

City Council OKs DOJ discrimination lawsuit

Settlement will cost Jacksonville nearly \$2 million in penalties, fees

By Christopher Hong
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The city resolved Tuesday a federal discrimination complaint stemming from its 2014 decision to stop a local nonprofit from building an apartment complex in Springfield for people with disabilities.

The City Council approved a settlement to a lawsuit the city faces from the nonprofit, Ability Housing, as well as the Justice Department and a statewide disability advocacy group.

The settlement will cost the city nearly \$2 million in penalties, legal fees and a grant that would pay for a supportive housing facility for people with disabilities. It also changes the city's zoning laws, including a special overlay for historic Springfield that was used to block Ability Housing's project.

The council took months to approve the settlement as it sorted out concerns expressed by several council members — as well as an influential

lobbyist hired by Springfield businessman Jack Meeks, who spearheaded the opposition campaign against the project and the settlement.

Those critics said the new zoning laws were vaguely defined and could open the door for intrusive housing facilities to move into neighborhoods without any input from residents.

In response, the council tweaked the new zoning rules. That includes requiring the city to notify neighbors if they are considering changes to a residence that aren't allowed under zoning laws in order to accommodate residents with disabilities.

Ability Housing and the Justice Department agreed to those changes.

The controversy surrounding the apartments dates back to 2013, when Ability Housing announced its plans to convert an existing 12-unit complex on Cottage Avenue into a housing facility for homeless residents, many expected to be vet-



An apartment complex in the Springfield neighborhood of Jacksonville was once considered an Ability Housing project. Neighborhood objections stopped the project from moving forward. (Bob Mack/Florida Times-Union)

erans with mental illnesses and drug addictions.

The city blocked the group's plan. Its reasoning: The project was a "cut above" normal housing because it would provide supportive services to residents, which isn't allowed under the special zoning rules for Springfield.

Those prohibitions on certain housing facilities

will be removed under the settlement.

In response to the city's decision, Ability Housing sued the city at the end of 2014 for housing discrimination. The Justice Department began investigating shortly after and joined the lawsuit at the end of last year.

Shannon Nazworth, executive director for Ability

Housing, said she was glad the city finally resolved the issue.

"We're just very grateful, after three years, that it's come to the right outcome," she said. "We're very happy for the city, and we're looking forward to moving forward and creating more housing for people who need it."

Police: After converting to Islam, man kills roommates

Former neo-Nazi killed allegedly them to bring attention to anti-Muslim sentiment

Amy B. Wang
The Washington Post

A former neo-Nazi who converted to Islam is accused of killing his two roommates because they "disrespected" his new faith, police said.

Last Friday evening, police arrested 18-year-old Devon Arthurs after he briefly held three people at gunpoint at a smoke shop in Tampa, then surrendered to officers.

That incident, it turned out, was only the tip of the iceberg.

During the arrest, Arthurs mentioned to police that people in an apartment across the street were "definitely dead," according to Tampa Police Department records.

When officers entered that apartment, in a manicured upscale complex

in north Tampa, they found the bodies of two of Arthurs's roommates, 22-year-old Jeremy Himmelman and 18-year-old Andrew Oneschuk. Both men had gunshot wounds to the upper body and head and were dead, records stated.

Outside the apartment, a fourth roommate, 21-year-old Brandon Russell, was "crying and was visibly upset," police said.

"He doesn't know what's going on and just found (the two dead roommates) like you guys did," Arthurs told police.

What followed was a chilling confession in which Arthurs described in detail how and why he had killed two of his roommates earlier, police said. According to records, Arthurs told officers that "all of them had been friends

with a common neo-Nazi belief" until Arthurs converted to Islam.

Since then, Arthurs stated, he has become angered by the world's anti-Muslim sentiment and had wanted to bring attention to his cause. Arthurs also stated that, before the murder, he had been privy to neo-Nazi internet chat sites threatening to kill people, and he had developed a thinking that he should take some of the neo-Nazis with him.

