sooner than that.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
February 8, 2011

**Macon may share business license data with state revenue department**

Author: JIM GAINES

Macon may soon share its business licenses with the Georgia Department of Revenue so that agency can cross-check which companies are paying -- or dodging -- sales taxes, under a resolution that unanimously passed the city's Appropriations Committee on Monday. "What can we get in return?" Councilman Mike Cranford asked city Internal Affairs Director Keith Moffett. Not much right now, but this should be the first step in allowing reciprocal checks, Moffett replied. The move is based on House Bill 1093, which passed last year. There's no real way to tell, but tax dodgers are probably costing the city and state hundreds of thousands of dollars, "maybe millions," Moffett said. "We've always felt that there's been an inconsistency in the amount of sales tax being reported," he said.

Councilman Tom Ellington said a study of four other cities, two years ago, found "significant discrepancies." Even without reciprocal checks, better sales tax collection should increase the amount that comes back to the city, he said. A 1-cent local option sales tax is split 60/40 between the city and county respectively, according to the city finance department. The resolution moves on to the next City Council meeting, Feb. 15, for final consideration.

**Job qualifications**

In the month and a half that former Macon Finance Director Tom Barber's job has been advertised, 15 applications have come in -- but none have met all the qualifications, according to Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**. The administration is asking to drop the requirement that the finance director be a certified public accountant. But an ordinance to do that stalled in committee, postponed until the next meeting. "I completely disagree in the dumbing-down of this position," Councilman Rick Hutto said. "We put the CPA requirement in at the begging request of our auditors." Questioned by Councilman Virgil Watkins, **Thomas** said both Barber and his predecessor were CPAs, but he contended that other Georgia cities don't require that; and that other advanced business degrees combined with administrative experience would suffice. Mayor Robert Reichert broke in to point out that council has the final decision on hiring. "If we bring you a candidate that you don't feel is qualified, turn him down," he said, to no avail.

**Pay reassurance**

Councilman Ed DeFore sponsored a resolution to keep paying city employees at least their current salaries in next fiscal year's budget, under the recently passed pay plan. It passed unanimously, but not without some debate. To mollify those who worried about committing council to expenditures before the next budget is written, DeFore agreed to add "if the budget permits." His biggest concern is retaining police and firefighters, who are costly to train, he said.

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Though she voted to send the resolution on, Councilwoman Elaine Lucas grumbled that DeFore's item headed for passage while her previous resolutions to review the new pay plan and set up an appeals process got tabled. "It sounds like a bit of hypocrisy to me," Lucas said. "If you are for one, you're for the other."

Other items passed on to full council included: Hiring Stephanie Jones as the city's new internal auditor. Routine replacement of police uniforms, bought for \$215,282.48 from Aramark; and fire department uniforms, for \$90,000 from Command Uniforms. Accepting \$177,128 in state grant money to buy a bomb robot, two helmets and two bomb vests. Buying a net core switch for the Information Technology department for \$41,523.20 under the state contract price. The new switch has a backup power supply, unlike the current one, said IT Director Stephen Masteller.

"Currently we don't have any redundancy, so if we lose that switch, our entire data network goes dark," he said. Buying a dump truck for \$34,296.80 from Brannen Ford. Buying a mobile diesel-powered trash pump for the landfill, to replace the current stationary electric pump, for \$33,801 from Thompson Pump & Manufacturing Co. Buying police ammunition of various calibers for \$21,714.88 under the state contract price.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
February 1, 2011

**Powell out as Macon Public Works director**

Author: JIM GAINES

Richard Powell, Macon's Public Works director for a little more than two years, has been placed on paid leave pending termination by Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**. "I've got a meeting in the morning with the mayor," Powell said Monday afternoon. "**Thomas Thomas** told me that I was terminated, asked for my cell phone and my laptop, wouldn't give me any reason -- and that was it." He was told details would be discussed at Tuesday's meeting. Powell said **Thomas** called him into his office at 8:30 a.m. Friday. Human Resources Director Ben Hubbard was waiting there too, Powell said. He said **Thomas** offered him three months of severance pay if he would resign. But Powell said he told **Thomas** that he thought he was doing a good job and wouldn't quit.

Powell is the third city department head whose departure has been announced in the past seven weeks. In mid-December, Finance Director Tom Barber said he was quitting in early January after two years in Macon to become city administrator of Fairburn. On Jan. 25, Reichert told the City Council that City Attorney Pope Langstaff will retire April 28 after 13 years with the city. **Thomas**, with mayoral spokesman Andrew Blascovich by his side, declined to offer details Monday about his Friday meeting with Powell or the reason for his firing, citing personnel privacy concerns. "What I can say is, as of Friday, Richard Powell has been put on administrative leave pending termination," **Thomas** said. "At that point in time, when he is terminated, he can decide whether he wants to avail himself of the appeals process." Blascovich said the administration will have to "go through the process" before making specifics public. He was unaware of any scheduled meeting between Powell and Reichert but said Powell's termination should be finalized in the next day or two. After that, any appeal is up to Powell, Blascovich said.

Powell said he "most definitely" plans to appeal his firing to City Council. The city charter says the mayor can fire department heads "for good cause," but a 10-member majority of council can overrule firings if they find there was not a good cause, Langstaff said. The council can also ask for a written explanation of a firing, which sometimes is a termination letter to the employee, he said. The charter doesn't specify any other recourse, but under the U.S. Constitution's due process clause a fired employee has a right to a hearing, Langstaff said. Since the council has the power to reinstate employees, council members usually conduct such hearings, he said. But at least once before, a hearing has been held by an administrative law judge. City Councilman Charles Jones, chairman of the council's Employee Development and Compensation Committee, said the council's position on Powell's firing will likely come down to whether he carried out what he was asked to do, not whatever he may have done above or apart from his job instructions. "We just have to follow the proper procedures and can't make (a) determination until we figure out whether it is our position to be involved," Jones said.

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Powell said he recently assembled a strategic plan for the department, but **Thomas** told him it “failed.” At that encounter, **Thomas** told him he wasn’t “moving the department in the right direction,” but gave no explanation or indication of what the right direction might be, Powell said. “I’ve made some good changes. We saved money in a lot of areas,” he said. Powell said he oversaw a restructuring of garbage routes, which freed up enough trucks to double the number of houses reached by recycling service without using overtime. Separating yard waste from household garbage, done since April, has already saved about \$70,000 in landfill costs, he said. He said the department also has doubled the number of house demolitions at a lower cost. Council President Miriam Paris said she’s “anxiously awaiting” the administration’s reasons for Powell’s departure. “I’m not aware of problems in the department, but apparently there were,” she said. “I’m anxious to hear what the administration has to say.”

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
December 2, 2010

**Pay plan for city workers presented to Macon council**

Author: JIM GAINES

Mayor Robert Reichert delivered to Macon City Council members Wednesday a long-awaited, comprehensive pay plan for all city employees. Council members unanimously praised the concept and effort but pounced on a short list of big raises outlined in the plan -- especially a \$27,000 raise for Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**, an increase of nearly 24 percent. "Our employees have been waiting 12 years for something like this," Councilman Tom Ellington said, but he stressed the need to examine each change closely. Prompted by Councilman Lonnie Miley, Councilwoman Elaine Lucas moved to endorse the pay plan concept but postpone a vote until the council's Employee Development and Compensation Committee's next meeting. Councilman Charles Jones, committee chairman, set that for Monday, soon after the council's Appropriations Committee also will consider it. The city's last pay plan was scrapped in 1998, and employees have only received a few cost-of-living adjustments since then, Human Resources Director Ben Hubbard said. Over the years, many disparities have crept in, especially for police and firefighters, he said.

The Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia compared Macon employees' pay to similar jobs in 11 other Georgia cities or counties, and assigned a market value to each job, Hubbard said. The plan establishes 33 steps in police and fire pay grades, and 23 grades of general employees with 12 steps pay steps in each. It includes no adjustments for seniority. Parity is maintained "as close as possible" for police and firefighters, Hubbard said. Pay for police and firefighters should be handled ahead of others, with top administrators coming last, Jones said. In recently approving pay for the next mayor and council, no raise was included, he said. "While we're hurting, everybody else is bleeding a lot worse than us," Jones said. No one would take a pay cut under the plan, but those judged to be currently overpaid would see their salaries frozen until the whole pay structure caught up, Hubbard said.

