

# The Florida Times-Union

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\$2



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## City might need longer to fully fund pensions

Mayor's plan scales back contribution to put money into other services

By David Bauerlein  
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Mayor Lenny Curry's proposed pension paydown plan would dial back how much the city contributes to its pension plans in the coming years, freeing up tens of millions of dollars annually that go can to other city services.

But because the city would be paying less for many years to its pension plan, it will take much longer to strengthen those plans so they are financially healthy enough to fully fund all the long-term pension payments the city

must make to retirees, according to an actuarial report done this month for the city.

That report shows that 30 years from now, the city's Police and Fire Pension Fund would still be far short of having enough money to pay its long-term pension obligations if the city spreads out its payments the way Curry is considering.

The actuarial report shows that on Oct. 1, 2045, the Police and Fire Pension Fund's assets would be sufficient to pay 58 percent or

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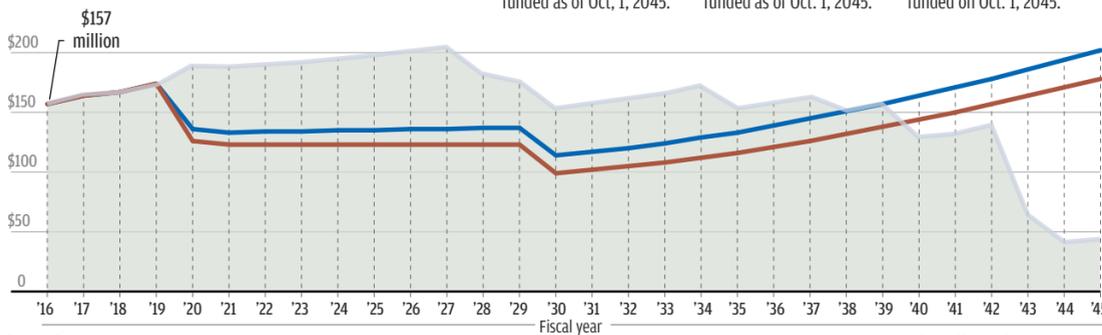


### Curry plan for pension costs

In Mayor Lenny Curry's proposal for pension costs, the city would spend substantially less on pension contributions for many years, thereby making more money available for other city services. However, the smaller annual contributions would push back how long it takes to fully fund the city's long-term pension obligations. The chart below shows a comparison for the Police and Fire Pension Fund.

#### CITY'S ANNUAL CONTRIBUTION

\$250 million



Source: City of Jacksonville

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**Current plan**  
The city's contributions peak in 2027. Pension obligations are 98 percent funded as of Oct. 1, 2045.



**Curry option 1**  
The city dials back its yearly contributions. Pension obligations are 64.9 percent funded as of Oct. 1, 2045.



**Curry option 2**  
The city further reduces its yearly contributions. Pension obligations are 57.6 percent funded on Oct. 1, 2045.

## House considers pension bill amendments

Curry not switching tactics until changes official

By Tia Mitchell  
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TALLAHASSEE | With the Florida House expected to vote next week on Jacksonville pension reforms, Mayor Lenny Curry said he is preparing for last-minute amendments that could bring substantial changes to the measure he considers his highest priority.

Lawmakers are discussing whether

to introduce an amendment to House Bill 1297 that would require current employees to pay more into the current pensions in return for permission to use a half-cent sales tax to pay down pension debt. Police and fire union representatives have said such changes could affect their support. That could, in turn, make it more difficult for Curry to convince voters to authorize the sale tax in a referendum. A second amendment that would affect governance of the pension plans, particularly with respect to the Police and Fire Pension Fund Board, could also be introduced.

"The choppy waters don't scare me," Curry said Wednesday, before specifics of the proposed changes were clear. "It's part of the process."

Curry was out of the office Thursday, a spokeswoman said, and not available to answer questions about

BILL continues on A-4



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Jacksonville City Councilman Bill Gulliford said he didn't want to withdraw legislation calling for a referendum on expansion of the city's human rights ordinance.

## Expansion of rights gone, but not forever

Council drops 2 bills that addressed LGBT protections

By Christopher Hong  
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Jacksonville's long-unresolved question of creating local discrimination protections for the LGBT community remains unanswered after the City Council voted Thursday to suspend its latest push to settle the divisive issue.