Arthurs had displayed some of his ideology when he walked into the Green Planet Smoke Shop about 5:30 p.m. Friday — presumably after killing his roommates — and produced a gun, ordering a customer and employee to "get the [expletive] on the ground," according to police.

After a second customer walked into the store, Arthurs told all three hostages that he had already killed someone and was "upset due to America bombing

his Muslim countries," a police report stated.

When Tampa police officers arrived about five minutes later, Arthurs surrendered after a brief standoff and was placed under arrest. According to police, he exclaimed "Allah Mohammed!" as he was being walked to a patrol car, and told officers: "I had to do it. This wouldn't have had to happen if your country didn't bomb my country."

County arrest records indicate Arthurs was born in Florida.

In a search of the apartment Arthurs shared with his three roommates, officers discovered bomb-making equipment in the garage, including fuses and a cooler containing a "white cake-like substance" that bomb squad technicians recognized as the explosive HMTD (hexamethylene triperoxide diamine), according to a criminal complaint filed

by the FBI in U.S. District Court.

Inside a bedroom belonging to Russell, the roommate who had been crying when police arrived, officers found firearms, ammunition and "Nazi/white supremacist propaganda," including a framed picture of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh on the dresser. McVeigh was sentenced to death for the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, which killed 168 and was the deadliest terrorist attack on American soil before Sept. 11, 2001.

Russell told investigators that he had made the HMTD and was the owner of the fuses found in the garage. He explained that he formerly belonged to an engineering club at the University of South Florida and had used the HMTD to "boost homemade rockets and send balloons into the atmosphere for testing," according to the complaint.

BROSCHÉ

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precedent. In fact, Crescimbeni lost his bid for council president in 1998 in the same manner.

Still, it drew criticism from a few colleagues. The most pointed came from Councilman Bill Gulliford, who said Brosche's move could poison working relationships between council members and that he'd refuse to serve on any committees next year if Brosche won.

Brosche and Crescim-

beni sat next to each other during the vote. They shook hands after the results were announced, although Brosche didn't mention Crescimbeni in her victory speech.

She said the omission wasn't intended as a slight and that she doesn't think any hard feelings will spill into the next year.

"This has been an interesting and long 85 days, and I'm really excited to put it behind us but also move forward," Brosche said.

Crescimbeni's loss marks the end of a roll-

ercoaster campaign for council president, the only key leadership position he hasn't held in his 17 years on the council.

Crescimbeni faced stiff competition from Councilman Doyle Carter in last year's election for vice president. He won in dramatic fashion after Councilman Reginald Gaffney flipped on his pledge to support Carter and handed Crescimbeni the deciding vote.

Typically, the vice presidency race decides who will serve as president the following year. How-

ever, rumors that Brosche would challenge him proved to be true in February when she announced her candidacy.

Crescimbeni quickly earned the support from five council members, although Brosche eventually closed the gap. Coming into Tuesday's vote, she had nine pledges of support, just one short needed to win.

In the vice presidency race, Councilman Aaron Bowman beat Scott Wilson. Bowman, a Republican elected in 2015, is the senior vice president

of business development with JAXUSA and former commander of Mayport Naval Station.

HOW THEY VOTED

Brosche: Al Ferraro, Aaron Bowman, Matt Schellenberg, Reginald Gaffney, Katrina Brown, Garrett Dennis, Reginald Brown, Danny Becton, Doyle Carter, Anna Lopez Brosche, Sam Newby

Crescimbeni: Joyce Morgan, Scott Wilson, Lori Boyer, Bill Gulliford, Jim Love, John Crescimbeni, Tommy Hazouri, Greg Anderson

LOUIE

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Little Willie.

By Monday afternoon, more than a dozen people had donated about \$1,300 to an online fund for Miller's legal representation. People identifying themselves as friends of Miller flocked to social media and said they hoped — for his sake — that a mistake had been made.

Alex Osborn, a fellow street performer who admires Miller as an artist and considers him a friend, said Monday, "If it is true, then I hope for justice, as far down the road as it is.