As proposed, the pay plan would cost an extra \$1.2 million in the current fiscal year, and another \$2.4 million in next year's budget. That's within the city budget, but that money has not been formally allocated, Reichert said. Answering a question from Councilwoman Lauren Benedict, Hubbard said 80 percent to 85 percent of that additional money would go to police and firefighters. The plan would not give automatic annual increases. The council would have to specifically appropriate money for any raises, Reichert said.

Most city employees would keep the same pay or see only a few dollars increase, but there are exceptions. Hubbard cited the example of a custodial crew leader currently making \$21,978 per year while other city crew leaders started at \$25,974. The pay proposal would equalize that by starting all crew leaders at \$26,270. The big exception is the chief administrative officer's job, which the city itself analyzed later, since the city had an interim CAO when the Carl Vinson Institute study was done, Reichert said. **Thomas'** job was compared to those at other Georgia

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cities -- and Reichert said he promised **Thomas** that he'd work to get a raise for him as soon as he could. Nevertheless, Reichert urged council members to focus on the comparisons with other cities. "Do not make the mistake, Mr. Chairman, please, of personalizing this," he said. Currently **Thomas** earns \$112,940, and Reichert's proposal would increase his annual salary to \$139,610. Lucas pointed out that in several of the benchmark cities in Macon's own study, the CAO has a bigger job because the mayors are part-time, unlike Macon. Councilman Rick Hutto noted that the cities that pay CAOs more are all larger than Macon.

Jones said Reichert's promise is fulfilled: He tried to get **Thomas** a raise, but the council is not bound to grant one, especially given the city's tight budget. James Timley, council president pro tempore, said if the CAO gets so much more, it should be offset by slashing the mayor's \$103,500 annual pay.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
November 25, 2010

**Ficklin, Erickson in ethics dispute**

Author: JIM GAINES

Two members of Macon City Council filed dueling ethics complaints against each other, but the dispute appears to have blown over -- without admission of error by either side. It started just before the Nov. 9 meeting when Councilman Henry Ficklin, who had just won a special election to return to council after a three-year absence, had a brief conversation with Keith Moffett, director of internal affairs for Macon Mayor Robert Reichert. From there, accounts diverge. Councilman Erick Erickson, who writes an opinion column for The Telegraph, wrote Nov. 12 that Ficklin complained that he hadn't gotten a letter of congratulations on his election, and he wouldn't cooperate with Reichert until he did. "So much for any sign of Christian humility in the Right Reverend Ficklin," Erickson's sarcasm-laden column said. Ficklin is pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church

Ficklin responded Nov. 19 with an ethics complaint to city Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**, accusing Erickson of "grossly misrepresenting the truth" and inventing conversations. "I thought it was very disconcerting for him to write such an article," Ficklin said Wednesday. The ethics complaint moved on to Municipal Court Judge Robert Faulkner, and Erickson said Wednesday that the judge -- after talking to Moffett -- said he planned to dismiss Ficklin's complaint. "I have then told him to dismiss mine against Henry," Erickson said. Ficklin said he was unaware of the impending dismissal -- or of Erickson's countercharge. "I have not heard about any of that," he said. Ficklin said it is Faulkner's prerogative to dismiss his complaint if he believes it's without merit, but he stands by his account. "My ethics complaint has what happened in it," Ficklin said. In his account, Ficklin said Moffett actually approached him to ask about a phone call. At a later committee meeting, Ficklin wrote, he gave his version in Moffett's presence and was not refuted. He contended that Erickson violated the city's ethics ordinance on three counts: making false statements, seeking to injure public confidence in officials and using his column as a vehicle for unethical public gain.

Erickson responded in two ways Nov. 22: with a letter asking Faulkner to dismiss Ficklin's complaint, and a letter to **Thomas** making a complaint of his own against Ficklin. "He's trying to get back at me, I understand that," Ficklin said. Erickson's letter to Faulkner says Ficklin's complaint misinterprets the ethics code. The provision about undermining public confidence refers to a member's own disreputable behavior, not "shedding light on the elementary school antics of another member of council," Erickson wrote. He said he's not paid for his newspaper column, and that other witnesses on council can back up his account of what happened. Moffett and two other members of City Council who sit next to Erickson broadly verify his account of the conversation. Moffett said Wednesday that he did approach Ficklin to follow up on a few phone messages, but after that his account matched Erickson's.

Reichert did verbally congratulate Ficklin on his election, and since then he has sent a letter

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doing so formally, Moffett said. No such letters have previously been sent to council members, so he's not sure why Ficklin expected one, Moffett said. Councilwoman Nancy White said that Moffett was walking to one end of the council's "horseshoe" dais as Ficklin came up the steps and stopped to talk. Ficklin was behind where she sat with Erickson and Councilwoman Lauren Benedict, as Moffett stood in front, she said. "We were right in the middle of it and heard everything," White said. "My recollection does confirm what he said, although there was more to it. His column was somewhat of a condensed version of the encounter. There was not a whole lot more, but there was more to it."

Benedict said she doesn't recall the conversation word for word, or who approached whom, but that she couldn't help hearing the basics as she stood by her chair. "The conversation as Erick related it in his column is basically how I remember it occurring," Benedict said. Erickson's letter to **Thomas** said that a congratulatory letter from the mayor would help Ficklin in his ongoing lawsuit against the Bibb County school system, and thus it's Ficklin who is seeking unethical personal gain.

Ficklin, a longtime teacher, claims age discrimination led the school system to pass him over for numerous administrative jobs despite his qualifications. The school system maintains that the successful applicants had more relevant experience or that Ficklin's many other activities discouraged choosing him.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
August 31, 2010

**In wake of Macon's new health care package, police-fire pension plan criticized**

Author: PHILLIP RAMATI

In the wake of the city of Macon's controversial new health care package, former Bibb County Commission Chairman Charlie Bishop is accusing the city of not meeting its responsibilities when it comes to the police and fire pension plan. Bishop, who worked 35 years in the Macon Police Department, is the police representative on the city's pension board. During the most recent board meeting earlier this month, Bishop and Macon City Councilman Charles Jones, who serves as the board's chairman, got into a heated debate about whether the city is meeting its fiscal responsibilities regarding pensions. "This thing is real involved," Bishop said. "It's a lot bigger than what it looks like." Bishop said that the city could face sanctions from the state if the fund doesn't meet the standards set in the actuarial report.

City officials said this week that the pension fund is in no danger and has enough money to keep it going for a long time. "It's still got more than \$150 million in assets," said Andrew Blascovich, spokesman for Mayor Robert Reichert. "For the immediate, the intermediate and long-term future, it still looks really good." City officials said they've always planned on being in compliance with the actuarial report and shouldn't have any issues with the state. There's disagreement over how the city should have funded the plan since fiscal 2009. The city said it didn't receive a report from actuary Chuck Carr of Southern Actuarial Services Co. until April, in part because the city's fiscal 2009 audit wasn't available until June. Carr said that based on his numbers, the city should have been funding the plan at 16.44 percent of covered payroll. To that point, the city had been funding the pension plan at just 6 percent, which at the time was a higher rate than the previous actuarial report of 2 percent conducted two years earlier. A city ordinance requires an actuarial study for the plan every two years.

Macon officials acknowledged that the city will have to make up the fiscal 2009 difference, with interest. Macon Finance Director Tom Barber said the amount the city owes for fiscal 2009 is roughly \$2.5 million without interest. Barber, Reichert, Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** and Human Resources Director Ben Hubbard are currently working on a plan that will repay the pension fund over the next three years. Bishop said the city should have done a better job putting money aside, knowing that the funding rate was going to jump. Bishop said Carr told the board before he turned in the actuarial report that it appeared as if the city would have to pay about 16 percent for both fiscal 2009 and 2010. Barber said the city can't afford to make one lump sum payment right now. "That'd be like laying off 75 to 100 people," he said. The issue of paying into the plan for the fiscal 2010 cycle has gotten contentious. In a memo to Reichert and members of the City Council, Carr said the city is liable to pay at the same rate of 16.44 percent of covered payroll.

But city officials want a new actuarial study done based on data from June 30, 2009, which should set a new rate for the fiscal 2010 year. Barber said because of the volatility of the stock

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market, the assets in the plan have improved considerably since Carr's actuarial report, jumping from about \$139 million in assets when the report was done to about \$155 million currently. City leaders are presuming that a new actuarial report would mean the city could fund the pension plan at a lesser rate than 16.44 percent. A new study would have to be agreed upon by the administration, the council and the pension board, but Jones said he thinks it's a good idea. "It's prudent," he said. "We really need to do this. ... One thing we do not know is if the city has to adjust (the rate)." Until the new study is done, the current rate of 16.44 percent remains in effect, Carr wrote in his memo.