But advocates from both sides have made it clear: The issue isn't going away.

In a special meeting, the council voted to withdraw bills that would have expanded the city's anti-discrimination law to include gays, lesbians and transgender people and another that would have let voters make the decision.

However, even the withdrawal of the legislation faced significant pushback from some council members — the latest sign that consensus on anything related to the issue is hard to come by.

Councilman Bill Gulliford, who introduced the bill that would let voters decide the issue, said Thursday that he didn't want to withdraw his legislation. While he previously said he'd withdraw his bill if Councilman Tommy Hazouri withdrew his, Gulliford said he had second thoughts after Hazouri said he planned to reintroduce his legislation to expand the city's anti-discrimination law at a later date.

Hazouri said he wanted to withdraw his bill because he believed it lacked the votes necessary to pass and that he sensed his colleagues still had fundamental questions about expanding discrimination protections. But others, like Councilmen Al Ferraro and Garrett Dennis, said they wanted

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#### HOW THEY VOTED

Breakdown: Who voted for and against the withdrawal. A-4

## Hall apologizes for texts, criticizes Vitti's leadership

Duval School Board member says messages weren't meant as slur; Vitti says he just wants reconciliation

By Denise Smith Amos  
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Duval School Board member Constance Hall Wednesday wrote a second apology for some negative texts she wrote about Superintendent Nikolai Vitti,

but she still included criticism about his leadership.

Vitti told a group of 40 parents and community members in Riverside Thursday that he wants reconciliation with Hall but to deal with her statements in a public meeting.

The superintendent, who has run the district for four years, said these issues are making him "emotionally tired."

"All I want is reconciliation; that's all I want," he said.

He said he wished Hall had talked with him earlier, "eye to eye and face to face," about her texts and about her problems with

him before the matter became public.

The trouble began late last week, when a few texts Hall wrote in September to a School Board employee became public through a public records request.

In one of those messages, Hall refers to Vitti wanting to spend time at an academy for public school leaders and wrote, "Wow, and

he thinks he can do that? Special Ed in action."

Hall has since said she was joking, although she was angry with him about some of the district's problems.

Vitti said he believes the text was a reference to his dyslexia and that he might sue over a "hostile work environment."

Hall issued a written

apology. Then on Monday, board member Jason Fischer called for Hall to resign, saying her text was a slur against students with disabilities.

Hall apologized again in a second statement Wednesday, saying she didn't mean it that way or for anyone else to see the texts.

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# Sanders' lead from primaries crushed by superdelegates

These establishment endorsements heavily favor Hillary Clinton

By Hope Yen & Stephen Ohlemacher  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON | So much for Bernie Sanders' big win in New Hampshire.

Since then, Hillary Clinton has picked up endorsements from 87 more

superdelegates to the Democratic National Convention, dwarfing Sanders' gain from the New Hampshire primary, according to a new Associated Press survey. Sanders has added just 11 superdelegate endorsements.

If these party insiders continue to back Clinton overwhelmingly—and they can change their minds—Sanders would have to win the remaining primaries by a landslide just to catch up.

He would have to roll up big margins because every Democratic contest awards delegates in proportion to the vote, so even the loser can get some.

After the contests in Iowa and New Hampshire, Sanders has a small 36-32 lead among delegates won in primaries and caucuses. But when superdelegates are included, Clinton leads 481-55, according to the AP count. It's essentially a parallel election that under-

scores Clinton's lopsided support from the Democratic establishment.

The disparity is sparking a backlash among some Sanders supporters, who complain that the Democratic nominating process is decidedly undemocratic, rigged in favor of Clinton.

Some of them—not part of the campaign, Sanders' people say—are contacting superdelegates who have publicly endorsed Clinton. Their message isn't subtle,

or always welcome.

"I'm sick and tired of them," Cordelia Lewis-Burks, a superdelegate from Indiana, said of the Sanders backers. "It's very aggravating to be bashed on my own computer by these people who it's probably the first time they've ever voted. I've been in the trenches since I was 20."

