

metro

DRONES ON DUTY

Help catch Glynn County suspect

Story, B-6



Poll: 72 percent not for longer term limits

By Christopher Hong
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As the Jacksonville City Council considers a referendum to increase term limits for local officials, a Washington, D.C.-based group Wednesday sent them a message: Voters think eight years is enough.

The group, U.S. Term Limits, was referring to 72 percent of the 400 likely voters they recently polled who said they oppose increasing term limits for council members.

Next week, the council is set to vote on a referendum to ask voters to allow council members, the sheriff, members of the Duval County School Board and the city's constitutional officers to serve three consecutive four-year terms. If approved, the referendum would go on the August 2018 ballot.

Officials are currently bound by a two-term limit that was enacted with overwhelming support in a 1991 referendum.

Opponents of extending term limits say voters don't want elected officials tinkering with that decision.

"We're just hoping that with recent polling, people will realize that we need to stick with an eight-year term and stop trying to find ways to benefit themselves by increasing to 12-year terms," said Brandon Lind, a regional director for U.S. Term Limits, at a press conference Wednesday.

The referendum was proposed by Councilman Matt Schellenberg, who has said term limits force experienced officials, along with their institutional knowledge, out of office to the detriment of residents.

The council was supposed to vote on the referendum last month, but it postponed the vote after a lengthy debate. It's still unclear how the measure would fare in a final vote.

The group's poll, conducted last week, found 17 percent favored increasing term limits, 72 percent opposed it and 12 percent weren't sure.

The poll also found 71 percent of voters believed

TERM continues on B-2

Despite audit, mayor wants change

Report details positive outcomes, but Curry plans to merge two programs for children

By Tessa Duvall
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Findings of an audit of Jacksonville Children's Commission programs were released to the organization Tuesday, nearly two weeks after Mayor Lenny Curry announced plans to overhaul the city agency.

Curry called for the audit in December, telling the board chair Matt Kane "it is critical" the commission be aligned with his priorities on public safety and opportuni-

ties for kids.

But, before the commission staff had a chance to review or respond to the 139-page document produced by data services company NLP Logix, Curry announced earlier this month his intent to merge the Children's Commission with the Jax Journey into one organization with a \$36 million budget.

The audit found that, by and large, the commission has been doing many things right for the children it serves. After-

school programs were producing results among engaged students and an effort to improve student mental health is a good candidate to be expanded to more schools.

Data collection and tracking results for children, however, was a re-occurring issue that the commission needs to address, according to the copy of the audit obtained Tuesday through a public records request.

For Kane, the "largely positive" review was consolation that the commission has been "really great."

For newly term-limited board member Cathie Shimp, it's proof that

Curry needs to keep his hands — and politics — off the Children's Commission.

"If it's not broken," she asked, "why is there an urgent need to fix it?"

Shimp spoke out at Wednesday's meeting of the Children's Commission board, its first since Curry announced Aug. 2 his plan to consolidate the Children's Commission and Jax Journey into the Kids Hope Alliance.

In her critique of the mayor's ordinance, Shimp took issue with the way it would allow Curry more direct power over the commission. If

AUDIT continues on B-3



terry dickson

Age doesn't slow mail for Brunswick man

BRUNSWICK, GA. | Neither snow nor rain, nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.

Add age to that list because you can bet that if the Brunswick post office is open and it's 72-year-old David Williams' shift, he'll be behind the counter, as he has been since Aug. 25, 1969.

His first government job had an APO, one of those overseas addresses he got during a three-year enlistment in the Army that started in 1965.

"After the first six months, they sent me to Vietnam (for a year) After I got out of the military, I said I'd never wear a uniform again," he said dressed in his U.S. Postal Service uniform. Combining his three years in Army green with his decades in post office blue, Williams is coming up on 51 years in government service.