"It is possible that a July 1, 2010, actuarial valuation will result in a lower contribution requirement for the city for the 2010/11 fiscal year," Carr wrote. "(B)ut without performing such a valuation and without the pension board's acceptance of a new valuation, the 16.44 percent contribution rate is still in effect through June 30, 2011." Carr wrote that he thinks it's in the best interest of the city and the pension board to work out a plan to make up the shortfall in the city's contribution. Carr criticized officials for not budgeting the 16.44 percent during the city's current budget. Bishop said some people have accused him of having political motivation for attacking Reichert and other officials about this issue, but he insists that isn't the case. "The only thing I'm concerned with is my fiduciary responsibility (as a pension board member)," he said. Jones said it's important for police and fire retirees to know they're in no danger of having problems with their pensions. "Among other police and fire pensions, I think that ours is probably fifth-best (across the nation)," Jones said. "The plan itself is not in any danger. We have the proper funding necessary, I can assure you."

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
July 14, 2010

**No 'clean' audit for Macon because of HUD grant issues**

Author: PHILLIP RAMATI

Auditors told Macon council members Tuesday they were unable to give the city an unqualified, or “clean,” audit for 2009 because of accounting issues with the city’s Economic and Community Development Department involving grants from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. However, auditors from Macon-based accounting firm Mauldin & Jenkins LLC said the rest of the city’s audit drew a clean opinion. Miller Edwards, who presented the audit’s findings, said the city faced certain financial struggles consistent with other governments in the state due to the recession. He praised the administration and council for showing financial restraint by not spending all of the \$69 million budgeted for expenses during fiscal 2009. Edwards told the council the city had about \$75 million in net assets in June 2009, down from \$88 million in July 2008, in large part to shortfalls in revenues. According to the audit, the city had \$151 million in total assets and \$76 million in liabilities. The city also earned about \$53 million in general revenue from taxes in fiscal 2009, down \$13 million from projected revenues, Edwards said. “A lot of governments had net losses (that) year,” Edwards said. “The economic times in 2009 were horrendous. ... The state of Georgia is having tremendous cash-flow issues right now.” Edwards urged the council to consider a plan that will soon be presented to them by Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**.

That plan would enact a policy to have a minimum fund balance and build up the city’s reserves to help in difficult economic times. “I strongly urge you to follow this initiative,” he said. “The fund balance can’t be understated. You need a five-year plan to build it up.” Edwards said the audit also showed 20 findings of material weaknesses in the city’s accounting practices. He told council members the ECD Department didn’t comply with the federal HOME Investment Partnership Program grant. The HUD program provides grants to communities to provide affordable housing to low-income families. Edwards said he also is concerned that the audit required 290 adjustments because of issues relating to internal controls and compliance. “The city needs to spend the right amount of time with its supervision,” he said. Macon Mayor Robert Reichert said Monday the city is already working to comply with the firm’s recommendations. Council President Pro Tem James Timley chided the administration Tuesday for the issues the audit cited. Some of the issues have been recurring for years, he said. “This is lack of observation by the administration,” Timley said. “It’s constantly the same thing. It’s a lack of management over and over and over. It doesn’t make a lot of sense.” To view the city audit online, visit [http://www.cityofmacon.net/sites/default/files/Finance/city\\_of\\_macon\\_fy09\\_caf\\_r\\_pdf\\_28749.pdf](http://www.cityofmacon.net/sites/default/files/Finance/city_of_macon_fy09_caf_r_pdf_28749.pdf) Also Tuesday, council members heard a presentation from LAZ Parking officials on a proposal that would bring parking meters to parts of the downtown Macon area for the first time since the early 1980s. Some downtown business owners showed up to voice their concerns with those plans, saying it would drive away customers. Councilman Larry Schlesinger was one of several members to voice concerns with the proposal. “It seems to be downtown is healthy and thriving,” he said. “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” The issue has not yet been placed on a City Council agenda.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
July 2, 2010

**Macon, Bibb County apply for JAG funds**

Author: PHILLIP RAMATI

The city of Macon and Bibb County beat Wednesday's deadline to apply for a Justice Assistance Grant, but both governments still haven't agreed on how to split the money. The city and the county have not settled a dispute over how to split the \$128,482 from the annual grant from the U.S. Department of Justice. County officials wanted a 50-50 split, but city officials argued Macon should get 80 percent of the funding, based on Department of Justice data that says about 80 percent of major crimes happen within the city limits. Negotiations between Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** and his county counterpart, Steve Layson, have ground to a halt over the past few weeks, with neither side willing to budge. Since then, Macon Mayor Robert Reichert and Bibb County Commission Chairman Sam Hart have taken over the negotiations. Andrew Blascovich, Reichert's spokesman, said the two entities are allowed to apply for the grant without having the money earmarked for something specific.

"It buys us more time to negotiate," Blascovich said. "(Hart and Reichert) have been discussing that there may be something they can fully fund together, and maybe not splitting the money at all." Layson said local officials may have several months to work out the split. "There's some conversation still to be had. The option's still open," he said. Layson said county officials want to use their share of the money toward drug court, where about 80 percent of participants come from within the city limits. In the past, the city and the county have split the JAG money equally, but last year the city received 60 percent of the grant. Last year's grant amount was \$572,000, with more money being awarded than usual because it included federal stimulus money. The federal government typically calls for an 80-20 split, but federal officials said Macon and Bibb County are "disparate," partially because of the county's funding for the courts.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)

June 19, 2010

**Political Notebook: It's not like they didn't try**

Author: Telegraph staff reports

Thursday night's special called council session in Warner Robins was the first meeting in weeks where officials didn't try to get each other riled up. Almost. Just before the meeting ended, Councilman Bob Wilbanks asked Chief Financial Officer Bill Harte about the city's fund balance, which he recalled from a previous conversation with Harte as having as much as \$9 million available. That wasn't exactly the case, Harte said. Wilbanks seemed to be speaking against discussions by several on the board, including Mayor Chuck Shaheen, to build the city's planned law enforcement center using the \$5 million allotted for the project through a 2006 special purpose local option sales tax. Plans for the building have reached more than \$10 million over the three years city officials have been engaged with local architects and builders on the project. There surely was enough to cover the price of a state-of-the-art facility, right? "The city has enough reserves to cover itself for about three months," Harte said. "We're a long way from being broke," Wilbanks said, addressing the room. "We're financially sound, Mr. Wilbanks," Harte retorted. "And we expect to stay that way."

Diminishing returns

We've written here before about the odd places that the service delivery vs. sales tax fight is turning up. The fights keep getting smaller ó very quickly. The city of Macon was worried in part about how much it would pay to run recreation ó now somewhere around \$6.5 million ó if Bibb County built more facilities with a special purpose local option sales tax. The fight just last week was over a figure roughly 1/50th of that, or how the city and county would split about \$130,000 worth of Department of Justice grants. And on Thursday, the debate turned to a struggle over literally tens of dollars. County Commission Chairman Sam Hart arranged a meeting to discuss and recruit support for the SPLOST proposal. The city refused to send a cameraman to tape it for a government access channel.

"We regret that we will not be able to cover this meeting," Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** wrote. "The Mayor felt it was not appropriate considering the City's stance on the SPLOST occurring in July." City spokesman Andrew Blascovich said the issue was over a city employee's time to tape the meeting. Would the city air the recording if the county taped it? Blascovich said there were technical standards, and city workers couldn't spend much time processing it. What if it met all technical standards? "We'll consider airing it," he said.

Blascovich said there are other concerns, such as giving equal time to both sides of the issues. County officials released portions of a cable company contract showing the government access channel "shall be shared equally by Bibb County and The City of Macon, Georgia." Steve Layson, **Thomas'** counterpart for Bibb County, said Macon officials can't make a call: "They don't have a choice. If we film it, it's going on there."

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Professional crews hired by the Greater Macon Chamber of Commerce are coming to work on SPLOST publicity, Layson said. Given the quickly diminishing returns in the debate, we're compelled to ask: If a dime is discovered wedged between the county-owned courthouse steps and the city-owned sidewalk, how will the two governments divide it, and how long will they fight? Perry officials await ghost-hunting appeal A group dealing in paranormal activity was missing from a meeting with Perry's mayor and council where they were expected to appeal a decision by the board prohibiting them from training at Evergreen Cemetery.