"If it is true, then I hope for justice, as far down the road as it is. But the natural reaction is if your friend is accused of something horrible, of course you don't want it to be true."

Alex Osborn

street performer and friend of Johnie Lewis Miller

But the natural reaction is if your friend is accused of something horrible, of course you don't want it to be true."

Farah's relatives have declined to comment on Miller's capture. One of his children said they have been asked to wait until the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office announces the arrest before speaking out on

the case.

However, an organization in Jacksonville that last month used its website to call attention to Farah's killing lauded authorities' work.

"For 43 years, the Farah family has been denied justice," Project: Cold Case said in a statement to The Florida Times-Union. "Thanks to the Jackson-

ville Sheriff's Office and its cold-case detectives, that is no longer the situation."

Documents preceding Miller's arrest also provide details of events surrounding Farah's slaying.

After being told at gunpoint that his store was being held up, Farah tried to swat the weapon out of his attacker's grip as he moved away, the documents said. Farah died from a gunshot wound to the head and the killer immediately fled, police said, citing an eyewitness.

Farah's survivors included his wife, three daughters and a son. The children were all young at the time.

PLANT

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BizCapital's lawsuit says Cowealth owes \$2.76 million to the bank for an unpaid loan amount, plus interest, late fees and attorney fees.

The city of Jacksonville sued Cowealth to recover a \$210,549 grant the city provided from the Northwest Jacksonville Economic Development Trust Fund for

the barbecue sauce manufacturing venture. The breach of contract lawsuit contends Cowealth failed to create any of the 56 jobs it was supposed to bring online in return for the city's support.

The city's lawsuit is still pending. In addition to the grant, the city provided a \$380,000 loan to Cowealth for the barbecue plant.

Biz Capital's lawsuit originally named JoAnn Brown and her husband Jerome,

who is the namesake for the barbecue sauce, in the list of defendants.

JoAnn and Jerome Brown filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy last week, which put a stay on the bank's lawsuit against them.

Biz Capital then dropped the JoAnn and Jerome Brown from the lawsuit, allowing the case to proceed against the other defendants for the foreclosure judgment.

JoAnn Brown could not

be reached Tuesday for comment. Katrina Brown is not named individually as a defendant.

Federal authorities also opened an investigation of the plant. The U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Inspector General joined the FBI and the IRS in a raid last December of the building. Federal authorities have not announced any results of that investigation.

David Bauerlein: (904) 359-4581

WOODS

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on Facebook. While I was out of the office, I missed a call back from the Fey Witch. So now I was playing phone tag with a witch.

We eventually did connect. Stephanie McGrath is a 50-year-old grandmother. She has dark hair, but no pointy hat or cackle; just an endearing laugh as she played along with my hunt, telling me a bit about herself.

She has a degree with dual concentrations in U.S. and European history, and a minor in fine arts. She grew up in California and lived in Ohio before moving to North Florida to help take care of her father as he battles cancer.

"I'm fairly active in the community," she said. "But I'm what is considered to be a solitary witch."

She said she's been a practicing psychic for more than 30 years. The "fey" part comes from Celtic traditions she has studied. She uses tarot cards, does readings, blesses homes, rids negative energies and passes along messages from beyond.

Even though she's based on the Southside, she says the internet allows her to have clients all over the world, from all walks of life, from a professor at an Oregon university to single mothers in Ohio trailer parks.

"A witch today is a person who has taken control of powers that are all around us, but a lot of times people tend to dismiss," she said, describing a mix of positive thought, prayer, physics and psychology. "It's not what you see on TV. I wish it was. That would be so much fun."

I eventually heard back from some other organizations. I told them my witch hunt already was a success. I had found a witch on the Southside. But I'd keep them in mind for future witch hunts.

I mean, I resisted the temptation to ask the Fey Witch if she could see into the future and answer important questions such as: Will the Jaguars finally have a winning record this season? Will I be riding a new paddleboard this summer? And, of course, what will become of what some politicians describe as "witch hunts"?

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