He was working for Sea Island Co. when someone suggested he take the civil service exam. Figuring he had nothing to lose, he took it, passed and was offered the position of a part-time, flexible employee. He took the first job available, a postal clerk's position, and that figured into his longevity.

"If I'd been a carrier, I'd have been gone," he said. "It's hot outside."

It's not just the heat. There are also dogs who like postal carriers about as much as they do garbage collectors and meter readers, Williams figures. His supervisor Erica King can attest to that from her days as a letter carrier.

When she got out of her car in Camden County once, a pit bull chomped down on her ankle. She jumped first onto the hood of her car then scrambled to the roof before scrambling to safety through a car window.

Williams has worked the main post office in Brunswick, and on St. Simons, Jekyll Island and Sea Island a couple of times. When he got caught up on his clerk work on St. Simons, he ran an auxiliary route in a semi-circle around the post office. It was a semi-circle because the old post office was beside the lighthouse where everything east was the Atlantic.

"I had to deliver to the trailer park once in an emergency. People were looking at me," he said. "They knew I wasn't their carrier."

That's when people knew their mail carriers, talked to them on the front porch and complained about the weather. One carrier on St. Simons knew every branch on some family trees. Now, many frequent mailers at the Brunswick post office are on a first name basis with Williams.

Some things have changed at the counter, but some haven't. Williams starts his day as he always has with a pair of tweezers, inserting a new date in his official hand cancellation stamp. When he started, the postal service issued two or three first class stamps annually and they were 3 cents.

They're 49 cents now and Williams said, "We get 10 or 12 every three months."

He knows because he orders them.

The stamps are kept

DICKSON continues on B-3

Calling all zombies



Left: John Delaney, from Mandarin, gives his zombie stare for the video camera during his audition Wednesday afternoon at Buzz Media Group's studio. "It's kind of my passion" said Delaney. "I have 'that house' in the neighborhood at Halloween." **Above:** Reflected in the front window of the building, Joey Vokac, director of video production for Buzz Media Group holds the door for Kiara Felder, 19, as she leaves their San Marco office after successfully auditioning for a job as a zombie for the upcoming Haunted Brewery Zombie Hunt. Client Focused Media, part of the Buzz Media Group, was holding zombie auditions at their San Marco Boulevard offices for The Haunted Brewery Zombie Hunt to be held at the Anheuser-Busch Brewery Friday and Saturday evenings from late September until late October. The event will be a zombie takeover, according to Dara Sweatt, the promotions director and event coordinator for Client Focused Media, with a range of activities from a laser tag zombie hunt in the brewery, a zombie paintball event, an art gallery of death and other zombie-themed activities at the Northside brewery. Sixty zombies are needed each night of the event. Potential zombies have to show their best zombie stare, zombie walk and zombie growl during the taped auditions, which will continue through Sept. 15. Further information about the event can be found at thehauntedbrewery.com. (Bob Self/Florida Times-Union)

Fishery officials to consider 2017 red snapper season

By Christopher Hong
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Federal fishery managers will vote on an emergency order next month to create an open season later this year for red snapper, which are protected by strict regulations designed to help the species recover from overfishing.

The surprise move, which would create the first open season since 2014, will likely be welcomed by many local anglers who believe red snapper are thriving and mismanaged by overbearing federal officials.

Others were caught off guard by the news, and concerned about the repercussions of loosening the regulations and whether fishery managers were legally allowed to make that decision on such short notice.

"The question is, what's the emergency? Where's the fire?" said Leda Cunningham, who works for a campaign to end overfishing run by an arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts. "If there's new information that indicates the status of the population has changed for the better or worse, we'll need to see it."

Red snapper have been protected by strict regulations since 2010, a result of the federal government ruling the species was overfished to dangerously low numbers. Anglers can still catch red snapper, but they've had just a few oppor-



Regulations protect red snapper to help them recover from overfishing.

tunities to keep the fish since the rules took effect.

