

Top-ranked firm for The Shipyards and Met Park will emerge April 19

By David Bauerlein
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A Jacksonville committee tasked with evaluating three firms vying to be master developer of The Shipyards and Metropolitan Park will submit their scores in time for the Downtown Investment Authority to vote April 19 on a top-ranked firm.

The evaluation committee met Monday to set up the time line for making a decision on the biggest tract of city-owned land on downtown's riverfront.

Jaguars owner Shad Khan, operating through Iguana Investments Florida, is competing with two Texas-based groups, the Presidium Group and Wess

Holdings.

The selection committee won't bring in the firms for in-person presentations. The committee will base its scores on the written applications that were submitted in response to the city's requests for development proposals.

Downtown Investment Authority Executive Director Aundra Wallace, who is on the selection committee, said the written proposals have the information the committee needs to give its scores.

"Quite frankly, no oral presentation is going to be better than what the numbers actually say, so at the end of the day, the financial offer and your redevelopment vision is really going

to drive a lot of this," Wallace said.

Wallace is joined on the evaluation committee by Downtown Investment Authority board member Ron Moody and city Public Works Department Director John Pappas. Each member of the committee will submit scores for the three applicants to the city procurement department by April 12. The procurement department will tabulate the scores and give them to the Downtown Investment Authority.

The DIA board will vote April 19 to begin negotiating a development agreement with the top-ranked firm.

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JEA and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local representing utility employees met Monday in a collective bargaining session, reaching a tentative agreement that will go to rank-and-file union members for a vote Thursday. (David Bauerlein/Florida Times-Union)

Electric workers union reaches pension agreement with JEA

By David Bauerlein
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The campaign to close Jacksonville's pension plans to all future employees got back on track Monday when the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers reached a tentative agreement with JEA a week after the union's members rejected a previous offer.

A centerpiece of Mayor Lenny Curry's pension reform package is to close all three pension plans to new hires after Sept. 30 when they would all go into 401(k) style investment accounts.

Unions representing workers in the Police and Fire Pension Fund and the Corrections Officers Pension Plan have signed off on the change for future hires. But there is unfinished

business for the General Employees Pension Plan because rank-and-file members of IBEW and Laborers' International Union of North America rejected offers last week from JEA.

JEA and IBEW met again Monday and reached a tentative agreement on a pact that sweetens the pay raises previously put on the table. Instead of 3 percent pay raises per year for three years, IBEW employees would get annual 4.5 percent raises for three years.

The tentative agreement also spelled out in greater detail benefits future hires would get in the 401(k) style accounts.

In a sign of the importance in getting an agreement worked out, CEO Paul McElroy was among the JEA administrators at

the collective bargaining session.

"It's been a long process over the past year," McElroy said after the tentative agreement got signed by both sides. "I think we're in a good spot."

A significant difference from the JEA offer rejected last week is that the tentative agreement reached Monday is supported by IBEW leaders. They will recommend rank-and-file members vote for it on Thursday.

JEA will return Tuesday to the bargaining table with LIUNA. Three other groups representing JEA workers in the General Employees Pension Plan have already signed off on tentative agreements, as have groups representing city workers.

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Constitution revision panel starts work

By Brandon Larrabee
The News Service of Florida

TALLAHASSEE | The once-every-20-years process of updating Florida's basic law began Monday, as the Constitution Revision Commission held its opening meeting in Tallahassee.

The 37-member panel, appointed almost entirely by Republicans for the first time in history, is expected to submit proposals for amending the state Constitution to voters for the November 2018 election.

The meeting was largely ceremonial. Gov. Rick Scott, Senate President Joe Negron, House Speaker Richard Corcoran and Supreme Court Chief Justice Jorge Labarga — who combined to appoint all but one of the members — each briefly addressed the commission.

Attorney General Pam Bondi is automatically a member of the panel.

Leaders steered clear of sweeping policy pronouncements. Carlos Beruff, a Manatee County home builder appointed by Scott to head the commission, promised an open process.

"Every member of the CRC will have the opportunity to be heard and have the chance to fight for the issues they believe are important to this state," he said. "Most importantly,

though, we need to listen to the citizens."

Beruff also announced the first three public hearings the commission will hold to get input from residents: March 29 in Orange County, April 6 in Miami-Dade County and a day later in Palm Beach County.

Beruff said he wanted to hold at least two rounds of public hearings — to try to ensure that part-time residents would also have input — and the commission would begin sifting through proposals "after the fall."

He said the panel was unlikely to put recommendations on the ballot unless it had a sense that they would be approved by the required 60 percent of voters.

"I think it's a fool's errand to propose ideas that we don't think the public is going to support," he said.

While the first day was tranquil, the commission could soon be engulfed in some of the state's fiercest political fights. Abortion, school choice and how the state's judiciary operates could all be affected by its work.

Already, there were tensions about how the panel would do its work. The First Amendment Foundation voiced a concern about a draft commission rule saying the panel's record would be "accessible to the

public," rather than "open to the public," the phrase used in 1998.

Timothy Cerio, a commission member who explained the draft to the commission, said the new version of the rule was meant to be stronger.

"That is certainly something that can be revisited," said Cerio, a former general counsel to Scott.

Beruff said the rules would be approved at a later meeting.

There were also questions about the role of Beruff, a close political ally of Scott who has no apparent experience in constitutional law. Scott defended the choice to reporters after speaking to the commission.

"He's a well-respected businessperson in the Sarasota area, and I know from my experience with him he's going to work very hard and run a very good commission," he said.

Former state Senate Minority Leader Arthenia Joyner, a Tampa Democrat who is expected to be a liberal voice on the panel, played down any worries that Beruff would have undue influence.

"I'm sure that this commission is not going to allow any one person, be it the chair or otherwise, dictate what is best for the people of the state of Florida," she said.

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- 10:30 am SPARK Line Dancers
- 11:00 am Kyle & Ann Heath
Singing Songs of the 50's
- 11:30 am YogaFit
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- 12:00 pm Keyboard Connection
Piano Fun
- 12:30 pm New Life Tai Chi
'Meditation in Motion'
- 1:15 pm Ed Arrington
Songs of the 40s, 50s & 60s
- 1:45 pm Gail Moore
Singing Gospel Classics

Speakers

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- 11:30 am Dr. R. David Heekin,
MD, FACS Heekin Clinic
Your Joint Pain and Treatment Options
- 12:30 pm John Reardon
Reverse Mortgage Specialist
Reverse Mortgages, Pros & Cons... Facts & Fiction
- 1:00 pm Dr. Adam Bordes and
Melanie Jordan, P.T.
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