The group, Peach State Paranormal Investigations, had volunteered to clean some of the white crosses at the cemetery in exchange for practicing at the cemetery. Members of the council held off on approving the request for the group to train at Evergreen because of a possible issue with the fact that the cemetery plots are public property. Other concerns with the group having access to the cemetery also were discussed, including possible overtime pay for workers who would have to oversee the group while the group was at the cemetery. It is not known whether the group still wants to clean at the cemetery without the possibility of ghost-hunting in between. "We welcome them to come back," Mayor Jimmy Faircloth said of the group's right to appeal the council's decision.

Capacity for irony

Bibb County Commission Chairman Sam Hart's SPLOST meeting this week was in a room that normally has seating for about 50 people. There weren't enough chairs. At the exact moment Hart talked about the need for improvement for courthouse security, especially more separation between criminals and the public, trustees of which are jail inmates of were carrying in more chairs.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
June 16, 2010

**Macon City Council approves resolution backing center**

Author: PHILLIP RAMATI

Macon City Council approved a resolution Tuesday night in support of the Booker T. Washington Community Center with hopes that the city will help the center continue to operate. The resolution passed 13-0 and asks the city's administration to draft a plan to continue the center's operation through either the Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation Department or through another city department. Councilmen Ed DeFore and Mike Cranford were absent for the vote. Earlier Tuesday, the council's Community Resources and Development Committee met with Barbara Yancey, administrator for the Office of Workforce Development's summer program. Yancey told the committee about the success of a summer camp program there as well as making the center a one-stop shop for the city's summer work and experience program.

Yancey informed the committee that her office also is working with the Department of Family and Children Services to develop an after-school program for neighborhood youths at the center. In other business Tuesday, the council:

ó Unanimously approved an ordinance to spend \$13,750 from the unallocated reserve account for the purchase of two Ranger trucks from Bibb County for Animal Control.

ó Unanimously approved a measure to increase the amount of funds maintained in the city's working capital reserve ó also known as the "Filomena Fund," named for the late Councilwoman Filomena Mullis ó by \$500,000 from operating surplus from fiscal 2010.

ó Voted 10-3 to execute a supplemental agreement between the city and UDC Realty-Terminal Avenue LLC to provide for an increase in administrative fees paid to UDC in connection with the expanded scope recently approved for the capital improvements to Terminal Station. Council members Elaine Lucas, James Timley and Lonnie Miley opposed the measure.

During the committee meeting Tuesday, its members endorsed a recommendation by Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** to fund a voucher program designed to help youths in the community play sports. Council members found out a couple of weeks ago that money for the vouchers ó up to \$35 per youth for each sport ó wasn't given to the Parks and Recreation Department as it had been in the past. The administration has proposed to use \$15,000 from unallocated money from this year's budget as well as another \$10,000 from the Community Development Block Grant funding left over in this year's budget to support the vouchers.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)

May 28, 2010

**Reichert in favor of improving Rosa Parks Square, Second Street**

Author: CHRIS HORNE

Macon Mayor Robert Reichert made it safely through his budget review with City Council's Appropriations Committee without much trouble Thursday afternoon. So he decided to stir the pot by asking for the committee to consider a few extra requests. One, he said, is to put money in the budget for a much-discussed Intergovernmental Business Opportunity Center, which would be a clearinghouse for local small businesses that want to get contracts with the city, Bibb County and the Macon Housing Authority, among other potential partners. When the IBOC has been discussed before, council members have liked the general idea but, in light of recent economic concerns, have balked at the \$40,000 the mayor has asked them to put toward it. During Thursday's meeting with the committee, Reichert asked council members to consider putting the money aside for the center even if the discussion for it needs to come later. "Please consider that," he said. "Pretty please with a cherry on top, consider that."

The mayor also asked for "a little bit of seed money" ó between \$75,000 and \$100,000 each ó for his plans to revamp Second Street and for changes to Rosa Parks Square. The money would pay for a study about Second Street as well as increase the size and utility of the park, thanks to a land swap the city made with a doctor's office that purchased the Shrine Building next to Rosa Parks Square. Reichert said the small park could become "a fantastic civic square right where we need it, and we could get rid of some of these parking spaces that just kind of stick out."

Earlier Thursday during the mayor's office budget review, Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** told the committee he wants to move the risk management division from the city attorney's office to his direct supervision. The move, he said, would not necessarily be permanent. He just wants to make some cost-saving changes. "I want it better organized," **Thomas** said. "In a year or two (we) might move it out."

Though the risk management operation may be found under other departments in other cities, **Thomas** said it's rare to find it in a city attorney's office. Councilman Rick Hutto said he originally was happy to see the cost savings between fiscal 2010 and 2011 in the city attorney's office budget until he realized it largely was due to a proposal to move risk management. Hutto said even with the risk management move, Macon's city attorney's office is larger than other cities in the state such as Savannah, Athens, Albany and Columbus. City Attorney Pope Langstaff said that while the question about the size of his office staff is fair, comparing it to city attorney's offices in other cities is complex. For example, the city of Macon is one of two municipalities in the state with a "strong mayor" form of government, which is a more open form of government that requires more meetings and documents for every action. By comparison, Albany, where his brother is a council member, meets just twice a month and has no committees, Langstaff said. A single contract approval in Macon usually requires four votes before it can be approved by the full council, he said. Hutto said the city attorney's office needs more

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supervision, but Langstaff argued that his role as an attorney to both the mayor and the council makes that complicated.

“I don’t deny that I need some oversight, but there’s a difference between supervision and oversight,” Langstaff said. “I think the basic idea is I don’t need one wing telling me what advice to give the other wing.” There are no budget review meetings today, but they are scheduled to resume next week.

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
March 24, 2010

**Reichert: City has ‘been carrying the county on our backs for decades’**

Author: CHRIS HORNE

Five days after the Bibb County Commission chairman sent a letter to Macon City Hall threatening to cut the city out of negotiations for a proposed sales tax agreement, the mayor asked City Council to unite behind him. Mayor Robert Reichert is demanding an agreement with the county on a service delivery strategy before signing off on a special purpose local option sales tax agreement, which the county is trying to push through for a July vote. The county says the service delivery strategy can wait until the SPLOST issue is settled. The SPLOST, if approved by voters, would generate \$183 million and would pay for various projects, chiefly a new county courthouse. Reichert’s insistence on having a new service delivery strategy in place is because he says city residents pay a disproportionate amount of taxes for services. Meanwhile, the city ó which had to lay off 31 workers in January ó faces an uphill budget battle. “We have been carrying the county on our backs for decades,” he told the council.

During a presentation to the council Tuesday, Reichert used marbles to show how ó because of the current service delivery strategy that decides how the two governments spend tax money on services ó the city’s residents pay a “disproportionate amount” of taxes. Since taxes from city residents make up half the county’s general fund, city residents pay 75 percent of the cost for services such as planning and zoning, even though the city and the county split the cost, he said. In other words, if the city and county each paid \$50,000 to an organization, in reality \$75,000 comes from the pockets of city residents, Reichert said. The mayor insists there are multiple instances of tax inequities between city and county taxpayers. For instance, city residents pay for half of the county’s Engineering Department, but that department only operates in the county. The same goes for the county’s roads program, the mayor said.

“What I’m after is tax relief for the citizens of the city of Macon,” he said. As the April 30 SPLOST agreement deadline drew nearer, Reichert said, the county no longer wanted to discuss the service delivery strategy. “Guess who picked up their marbles and went home,” the mayor said rhetorically. Two weeks ago Macon hired Atlanta attorney Buddy Welch to continue service delivery strategy negotiations with the county. Welch then sent a letter to county commissioners asking for a meeting, which has been set for March 31, Reichert said. Councilman Mike Cranford has been a part of those negotiations from the start and called Hart’s assertion that the city had not submitted its SPLOST wish list “disingenuous.” “We agreed on everything that needed to be a part of the SPLOST,” Cranford said, adding that the breakdown only came when the county wanted to pursue \$20 million in SPLOST money to build new recreation centers in the unincorporated area. Reichert said the city’s problem with the county creating a new recreation department is that the operating cost largely would fall on the shoulders of city residents.