Anglers have long argued the government's science is wrong, pointing to their abundant catches of red snapper as undeniable proof the species is healthy. However, a government study of the red snapper completed in 2014 concluded the species still suffered from overfishing.

This summer saw a major shift in the debate over red snapper when the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, which sets fishing regulations in federal waters off the Southeast's coast, said they believed the species was healthy enough to endure conservative fishing seasons without hampering its recovery.

Government biologists said new data showed there were more red snapper than previously

thought. They also said previous data used to estimate the number of fish caught and killed each year — a crucial part of determining whether there is an open season — wasn't reliable enough to be used anymore.

At its June meeting, the fishery council decided to develop a plan to open red snapper season next summer and hoped to approve it at its next meeting in September. There was no discussion of opening a season in 2017.

Still, the emergency order was included on the agenda for the council's Sept. 11 meeting that was released Tuesday, meaning the council will likely discuss and vote on the decision.

If the council approves the order, it will be reviewed by Secretary of Commerce Wilbur Ross. If Ross' office approves it, the Na-

tional Marine Fisheries Services will determine when and how many days the season will be.

Roy Crabtree, a regional administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service, said any season would be a short one, likely one or two weekends.

Crabtree, a member of the fishery council, said the emergency order would likely be justified by new data on red snapper, and the economic harm that a closed season would inflict on local businesses and commercial fishermen.

"It was important to the council to try to provide fishing opportunities given the response we're seeing from the stock," Crabtree said. "People shouldn't expect a large number of days ... (The council) wouldn't want to do anything to put the season in jeopardy next year."

While anglers fishing the Atlantic Ocean have been prohibited from keeping red snapper, their counterparts in the Gulf of Mexico have enjoyed the longest season in years, thanks to the Commerce Department's decision to extend the season by 39 days. Conservationists filed a lawsuit in response, arguing the decision violated federal fishery laws and jeopardized red snapper recovery.

Crabtree said the Commerce Department was certainly inter-

SNAPPER continues on B-2

AUDIT

Continued from B-1

approved, the Kids Hope Alliance's board will have seven members, all appointed by the mayor and who serve at his pleasure. The commission is currently allowed 11 board members, some of whom serve at-large and some who represent the district. The new approach, Shimp said, could leave whole communities without representation on the board.

The mayor's proposal doesn't require that a board member live in Jacksonville; they need only "a substantial business interest in Duval County." The mayor would also be allowed to appoint the chair.

"So the last RFP didn't go the way you wanted it to. So what?" Shimp said. "That is not worth throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It's not worth

taking away the autonomy of this board, of this commission and the work that we do. And I'm willing to fight for that."

Shimp said Curry's plan is no different than previous Mayor Alvin Brown's attempt to bring the Children's Commission under his control. The only difference, she said, is that this time it's "just from the other political party."

"I don't want to criticize the mayor in his intentions," Shimp said. "But I think it is horrible, horrible, horrible to take what Mayor (Ed) Austin did, having seen up close and personal the needs of kids in the community, the at-risk kids in the community. And he felt it necessary to depoliticize it by having it out from under direct mayoral control."

Board member Davy Parrish also commented, saying, "Let's protect the validity of children's ser-

vices and not politicize it."

Much of Curry's ire toward the commission has involved funding of summer camp and afterschool programming, and how many kids were — or were not — being served by these programs.

The commission and Journey both decided that this year, in an effort to drive up quality, they would be willing to pay more per child, knowing the same number of dollars would be available. When it became more widely understood this meant fewer kids would be served, the mayor made announcements that additional dollars would be scraped from unspent contracts to make up the difference.

The audit found that kids who participate in afterschool programs have "significantly improved outcomes." Some of those outcomes include:

- The children attend "significantly more" days of schools compared to kids who don't participate.

- Academically challenged kids have a higher promotion rate to the next grade than their similar peers.