Superdelegates aren't new. They have been part of the Democratic Party's nominating process since

1984.

They automatically attend the national convention and can support the candidate of their choice, regardless of whom primary voters back. They are party leaders—members of Congress, party officials and members of the Democratic National Committee.

There are 712 superdelegates, or about 30 percent of the 2,382 delegates needed to claim the Democratic nomination.

## HRO

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to move forward and vote on the legislation.

The council Thursday night also considered taking a final vote on Gulliford's legislation. However, council members seemed reluctant to hold a referendum on the issue this year—especially since voters could also decide on passing a sales tax to pay off the city's pension debt on the same ballot.

Councilwoman Lori Boyer said she feared that a high-profile referendum on the issue would divide the community and would attract national attention that could paint Jacksonville in a negative light.

In the end, the council voted 13-6 to withdraw Hazouri's legislation. It also voted 13-6 to withdraw Gulliford's legislation.

## 'WASN'T READY FOR PRIME TIME'

After the meeting, Hazouri said it's clear to him that his legislation "wasn't ready for prime time."

He also said he expected to get more support from his colleagues—whom he wouldn't name—who indicated they would expand the discrimination protections during their election last year. However, Councilmen Aaron Bowman and Jim Love were the only ones to co-sponsor the legislation, and some council members never said where they stood on the issue.

"That's disappointing," Hazouri said.

Hazouri said he would spend the coming months refining his approach to the issue before he introduces new legislation. He



Photos by Bob.Self@jacksonville.com

Jacksonville City Councilman Tommy Hazouri addresses questions during the debate on proposals for withdrawal of bills that had been introduced by him and by Bill Gulliford.



Asked his view on an expanded rights ordinance, Dave Danford said, "Everyone has the same rights and everyone has enough rights. I respect them all."

said he hopes the next time he introduces a bill, council members will have answered their own questions and he'll be prepared to deal with the arguments against expanding the discrimination protections.

Gulliford, who two weeks ago supported withdrawing the legislation, said the issue won't go away until the council deals with it. He said he hasn't ruled out introducing new legislation to hold a referendum.

Advocates for both sides

made another strong showing at the meeting. Those in favor of the discrimination protections expressed disapproval at the council who they felt were walking away from the issue, while those opposed to the protections urged council members to let the voters make the decision.

Even after the votes were cast, both sides seemed eager to keep the issue on the minds of the council. Advocates for the discrimination protections held a

## HOW THEY VOTED

### For the withdrawal:

Greg Anderson, Aaron Bowman, Lori Boyer, Anna Brosche, Katrina Brown, Reginald Brown, John Crescimbeni, Reginald Gaffney, Tommy Hazouri, Jim Love, Joyce Morgan, Samuel Newby, Scott Wilson.

### Against:

Danny Becton, Doyle Carter, Garrett Dennis, Al Ferraro, Bill Gulliford, Matt Schellenberg

rally on the steps of City Hall, chanting, "No justice, no peace."

A large group opposed to the protections watched silently from across the street. While they weren't chanting, many wore shirts displaying a clear message: "If you don't have my VALUES, you don't have my VOTE."

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## VITTI

Continued from A-1

But, she wrote, she is frustrated there are still so many persistently low-performing schools in Duval.

"As we face an onslaught of failing schools just released this past Friday, 21 Duval schools received an 'F' grade; more than 50 percent of them (11) are located in my district," she wrote. "These poor outcomes fuel my continued frustration with the lack of leadership, respect, and collaboration exhibited by our Superintendent."

Hall wrote Wednesday that Vitti "lacks the leadership skills exhibited by successful superintendents that lead successful districts" and noted that the School Board hired an executive coach for him.

Two other board members, Scott Shine and Jason Fischer, said the board recommended coaching for Vitti because that is what responsible executives do to develop themselves; they believe Vitti already is an effective leader.

Board Chairwoman Ashley Smith Juarez said she won't comment on Vitti's

abilities until his annual evaluation in April. Meanwhile, she wants the bickering to stop.

"Enough is enough," she said. "It's time for leadership. We need to stop fighting each other and go back to fighting for children. We have a school district to run and constituents to serve."