Council members’ attitudes about the mayor’s insistence on getting a service delivery strategy in

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place before a SPLOST agreement is hammered out were somewhat mixed Tuesday. Councilman Tom Ellington suggested a partial agreement, while Councilman Rick Hutto called the mayor's strategy "playing a game of chicken." Councilwoman Elaine Lucas said she wants to "safeguard what's at stake" with the SPLOST. Lucas said she wants to see the tax passed, urging "egos to get out of the way." Reichert said he has never threatened Hart with ruining the SPLOST vote, but that he couldn't sign off on a SPLOST agreement without a service delivery strategy in place. Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said the county cannot decide what the city's projects will be, but can create categories for SPLOST money to be distributed. "I refuse to believe that anyone will vote for a SPLOST knowing the City Council hasn't signed off on the agreement," **Thomas** said.

Council President Miriam Paris stressed that the council must stick together for the good of the city's residents. "We have carried (the county's) burden too long," Paris said. "They want that courthouse more than kids at Christmas, and they're doing everything they can to make that happen. It is very important that we stay unified on this issue. It is their intent to pull the rug out from under us." The mayor pointed out that when the city's share of the sales tax was reduced from 80 percent to 60 percent in December 2002, the city did not insist on a renegotiated service delivery strategy. That means the county began receiving 40 percent of the sales tax but was providing for services as if it were still only receiving 20 percent of the sales tax.

Councilman Alveno Ross said the city's elected officials at the time are to blame. Ross was a city councilman in 2002. "They sold us down the tube," he said. "We did it to ourselves." The current service delivery strategy dates back to 2006, was last adopted by the city in August 2007 and was set to expire Dec. 31, 2008, until it was extended by former Bibb County Commission Chairman Charlie Bishop to October 2010. The mayor said he is hopeful the March 31 meeting between Welch and county commissioners will go well. Their attitude, he said, will determine how the city proceeds. Reichert said he hopes the county wants to move forward with the city. There is still time to get the service delivery strategy ironed out so it is "fair and equitable" to Macon residents, he said.

If the county is willing to work with the city to settle the service delivery strategy issue, the city will "be on their timeline" for the SPLOST agreement. "Both Chairman Hart and I are committed to keeping open communication," Reichert said. "We can work this out, and we will work this out." Council members Erick Erickson, Lonnie Miley and Charles Jones were not present for the work session.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search**

**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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**Macon Telegraph, The (GA)**

January 21, 2010

as provided by The McClatchy Company

**Intimidation and deception**

Several weeks ago I wrote concerning whether Macon City Council should have a voice in city employee layoffs. I felt matters of this nature are administrative and should fall under the mayor's office. Information that has come to my attention now leads me to question whether council oversight on all firings may well be appropriate.

Tuesday, council, voting to overturn a decision made last year, modified a city ordinance to give that legislative body a say in future layoffs. This oversight may be needed, but what I find more troubling is that there are compelling indications the city's chief administrative officer, **Thomas Thomas**, using intimidation and deception, is now and has been targeting individual employees for separation regardless of whether that employee is needed or whether he or she is doing a good job. This also includes assigning a workload so heavy that a job cannot be done successfully. This leaves the employee in a position where he or she can be fired for failing to meet impossible goals. I agree completely that the layoffs last Friday were necessary. A reduction in the employee pool, considering Macon's population has dropped dramatically and the workforce hasn't, is fiscally responsible. Prime consideration must be whether this action was a financial necessity, which it clearly was.

However, through conversations with people I trust implicitly and who must remain anonymous for their own protection, as well as elected city officials who are equally aware of problems that create a need for stricter oversight, I'm forced to conclude there are serious inequities involved in the manner in which workers are being targeted for separation outside the right-sizing effort. **Thomas**, in conjunction with Human Resources Director Ben Hubbard, has secretly identified some workers he wants gone, and he will do whatever it takes to accomplish this, in what apparently is an effort to "right-size" the workforce outside the official procedure. I have a substantial amount of documentation that strongly suggests **Thomas** and Hubbard have, on occasion, said one thing and done another. In past and planned personnel actions there has been an unspoken agenda in which the goals are to force older, higher-paid city employees to retire, even though there is every indication their jobs remain necessary and they have been doing them proficiently. The "right-sizing" program, which is designed to save the city about \$900,000 this year and far more in 2011, doesn't appear to be seriously flawed, although it is inflexible and ignores, in some very obvious cases, a city wide survey conducted earlier by the University of Georgia intended to identify areas of inefficiency.

**Thomas** and Hubbard, appearing before council's Employee Development and Compensation Committee, explained layoff decisions were reached through interviews with department heads, individuals and a close analysis of whether a position was needed. This is not always the case. I believe **Thomas** and Hubbard have at best skirted the truth in what they have told council members. Layoff decisions, they said, have been based on determining the necessity for a

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search**

**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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position, not the person occupying it. Individuals have not been targeted, they said.

Whether council exercises oversight on future layoffs isn't a bad ideal. But what council members need to monitor closely is the methodology **Thomas** is using in an attempt to force individual separations. The elephant in the room is the question whether Macon Mayor Robert Reichert, to whom **Thomas** reports, is aware of what his chief administrative officer is doing. If the mayor is unaware of what is going on ó and I hope that's the case ó then he needs to measure his CAO for a short new leash.

E-mail Phil Dodson at [d2732@aol.com](mailto:d2732@aol.com).

In a recent column I wrote that it has been suggested council member Richard Hutto is considering a run for mayor. Hutto says this is not the case, and would have told me so, had I asked.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
November 11, 2009

**Mayor plans to lay off 31 Macon employees by Jan. 15**

Author: Travis Fain

Macon Mayor Robert Reichert plans to lay off 31 city employees and cut 36 more vacant positions as part of a citywide “right-sizing” effort his administration has been studying.

The positions would be eliminated as of Jan. 15, and three other full-time positions would become part-time, Reichert said. The changes would cut about \$2.6 million a year from the city’s books, the mayor told City Council members during a Tuesday evening work session on the issue. Reichert said the cuts, combined with other measures, will allow him to include a long-desired pay scale for police, fire and general city employees in next year’s budget. The mayor also said he’d push for a property tax increase by not fully rolling back the city’s millage rate to offset property value increases from this year’s property reassessment.

What that will mean for city tax bills won’t be known until later this year or early next year, but Reichert said he and the council will need “courage” as they discuss “what, if any, rollback in the millage rate we can afford.” Reichert said he’d discuss all of this individually with council members, but he plans to sign an executive order implementing the layoffs Thursday night. There has been some question whether Reichert can lay off employees without council action, but City Attorney Pope Langstaff said Tuesday he can. Langstaff said these are “indefinite layoffs” as opposed to permanent job eliminations, which would take council approval. Reichert wouldn’t publicly name any of the employees or positions affected and said he’d inform those losing their jobs Friday, then make the list public. No sworn police positions will be affected by the cuts, nor will any filled firefighter positions, Reichert said. No department heads are on the list either, he said. There are “some managers, some clerical people, some technicians and some very dedicated city employees” on the list, he said.

“This is the hardest job I have ever had,” said Reichert, who won office easily in 2007 and quickly found himself dealing with a crumbling economy in a city that already had budget problems. City Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**, who oversaw the right-sizing process, sat quietly for the most part Tuesday as the mayor made his presentation to the council. Finance Director Tom Barber gave members an overview of city finances beforehand, focusing not only on a need to cut positions but also on several other measures. That included a push for new revenues from “targeted user groups,” which Barber later said was a reference to a potential stormwater management fee.

“That’s something we’re working toward,” **Thomas** said. But Barber said “the key to (the city’s) whole financial recovery” would be a new special purpose local option sales tax. The city has been using proceeds from a SPLOST penny tax passed in 2005 to prop up the city’s budget, particularly to pay for new police cars and other equipment. That money ó about \$2 million a year ó runs out by 2012, Reichert said. Whether the city can tap a new penny tax remains to be

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search****Thomas Thomas***(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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seen, because the Bibb County Commission controls the SPLOST process and wants to fund a new courthouse and possibly recreation upgrades with the next one. The layoff announcement didn't surprise council members, who have heard rumblings for weeks as Reichert's administration worked on its proposal. But its revelation sparked some anger, some resignation and some appreciation among the 11 members who attended Tuesday's work session. Councilman James Timley said he expects legal action to stop the mayor, even if the council can't stop him with a vote. He called the cuts "reprehensible" and said there are too many "giveaways" in the city budget, an apparent reference to city funding for outside agencies.

Reichert said the council is welcome to find that money in the budget and delete it. "If you find that you have come up with enough money, we can bring all of these people back," Reichert said. Councilwoman Elaine Lucas said Reichert assembled his cuts in "a fairly underhanded way" and questioned the hitch in his voice as he announced them, saying "you tried to cry." Council President Miriam Paris said these moves are "tough for all of us."

