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SPORTS, 1B

Pensacola Housing Director resigns from city

Jim Little
Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Pensacola Interim Housing Director Meredith Reeves has resigned from the city to take a job with another local government out of state.

Reeves’s departure is the fifth senior-level city official to resign from the city in the last year.

Reeves, who is Pensacola Mayor D.C. Reeves’ cousin, was hired at the city un-



Reeves

der Pensacola Mayor Grover Robinson in 2021 as an assistant housing director. Robinson recruited Reeves from Escambia County, where she had been a division manager for several years, including Robinson’s time as a county commissioner.

She became interim director last year when Housing Director Marcie Whitaker retired.

Reeves was never put before the City Council for confirmation and held the job on an interim basis.

Her resignation letter from the city is dated May 22 and notes she was accepting a job with another local government but would stay on with the city until July 25.

Tracey Pickens, the home buyer program coordinator, is now the interim housing director.

The Housing Department is largely an administrative department that

manages the city’s federal and state grants that deal with housing and manages all Section 8 housing grants for both the city and Escambia County.

The Housing Department is also undergoing major changes as Pensacola and Escambia County ended a 32-year partnership of a combined committee to coordinate affordable housing policy. The split has been downplayed by officials who insist they will still work together but it will be on an informal basis.



Santa Rosa County Sheriff’s Office deputy Jerry Robins makes a traffic stop along Stewart Street in Milton on July 29. GREGG PACHKOWSKI/PENSACOLA NEWS JOURNAL

Gulf Breeze and Milton residents win in MSTU votes

Tom McLaughlin Pensacola News Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

The Milton City Council convened at a hastily called and poorly attended Saturday morning meeting July 19 to consider raising its property tax assessment. ● When City Manager Ed Spears and Budget Director Laura McDill explained to board members that due to circumstances no longer within the city’s control, it would be possible to raise the existing millage rate by as much as 1.1115 mills and still bring resident property taxes down by about \$230, the council knew a win-win when it saw it.

“This is a unique opportunity to realize more revenue while lowering the tax burden on our citizens,” Councilman Casey Powell said.

The opportunity to which Powell referred occurred because the city, either willingly or mistakenly, had opted out of going along with Santa Rosa County on a plan to divide the county millage rate by funding a law enforcement municipal service taxing unit, or MSTU, that had been created in 2018 but lay dormant since then.

The move, finalized July 10 by the County Commission, locked in 2.07 mills of the county’s property taxes for the Sheriff’s Office to use to fund operations outside of court-related functions and school resource officers.

The LEMSTU, as it is called, will not raise county property taxes, as it will simply divide what goes to the Sheriff’s Office and what goes to the general fund. The municipalities, which

collect property taxes of their own, were required to step up to say whether or not they intended to participate.

Gulf Breeze elected officials opted out of the county taxing plan and decided to “pass along the full benefit of Santa Rosa County’s 2.07 millage reduction” to its residents, City Manager Samantha Abell said.

“With the governor and state legislature talking very seriously about putting forth a ballot item to eliminate property taxes, if you raise the millage and property taxes go away the next year, what was the point?” she said, relating the rationale of City Council members.

In a city with a median household value of \$250,000, it is projected that Gulf Breeze residents will get a \$530 break in their county taxes.

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FRICKER CENTER

Mayor postpones meeting after backlash

Jim Little
Pensacola News Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Pensacola Mayor D.C. Reeves postponed a second public input meeting on the Fricker Center renovation – a day before it was set to take place – after the city was met

with anger from some Black residents over gentrification in the city.

The newly scheduled meeting at the Fricker Center will be at 8 a.m. Aug. 13, instead of at 6:30 p.m. July 31 as originally planned.

Reeves said the purpose of moving the meeting was to ensure the meeting was about feedback on the community center and not other issues, which he said can be addressed at a town hall he will host on the evening of Aug. 26 with Councilman Delarian Wiggins. The location hasn’t been set yet.

“This is a rescheduling of an event,” Reeves said. “It’s not the cancellation of an event. We’ve just given you the dates, and certainly folks can go there, or they can go to a town hall as well and share some of those issues.”

Pensacola has \$9.5 million in state grants to fund a renovation of The Fricker Center and held a public meeting on July 23 to get feedback on the center’s renovation. A large portion of the meeting was dominated by concern about the gentrification of historically Black neighborhoods, anger over the mayor’s absence, and several commenters who voiced distrust of the city’s motivation for renovating the center.

“I’ve never seen the city of Pensacola dump \$9 million into the Black community,” Pensacola resident Jermaine Williams said at the July 23 meeting.

The share of Pensacola residents who identify only as Black has fallen from about 30% of the city in 2000 to about 21%, according to the most recent Census estimates.

“Anybody bringing any concern that they have with the city, it is important to allow that opportunity,” Reeves

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