- Students who attended afterschool programs for more than 60 days had less than half the number of offenses for those who attended fewer than 60 days.

- These outcomes improved for students with multiple years of participation in afterschool programming.

- Programs based in elementary schools have the highest average attendance with 100 percent, followed by programs based in middle schools at 93 percent. Community-based groups have the lowest attendance at 88 percent. The audit recommends hosting smaller, but more intensive, pro-

grams for middle school students.

The report also noted the significant cost difference between commission and Jax Journey afterschool programs. The request for proposals allowed up to \$4,000 per child in a Journey program and up to \$1,600 for one in a commission camp. "A comparative analysis needs to be planned to evaluate if, and by how much, outcomes are improved with additional cost," the audit said.

The audit also listed data collection for summer camp participants as a concern, but did note that for 2017 summer camps, collection of ID numbers would be implemented.

Other audit highlights and findings:

- "Significant improvements" were seen in the schools that had on-site therapists as a part of the Full Service Schools Plus

model, which integrated the therapists directly into 12 schools. This step increased referrals to the therapist and reduced conduct violations. The report recommended expanding the program to all Full Service School sites if the improvement continues in the first batch.

- The Mayor's Young Leaders Advisory Council has an average monthly attendance of 55 percent. Only 41 percent of the students attended an event associated with their annual project.

- Youth who received treatment through a Criminal Justice Reinvestment grant had a one-year recidivism rate of 27 percent. However, only 29 percent of the kids referred in a year-and-a-half timeframe actually attended their first treatment appointment.

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After 50 years at the counter, David Williams, 72, is still helping people at the post office in Brunswick. (Terry Dickson/Florida Times-Union)

DICKSON

Continued from B-1

under lock in the shallow drawers of an upright Sears Craftsman tool chest. Stamp themes include the Purple Heart, regular hearts, Save Vanishing Species, JFK, Elvis, Oscar de la Renta, bouquets and cakes for wedding invitations, sharks, Andrew Wyeth, and a solid black circle for the total solar eclipse. Put your thumb on it and the body heat brings up a dark moon. There are also sports stamps. Amazingly, given the pace of the games, the baseball stamp reaches its destination as quickly as the soccer stamp.

King took a picture of the eclipse stamps with her cell phone and said, "I like to put stamps on Facebook. Get some customers in here."

"Oh, no," Williams said, perhaps because it's just more new-fangled technology or maybe because there already was a line.

It's not just the stamp offerings and prices that have changed.

Special delivery, which required 60 cents postage, is gone. Now there is express service with guaranteed overnight delivery for \$23.75. That may seem high, but it's cheaper than some parcel services. There's also the priority flat rate for everything from envelopes to large boxes. Prices top out at \$16.55.

Asked about the weight limit, Williams said, "As much as you can put in it. I've seen boxes come in weighing 30 pounds. If it fits it, we ship it."

Maybe those potential Workers Comp weights are why you don't see those little postal scales anymore. One of those boxes would crush them.

As he worked Monday, Williams greeted an old friend and fishing buddy in line, but he has another, Ronnie Fleming, on the job with him. Fleming is new by comparison, with only 35 years at the post office.

"I love to fish," Williams said, "but I haven't been in a couple of years."

He could call in with a fever during the whiting

run or maybe come down with the red fish flu, but Williams doesn't. He has so many sick days banked he could likely disappear for a month, but King says she's glad he's never out. "We'd be lost without him," she said.

Indeed, when some of the other clerks, all of them seasoned workers, start second-guessing, they drift toward Williams to consult.

As for the vow to never put on another uniform, he violated it twice, first with

the post office and then by joining the Georgia Air National Guard. At least Williams showed he could retire from something. He left the Air Guard as a chief master sergeant after 28 years.

For one thing, he said, the post office job keeps him active, but there was another hint when someone told him to have a good day at work.

"You might call it work," he said. terry.dickson@jacksonville.com, (912) 264-0405



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