"I commend you on your work and your efforts toward keeping us viable," she told the mayor. The mayor wouldn't say whether any of the cuts will hit his own staff, nor would he provide a breakdown of losses by department. He did say "one or two" unfilled positions will stay on the city's books, including an unfilled internal auditor's spot. Reichert said besides saving the city about \$2.6 million a year, the cuts would save another \$900,000 in this budget year, which ends June 30. Those figures include benefits, according to the mayor's office, and work out to an average city salary and benefits package of about \$39,800 per job cut. The city will realize savings from cutting open jobs because the money that otherwise would have been used for the salaries has been used to fund other city operations, Reichert's spokesman, Andrew Blascovich said. The pay scale proposal is still a work in progress, Reichert said. There are three versions being considered, with a cost in the neighborhood of \$2 million to implement, Human Resources Director Ben Hubbard said. That's less than previous estimates for a pay scale, but Hubbard said the lower figure was realistic.

Implementing the scale would give some employees raises, as well as a clear expectations of salary increases in the future. That change has been seen as crucial to police officer retention. While Reichert pushes forward with layoffs and tries to round up support for a tax increase, he will continue service consolidation and service delivery talks with Bibb County Commission Chairman Sam Hart. He promised Tuesday to get some changes, such as a combined animal control department, in place by the end of the year. "(The layoffs add) fuel to the fire," he acknowledged after Tuesday's meeting with the council. "I've got to get some efficiencies through service delivery."

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
November 5, 2009

**Macon parks chief Anthony to retire**

Author: Travis Fain

Mike Anthony, director of the Macon-Bibb County Parks and Recreation Department for more than a decade and a jack-of-many-trades in both the Jack Ellis and Robert Reichert administrations, plans to retire from the city in January. Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** announced the retirement to City Council members Friday in a brief e-mail. Reichert said he understands that Anthony wants to “slow down and do things of his own choosing on his (horse) ranch up in Tennessee, I believe it is.” “I have nothing but positive comments about Mike Anthony,” Reichert said. “We wish him well.”

Attempts to reach Anthony on Wednesday were not successful. He was out of town attending the Recreation and Park Association’s annual conference, according to the parks and recreation department. Anthony became parks and recreation director in 1997 under then-Mayor Jim Marshall. Twice under Ellis he was named the mayor’s interim chief administrative officer, a position he held for much of Reichert’s first year in office. He also served as interim airports director and interim finance director for the city. “He was a bridge between the last administration and this one,” Reichert said. “He knew where a lot of the pieces and parts were that we could pull out and get going.”

Anthony’s first stint as CAO came in 2003, seven months after he fought off a potentially deadly case of bacterial meningitis that hospitalized him for weeks. The second came in 2006, when Ellis switched from then-interim CAO Regina McDuffie back to Anthony, who had been heading the parks department again in the interim. Anthony also stood in as Ellis’ airports director after the Federal Aviation Administration threatened to ground flights out of Macon over regulation shortcomings. He, with help from other city officials, kept the airport open while also doubling as head of the parks department. He helped bring in TBI airport management and negotiate a contract for the company to manage the city’s two airports. As interim finance director, Anthony hired much of the current office staff “with whom we are very pleased,” Reichert said. As parks and recreation director, Anthony also was heavily involved in the development of the riverwalk along the Ocmulgee River. Anthony also is a retired colonel with a 29-year military career.

“He was a pinch hitter,” Councilman James Timley said Wednesday. “When things didn’t go (well) or somebody left, he would always fill in.” “I thought he did a good job,” said Timley, the council’s president pro tem. “I didn’t really have any problem with him.” Reichert will make a choice about a new parks director, but the council must confirm that choice to formalize the position. An advertisement seeking to fill the job is posted on the city’s Web site.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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US Fed News (USA)

July 31, 2009

**SAFETY NEW LOOK OF CITY OF MACON PUBLIC WORKS' EMPLOYEES**

MACON, Ga., July 30 -- The city of Macon issued the following news release: This week the employees of the Public Works Department in the City of Macon have donned new uniforms. These new uniforms are an effort by the City of Macon to promote a safer work environment for our employees.

The uniforms are made with reflective stripping which makes the employees more visible to motorists and also provides clear identification as City of Macon employees so citizens can readily be aware of the work they are doing. Public Works is leasing these new uniforms from a private contract who will maintain them through replacements and also washing them weekly so that the appearance of the uniforms will be maintained throughout the year.

"Our employees are in constant view of the public, these new uniforms will improve our presence while working on the city streets," said Richard Powell, Director of Public Works. "This is one of many new efforts we are implementing to improve the safety, productivity, and morale of all employees of the City of Macon," said **Thomas Thomas**, Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Macon. For more information please contact: Sarabjit Jagirdar, Email:- [htsyndication@hindustantimes.com](mailto:htsyndication@hindustantimes.com).

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
June 23, 2009

**Lucases' use of generator stirs questions**

Author: Travis Fain

After a Friday morning fire that damaged their home, state Rep. David Lucas and his wife, Macon City Councilwoman Elaine Lucas, were allowed to use an Emergency Management Agency generator to keep their refrigerator and freezer running. EMA Director Johnny Wingers said that, given the same set of circumstances, any Bibb County resident could have done the same. But it's unclear exactly what those circumstances were. Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas**, after hearing concerns about the episode Monday, met with Wingers, Police Chief Mike Burns and Fire Chief Marvin Riggins. The consensus was that an initial suspicion of arson led officials to call for a light array so that they could see better in the early morning hours. That array is connected to a diesel generator. But Wingers, in a later conversation with The Telegraph, said police called for the array without giving a specific reason why they needed it. Wingers also said police Lt. Eric Woodford "did mention the freezer and the refrigerator" when he called on the EMA. But **Thomas** said that's not what Wingers said during their initial meeting. **Thomas** said he was "stunned" by the inconsistency, and that he'd have to speak to Wingers again to get to the bottom of it.

"Johnny verbally said it was for light at a potential crime scene," **Thomas** wrote in an e-mail. "He cannot change his story 30 minutes later." At any rate, the generator/light combo was left at the Lucases' Saratoga Drive home through the day Friday and picked up Saturday morning, said Wingers and David Lucas, one of the longest-serving state representatives in the Georgia General Assembly. Wingers said the generator had about two-thirds of its diesel tank still full when a crew picked it up Saturday about 10:30 a.m. He said he personally plugged the refrigerator and freezer into the generator Friday morning, although David Lucas never asked him to do so. Elaine Lucas was at the hospital at that point with two grandchildren. The grandchildren spent Friday in the hospital being treated for smoke inhalation and were released Saturday. The family can't live in the house right now, although David Lucas was there Monday dealing with the aftermath.

He said he believes the fire was caused by a problem with the electrical wiring. "I think I mentioned I needed a generator (Friday morning)," he said Monday. "If I need to reimburse the city, if that's what it takes, I'll do that." Wingers said EMA generators were used similarly during the Mother's Day tornado last year, though obviously there weren't enough to go around in a city largely without power. Asked if the Lucas family received any special treatment because of their political positions, Wingers replied: "Not from me they didn't."

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph  
June 21, 2009

**Macon work force bloated, some say**

Author: Matt Barnwell

For years, Macon's population has been shrinking. But the size of city government — as measured by its work force, at least — has not. In fact, it has grown. In 1990, 1,274 full-time employees served a population of more than 106,000. By the time the number of Macon residents dropped to 93,000 in 2007, the most recent year for which the Census Bureau provides population estimates, the city's payroll included a little more than 1,400 full-time positions. Little has changed in the past two years. There is money for 1,380 positions in the upcoming 2010 budget cycle, and based on recent trends, the population continues to slip. That means that over the course of the past 20 years, Macon has gone from nearly 12 employees for every thousand residents it serves to 15 city workers.

Personnel costs eat up the lion's share of the city budget, and it's starting to put a strain on the public purse. In planning the next budget cycle, Mayor Robert Reichert expected to have to furlough employees to balance revenues with expenses. The council ultimately rejected that plan, but even the options it chose will leave Macon in a similarly tight situation this time next year. After all, taxpayers don't just fund salaries. They pay for robust benefits that many employees reap over a lifetime, including a pension and health care now and in retirement. It's the benefit costs in particular that threaten to spiral out of control and smother Macon's long-term financial plans. Health care alone will cost the city \$7,250 per employee and retiree in 2010, \$1,000 more per worker than this year. The spectre of a never-ending, ever-increasing expense that is further inflated by a potentially bloated work force has city officials questioning what the right size of Macon's government ought to be. Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** says Macon needs to shed 100 to 150 positions.