Hall said she does not intend to resign. "Our constituents elected us to ... hold Dr. Vitti and any superintendent accountable for the academic excellence of students," Hall wrote.

"I commit to efforts that contribute to a conducive environment and look forward to learning more about how Superintendent Vitti will improve our schools. ... My tough questions will continue; my expectations will remain high; and my commitment to the students and constituents of District 5 will grow stronger."

Initially, Vitti responded to Hall's Wednesday letter with a written statement of his own, defending himself and criticizing her.

Vitti wrote that Hall has long held low opinions of him and that she is using school grades as "a politi-



Hall

Vitti

cal weapon to erode public confidence and eerily excuse her inappropriate comment."

Hesaidnumerousschools had failing grades due to Florida's many changes to its academic standards, tests and accountability system.

"Dr. Hall was a former elementary principal who led a school to four consecutive D school grades until the school improved to a C. She should realize more than most that it can take time to improve school grades in a context of constant accountability changes," he wrote.

He added that Hall is intentionally rejecting his ideas for school reforms, he said.

"The overall approach is 'we need to hold the superintendent accountable but let's keep everything the same and make his work as difficult as possible as he tries to change the same schools we need to hold

him accountable [for] improving,'" he said. "This is not effective."

Several of the 40 parents attending Thursday's "superintendent chat" said they don't want Vitti to consider leaving the district because of the brouhaha, especially not when he is trying to revamp schools.

"I could care less about tempers and text messaging," said Chelita Holland, whose children attend Central Riverside Elementary and Kirby-Smith Middle School.

"If you're going to make some changes so my children will have some of the same opportunities the next child has, that's all that matters," she said.

Joanna Copeland said she moved to Jacksonville from Miami-Dade and "stands in support" of Vitti.

"You are a strong leader; if you can hold on just a while longer," she told him.

Vitti answered: "I'm not going anywhere," as the group clapped.

"It's going to be hard for me to burn out; it's just not in my genes. ... But I'm a little tired emotionally."

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## PENSION

Continued from A-1

65 percent of the pension obligations earned by police and firefighters. The difference depends on the amount of contributions the city puts into the pension fund over that period.

In contrast, the funding schedule currently in place calls for heftier annual payments and would get the Police and Fire Pension Fund to a funding level on Oct. 1, 2045 sufficient to cover 98 percent of pension obligations.

City Director of Finance Mike Weinstein said the problem with the current approach is the pension payments are so large that they squeeze out the ability to pay for other needs sought by residents.

Currently, the Police and Fire Pension Fund has enough banked to cover 43 percent of pension obligations due over the next 30 years.

Curry's approach breaks from the strategy outlined by a high-profile pension-reform task force that recommended in 2014 that Jacksonville should front-load paydown of the debt in order to reduce the city's costs over the long run. The city followed that approach when it enacted pension reform legislation last June.

Bill Scheu, who was chairman of the pension task force and now serves on the Police and Fire Pension Fund's board, said Thursday he wasn't ready to weigh in on the funding scenario detailed in the actuarial report on Curry's proposal.

He said the Legislature still could change bills that are pending in the House and Senate affecting Jacksonville's options. The bills would allow Jacksonville voters to enact a half-cent sales tax solely for paying off the city's pension debt.

"I want to see what actually comes out of the Legislature," Scheu said.

Tad Delegal, an attorney who also served on the task force, said the time frame envisioned by Curry for pension paydown concerns him.

"It gives me some discomfort because we're further kicking down the road the effects of some historical mistakes," Delegal said.

He said he likes that Curry's plan includes seeking a sales tax that would be a dedicated source for handling the pension debt. "I just don't like that it's going to take so long to do it," he said.

## SALES TAX IS CENTERPIECE OF PLAN

The phrase "kicking the can down the road" has been a frequent criticism of how Jacksonville has approached its pension problems over the years. Weinstein and Chief Administrative Officer Sam

Mousa said the current proposal isn't an attempt to push off the problem.

"The mayor is taking the problem head-on," Mousa said. "This is not kicking the can. This is a final, conclusive, complete game plan to get it fixed once and for all, and never, ever have this problem again."