He is reviewing individual city departments, comparing them to cities elsewhere and trying to determine where duties can be combined into a single position. He said he already has discovered places where that's possible, though he declined to specifically say where. In recent years, Macon has operated with as many as 80 vacancies in its work force. The city has continued to fund the positions, and each quarter officials sweep the unspent money into reserves to help pay other expenses. But continuing that practice over the long term "is almost like cheating," **Thomas** said, because it causes imprecise budgeting. **Thomas** will present his conceptual plan for a right-sized city to council members this week and will also develop a mechanism for a work force reduction in case that's needed, too. Most officials hope the work force will shrink through eliminated vacancies, natural attrition and perhaps coerced or incentivized retirements. The administration also is putting together a process for formally evaluating employees, which the city has lacked for nearly a decade. "Some of them are going to shine, and they'll be given the opportunity for additional responsibility," **Thomas** said. "Some won't shine, and they'll either improve or move on to other organizations."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Search****Thomas Thomas***(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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If natural attrition does not yield enough departures, it raises the prospect of layoffs. Downsizing of any sort prompts a choice for council members: How far do they go to protect employees at the financial expense of the city and tax-paying residents? The council seems to acknowledge that significant changes must be made if politically popular ideas like a pay scale are going to be put into place anytime soon. Members have begun looking at a resolution to encourage retirements by taking away retiree health-care benefits for anybody who leaves city employment after Sept. 30. The resolution would not affect anyone who retired before then but could spur eligible retirees to leave now and save their benefits. Of course, some city council members balked at that idea. They say it treats long-serving employees too harshly. At the same time, forthcoming proposals for right-sizing may appear even more blunt.

Council President Miriam Paris said so far the council has not made the tough decisions to fully serve the interest of the entire city. She admonished some of her colleagues last week for trying to block consideration of another piece of legislation that would stop the city from offering retirement health-care benefits to future employees. The objection, primarily from Councilmen Charles Jones and Lonnie Miley, was that discussion of taking away any employee benefit is offensive to “loyal” city workers. “They do not show up for a job just because they love the city,” Paris told them. “They get a paycheck, and they get benefits.” In a later interview, she said the size of the work force is “disproportionate” to the population. Layoffs should be treated as a worst-case scenario, she said. But she also expressed frustration that such a cost-saving step seems to be taken seriously “everywhere but Macon, Georgia.”

“It may be unpopular, but it is a stark reality of life with this current economy,” she said. “We have a social contract with the whole city.” Councilwoman Lauren Benedict, chairwoman of the Employee Development and Compensation Committee, said it requires a difficult balancing act to make needed cuts without harming specific workers. But she said she thinks her committee is willing to listen to every option, including layoffs, even if it’s not yet ready to commit to a step that drastic. “We’re still in Band-Aid mode in terms of revenues and expenses,” she said. “We’ve got to come up with a way to eliminate costs. ... It’s going to hurt no matter how we get there, but I think we’re at a point where we’ve got to figure out a way to right-size.”

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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The Telegraph - <http://www.macon.com/news/article28567480.html>  
June 19, 2009

**Macon IT director's future uncertain Macon's manager of information and technology was on administrative leave Thursday, his future with the city unclear.**

Author: Matt Barnwell

Macon's manager of information and technology was on administrative leave Thursday, his future with the city unclear. Tom Tourand, the city's IT director, was sent home Wednesday by Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** after being asked to surrender his office keys and city cell phone. **Thomas** said he has given Tourand two options regarding his employment — the CAO would not say what the choices were — to which he must respond by noon today. Tourand saw the administrative leave as an effort to fire him. After being sent home, he sent an e-mail to Mayor Robert Reichert and all 15 City Council members asking to meet with Reichert to “respectfully request that my termination be reconsidered.” In that same e-mail, Tourand said he had diligently performed the tasks requested of him and had never refuted **Thomas**' directives. “I don't understand the manner in which I am being treated, and don't feel that I have done anything so gravely wrong to be terminated,” he wrote.

Tourand declined to comment on the situation Thursday. **Thomas** said his initial intention had been to place Tourand on leave until they could sit down and discuss ongoing departmental issues. The CAO had reprimanded Tourand by letter in late April for missing project deadlines, not ordering computers on time, lacking a plan for computer replacement in the next budget cycle and “personalizing issues and becoming defensive during discussions.” **Thomas** said the final straw involved creation of a tracking system to monitor requests for repairs and to collect performance measurement data. The IT department does not have such a system, which **Thomas** said was commonly used in cities where he previously worked. He asked Tuesday that one be implemented by June 30 using as framework a separate, less comprehensive program already in place for managing other projects.

The tone of Tourand's e-mailed response to that request led to the current situation, **Thomas** said. “He was very angry,” **Thomas** said. “I thought it was best that he go home because he was angry.” In the e-mail, the IT director agreed to bring the new system online by month's end but seemed to criticize **Thomas** for meddling. He told the CAO the tracking system as requested was not the panacea he thought it was, but “of course coming from someone lacking any true hands-on management of day-to-day technical operations, this glaring oversight is understandable.” “I do not agree with your assumptions concerning the operation of this department that has been managed well by me for nearly 8 years,” Tourand wrote to **Thomas**. “Further, I do not hold to management styles that reflect an insecure personality nor which demonstrate an inexperienced person that oftentimes demands constant documentation and micromanagement of experts.” **Thomas** called such comments “derogatory.” He said he was also concerned that Tourand did not realize he had been previously reprimanded. The CAO wrote an April 30 letter of reprimand to Tourand, outlining problems he found with the department in the interest of accountability and “improving your performance.” But the IT director wrote in his e-mail to Reichert and council

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**Thomas Thomas**

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members that he had never received a formal reprimand or disciplinary action. Tourand was hired in July 2001. He previously worked for the city of Atlanta. If he were ousted, it would mark the third department-level manager to be shown the door since Reichert took office at the end of 2007 and **Thomas** started work last November.

Former Economic and Community Development Director Kevin DuBose was forced to resign at the end of January. In February, the mayor fired Lori Howard, who was the administrator of the Macon-Bibb Office of Workforce Development. Andrew Blascovich, Reichert’s director of external affairs, said there has been no conscious effort to weed out department heads predating the current administration. “In terms of one of the campaign promises the mayor made, he said he was going to bring top-level management to the city,” Blascovich said. “When you want top-flight management, you bring accountability to your departments.”

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
June 6, 2009

**Plan might cause police, fire exodus**

Author: Amy Leigh Womack

A proposal to eliminate retiree health benefits has created a tug of war between balancing the city's budget and public safety with the potential for 105 retirements within the Macon police and fire department ranks. Macon City Council members Mike Cranford and Nancy White have drafted a resolution to stop offering "continued health insurance coverage" to city employees who retire after Sept. 30, 2009. Macon Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said 119 employees citywide are eligible for full retirement and an additional 111 are eligible to retire early. White said the resolution is meant to save the city millions of dollars by encouraging retirement-eligible employees to retire now. With the savings, Cranford said it's possible the city may be able to avoid furloughs and discontinuing paid holidays.

But police say the possible exodus of officers and valuable experience could affect crime and safety. "There's going to be less experience and less knowledge on how to solve crime," Police Chief Mike Burns said. The resolution is scheduled to be heard by the Employee Development and Compensation Committee on Wednesday. If it passes the scrutiny of the committee, the resolution could go before the full council as early as June 16, Cranford said. He said the resolution also can be presented to the council if it isn't endorsed by the committee. Burns said a few officers have already said they plan to retire if the resolution passes. "They don't have a choice," he said of the officers. "They've got to have their insurance. It's a very tough decision for everybody."

**PUBLIC SAFETY COULD TAKE HIT**

Of the 66 firefighters eligible to retire, **Thomas** said the list includes the chief, deputy chief, seven district chiefs, 16 captains, 26 lieutenants, six sergeants and nine privates. "We're talking about the senior level staff who have been with us for a long period of time," said Macon-Bibb Fire Chief Marvin Riggins. "Along with that goes a lot of experience. "It takes time to recover from that." Riggins spoke with The Telegraph briefly Wednesday, but when contacted later in the week said, he was directed to refer further comment about the proposed resolution to the mayor's spokesman. **Thomas** said the police list of 28 includes the chief, four majors, six captains, eight lieutenants, six sergeants and three privates. For a department where 70 percent of officers have 10 or fewer years of experience, Burns said the potential for retirements has raised concerns about who will be left to train officers. The retirements also have the potential to perpetuate a continued shortage of police officers. In February, Burns said the department had 18 vacancies and 13 officers in training.