The centerpiece of Curry's plan involves asking the Legislature to let Duval County voters decide if they want a half-cent sales tax devoted solely to the city's unfunded pension obligations. That half-cent sales tax would take effect immediately after expiration of the Better Jacksonville Plan's sales tax in 2030.

## 'THIS IS NEW TERRITORY'

The half-cent sales tax for pension would run through 2060. Curry's proposal is based on conservative 2 percent annual growth in the sales tax, which would generate about \$4 billion between 2030 and 2060.

To get immediate credit for that half-cent sales tax money, Curry is asking the Legislature to let Jacksonville count that as an asset right off the bat by converting it into a lower "present day" value for accounting purposes.

By having that asset on the books, the city would be able to lower its annual contribution in the years until the sales tax actually starts pouring in.

But the actuarial report by Milliman, a firm that has worked for the city over the years analyzing pension concepts, warns that Governmental Accounting Standards Board standards might prevent Jacksonville from counting future sales tax revenue as a current asset.

"That's a legitimate comment because this is new territory and nobody knows for sure if this can be done," Weinstein said.

Milliman's report shows the city would not start to get financial relief on its pension contributions until the 2019-20 fiscal year. The city's contribution to the Police and Fire Pension Fund would be \$126 million to \$136 million in Curry's pension plans, compared to \$189 million in the current funding arrangement.

In addition to that reduction of around \$60 million, the city also would experience another \$30 million reduction in what it would pay into the General Employee Pension Plan.

Weinstein said after the sales tax money starts flowing into the pension plans, the assets of the plans will grow toward 100 percent funding, probably between 2045 and 2055.

"It won't get there as fast," he said, "but it will definitely get there."

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## BILL

Continued from A-1

whether he would support amendments like these or if they could affect support in Jacksonville for his proposed reforms.

Jacksonville firefighter union President Randy Wyse said he had not heard from the mayor about any potential changes to the pension bill, which he supports in its current form. Wyse said he would remain open-minded and doesn't consider the possible amendments, as described to him, to be automatic deal-breakers.

"We'll look at each amendment and work on it

until the very end," Wyse said. "We might even have amendments of our own to propose."

## 'A DELICATE POLITICAL BALANCE'

Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fort Walton Beach, said an amendment affecting current employees is being talked about, but that doesn't mean one will be introduced and ultimately approved by a majority of representatives. He is a strong proponent of the plan as is and said he would not support changes that threaten the current level of support.

"I think that Mayor Curry is dealing with a delicate

political balance back in Jacksonville," Gaetz said. "I don't want the Legislature doing things to make it more complicated."

Curry was in Tallahassee this week meeting with lawmakers. He said part of his agenda was explaining that the city has already received concessions from unions that affect current employees. In addition, Curry said, he has received a clear message from the Legislature that, if the pension tax is approved, a new retirement plan will have to be created for future employees. He just doesn't want his hands tied on what that should look like, something about which the

unions have also expressed concern.

Curry said he is trying not to put too much thought into what would happen if there are amendments proposed on the House floor that affect his vision for the pension reforms. The House will consider any amendments on Tuesday and vote on the bill Wednesday.

"We'll just navigate them when it happens," Curry said about potential changes.

## A BUS LOAD OF SUPPORT

JAX Chamber announced Thursday that it will be sending a bus full of business leaders and City Council members to Tal-

lahassee on Wednesday so they can meet with legislators and make their presence known in any committee hearings.

The chamber's board of directors voted Jan. 26 to support Curry's pension plan and pledged to rally the business community behind it.

"There's always been an expectation that we would do something to really show support of the business community," Chamber spokesman Matt Galnor said of the lobbying trip.

He said a public notice of the trip would be posted since several City Council members are expected to ride the bus to Tallahassee.

Sen. Rob Bradley, R-Fleming Island, said the Senate version of the legislation, SB 1652, is on track to be approved soon by its final committee. But he and Rep. Travis Cummings, R-Fleming Island, have decided to let the House take the lead, especially if changes are on the table.

"What Representative Cummings and I want to avoid is a bounce" as the chambers toss different versions of the bill back and forth, Bradley said. "We want to have one pass."

Times-Union writer David Bauerlein contributed to this report.

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