Burns said 40 officers in training now will be on the street by early 2010, leaving only nine vacancies in the department " unless additional officers retire. Burns said it takes an average five years before an officer has been exposed to every type of emergency and feels comfortable.

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**Thomas Thomas**

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Taking away retiree health benefits also could hurt recruitment, the chief said, noting that some departments offer higher starting salaries, incentive pay and retiree health benefits. The Macon police starting salary of \$30,160 is competitive with the \$25,688 base salary for a Bibb County deputy. Kendall Countryman, benefits and payroll officer for Bibb County, said deputies are eligible to receive retiree health benefits and Social Security. **Thomas** said Macon police officers are not eligible for Social Security. Burns said senior officers who have learned about the resolution through the media “are real bitter,” and morale is suffering. It’s a real blow,” he said. Cranford and Nancy White said they expected that the retirements would actually help morale among all city employees because of promotion opportunities.

**Thomas** said it’s possible some retirement-eligible employees may decide to keep working in hopes of being promoted to a higher paying position. Police Capt. Joe White said he doubts the City Council understands the implication that retirement-eligible officers’ departure could have on the city. “I think they’ve lost their minds,” said White, who has worked at the department for 28 years. White said he credits Burns and the department’s leadership with crime dipping to the lowest rates in recent history. The number of crimes reported in Macon in 2007 was the lowest since 1994. Statistics show crime increased by one percent in 2008. Without the experienced officers, “you’d have a lot of crime and less experience to fight it,” he said. **Thomas** said he doesn’t expect the potential retirements to affect the city’s fire Insurance Services Offices Inc. rating, which helps determine property insurance rates, or crime fighting on the street level. “I don’t think there will be an impact on public safety,” he said.

**Thomas** said Burns has told him that if the resolution passes, he’d stay on at least until Sept. 30. “That’s more than enough time for me to hire a new chief,” **Thomas** said. Burns told The Telegraph he has not decided what he’ll do. “I’ll make that decision in that 90 days like everybody else,” he said. Although Riggins is eligible for early retirement, **Thomas** said the fire chief has told him he plans to keep working. Cranford said he anticipated a good number of public safety employees would be eligible to retire. The Carl Vinson Institute of Government said the police department is “top heavy in administration,” he said. “The general consensus is that we’ve got too many chiefs and too few Indians.” Nancy White said it’s possible the resolution could be amended, if needed, to ensure that essential services “which she defined as public safety and sanitation services “have adequate staffing. We might have to look at them at a different angle,” she said. “We cannot compromise core city services.”

**THE COST**

Providing retiree health coverage for the city’s 300 retirees costs the city about \$6 million a year, **Thomas** said. “I’m looking at a financial situation where we can’t afford it anymore,” he said. **Thomas** said he gathered information about the financial, personnel and organizational impact of the resolution after hearing that Cranford was drafting the resolution. City Council will review the information as it considers the resolution, he said. Cranford said there’s no law that requires the city to provide health benefits once an employee retires. The city only started providing the retiree health benefit in 1991, at a time when the city and the retirement fund were “flush with cash,” Cranford said. The coverage is designed to be a secondary policy to supplement Medicare

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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for retirees ages 65 and older. If all employees eligible for retirement citywide retired, **Thomas** said the city could save about \$5 million from salaries alone.

But for police officers and other employees eligible to retire, the resolution is liable to cost them money “and lots of it. For example, Macon police Lt. Andra Grinstead, 45, said she’s eligible to retire, with 27 years of service, even though she hasn’t reached her 50th birthday. If she retires now, she will have to pay just \$75 a month for individual health insurance. But she’ll draw \$220 less a month in pension payments than if she worked a few more years. If she waits another five years, she’ll be able to draw a full \$1,800 monthly payment without penalty based on her current salary, but she will have to pay for private insurance that could cost hundreds of dollars a month. Because of the substantial amount of pension money early retirees would leave on the table, **Thomas** said he doesn’t expect as large a proportion of the 111 employees eligible to leave, as compared with employees eligible for full retirement.

Maj. Charles Stone said it’s been a promise for years that employees would have retiree health insurance, and that’s been a glimmer of hope for officers who haven’t had a pay scale and who have lost incentive pay benefits. Incentive pay was discontinued in late 2007. He said it’s likely that some employees won’t be able to afford to stop working because their financial planning has been based on having retiree health care. **Thomas** said the average age of police officers eligible for full retirement is 57. For firefighters, the average is 55 and for civilians it’s 65. Many retirement-eligible employees are still young enough to get another job, Cranford said. **Thomas** said it’s not easy to balance the budget. ‘I’m trying to find a way to balance the budget in the least painful way possible,’ he said.

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**Thomas Thomas**

*(Articles Appear in Reverse Chronological Order)*

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)

May 22, 2009

**Macon's financial picture takes turn for worse**

Author: Matt Barnwell

Macon's financial picture appeared to grow more dire Thursday, when city officials reported that March sales tax proceeds were down 40 percent from the same time period in 2008. The decrease follows February collections that came 31 percent short of the mark set a year prior. In total, the two months' decline has meant a \$1.2 million drop in revenue compared to the previous budget cycle, and some officials fear it could represent the start of a protracted period of sales tax losses. Revenues are reported about two months after they are collected. The final check from Bibb County's special purpose local option sales tax is supposed to arrive in the city today, and officials expect it will be similarly diminished. City Council Appropriations Chairman Mike Cranford, opening budget hearings Thursday, said everything in the proposed spending plan for fiscal 2010 is on the table and facing substantial cuts "if we're going to survive the next year." "We're broke," he said. "We just ain't admitted it yet."

Cranford also has asked the administration to look at encouraging employees who are eligible for retirement to leave their jobs. He plans to entice them by introducing legislation that cuts off health insurance benefits for future retirees who are not gone in the next 90 days. Macon currently pays health insurance claims for both its current and retired workers, and the rising costs are "bankrupting" the city, he said. Chief Administrative Officer **Thomas Thomas** said administration officials are putting together a plan that takes Cranford's wishes into account and investigating the savings it could achieve. He said nearly 10 of the city's department heads ó who are among the highest salaried ó are eligible for retirement.

"It's real," he said. "We're trying to keep people working without having to do salary cuts." Mayor Robert Reichert's budget currently proposes city employees lose their pay for all of the nine holidays they are allotted in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1. And nonessential personnel ó everybody except sworn police officers, firefighters and sanitation workers ó would be furloughed for a half-day each pay period, or one day per month. It would generally amount to an 8 percent loss in salary. Council members have vowed to look for other alternatives. Cranford has already proposed delaying the furloughs until January and then instituting them for a full day each pay period. That at least gives workers more time to prepare financially, he has argued. Other council members have also expressed interest in retirements as an alternative to furloughs. "Retiring employees is a way of avoiding layoffs," Appropriations Committee member Nancy White said. "In many ways, it's a win-win." At budget hearings Thursday, the committee began its initial review of individual city departments. Among those it took a look at were the mayor's office and the council office. In both cases, the committee made some cuts, taking \$16,000 from the nearly \$900,000 budgeted for Reichert's office and about \$14,000 from the more than \$650,000 council budget. Generally, the money was removed from line items that pay for travel and training expenses. Budget hearings resume today at 3 p.m.

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Thomas Thomas**

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Macon Telegraph, The (GA)  
September 29, 2008

**Reichert confirms Albany's Thomas will be Macon's next CAO**

Author: Matt Barnwell

Mayor Robert Reichert this morning confirmed what The Telegraph reported Friday night: He has picked the assistant administrator of Dougherty County, **Thomas Thomas**, to serve as Macon's next chief administrative officer. "I am delighted that we have been able to attract **Thomas Thomas** to Macon," the mayor said in a news release. "I believe he is well qualified and well suited for this particular position."

**Thomas**, in the release, said he was attracted to the position by the challenge of managing services for such a large population, Macon's central location and its growing business district. His interview with the administration confirmed his interest in the job, he said. "From that interview I discovered we had a shared organizational vision of continual service improvement and citizen satisfaction," **Thomas** said. "This vision is based on common values, shared trust and commitment to transparency."

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Complied by:           Cara Slade and Amanda Kuhl  
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