

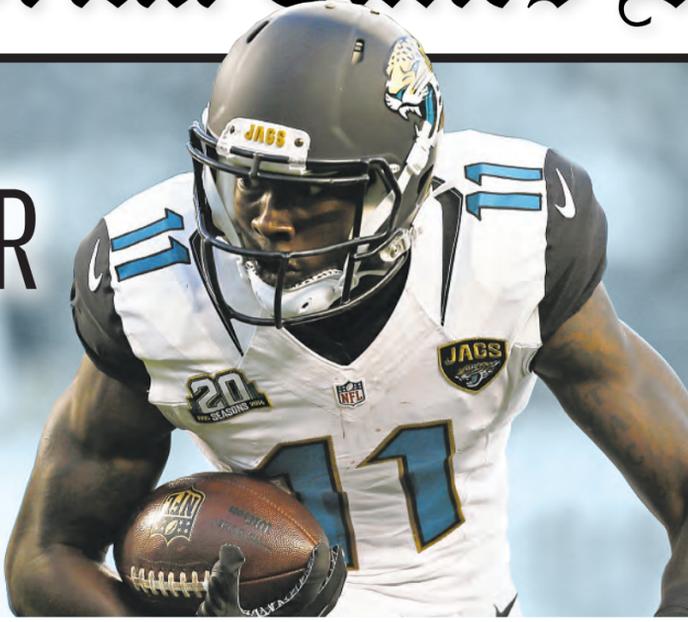
The Florida Times-Union

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DECEMBER 1, 2015
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A FAMILIAR POSITION

Jags receiver Marqise Lee will step into bigger role as Hurns questionable

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STATE AUDIT TARGETS MISMANAGEMENT CLAIMS IN PUTNAM CO.

Metro, B-1

RIGHT NOT DONE; READY FOR NEXT OPPORTUNITY

Sports, C-1



\$90M stadium upgrade clears first step

3 more council committees must pass EverBank Field plan for a final vote

By Christopher Hong
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An ambitious \$90 million makeover to EverBank Field, which includes a new outdoor amphitheater and an indoor practice facility,

cleared on Monday the first of several preliminary reviews it will face this week from the Jacksonville City Council.

The council Finance Committee approved the project, which will cost the

city \$45 million, in a 6-1 vote. While it easily passed, council members and their auditors spent hours vetting it. Councilman Danny Becton, who provided the most intense scrutiny of the project in several testy exchanges with members of the Mayor's Office, was the lone no vote.

Top members of Curry's staff vigorously defended

the plan, saying it was the best way to pay for an ambitious project that would improve the city's quality of life and build a valuable asset downtown.

"We can't spend \$45 million without it having an impact," said Mike Weinstein, the city's finance director. "We think that it's the best package we can provide to you if you want

to do something like this."

The committee was the first of four that must pass the plan this week in order for it to be voted on for final approval next week, which the Jaguars say is necessary to meet its tight schedule to begin construction early next year and finish by July.

Curry has pitched his proposal as a way for tourists, not residents, to pay

for a significant improvement to the city-owned stadium. Under his plan, the city would pay off the debt for the project with a special tourism tax that cannot be used to pay for everyday city services like police and fire protection.

That tax money, which has generated between \$4.5

STADIUM continues on A-7

David Griffis, an Army combat veteran, turns to farming in Starke



ON THE MARCH TO RAISE 'REAL FOOD'

Photos by Will Dickey@jacksonville.com

David Griffis poses with a chicken at Cognito Farm in Starke. The farm produces organically grown chickens, hogs and cows.

By Matt Soergel
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STARKE | It's chicken-butcher day at Cognito Farm, and the morning sun barely peeped over the fields as Andrea Lewis, 24, an apprentice, pulled up in a pickup truck loaded with crates of clucking cargo: 119 Cornish Cross chickens bound for outdoor markets in Neptune Beach, St. Augustine and Gainesville.

David Griffis was getting ready. Hosing down the chopping blocks. Heating water for the scalding. Setting up eight metal cones — "killing cones," he calls them — into which

he'll place each chicken, head-first, before slitting their throats with his knife.

He's 30 and fit, owner of an impressive dark beard. He's happy to show anyone how Cognito's chickens, raised on pasture and organic feed, take the next step toward markets, where he can't yet keep up with the demand of shoppers looking for local meat, for what he calls "real food."

"We think it's important for people to know where their food comes from," he said. "It's important for people to know: This animal gave its life for you."

FARM continues on A-7



Ben Malkin (left) and John Spencer move chicken coops to a fresh patch of grass. Coops are moved every few days to keep the land and chickens healthy.

New JEA board whittles bonuses

Smaller payouts for both executives, rank-and-file after City Hall scrutiny

By Nate Monroe
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The newly overhauled JEA board of directors, hoping to swiftly move beyond months of controversy and upheaval, approved smaller bonuses for utility employees Monday and a performance bonus of about half of its potential for the chief executive officer.

The board's decisions — the first time the group has met to weigh substantive issues — mean JEA's some 1,500 rank-and-file workers will take home \$1,150 bonus checks rather than the \$1,600 they would have gotten under a plan approved by previous board members. The maximum the top executives could take home is capped at \$29,000 instead of their prior max-out, which could have topped \$50,000.

CEO Paul McElroy will get about \$33,066, or 8.18 percent of his \$404,227 salary last fiscal year; he was eligible to get up to 15 percent. He has since received a three-year contract extension and raise. He's now paid \$437,000.

The reduced employee bonuses will cost \$4.2 million in total, compared with the previous formula that would have cost \$5.4 million. Under the revised formula, employees received no money for goals that were not fully met — as opposed to smaller amounts for partial success.

The trimmed payouts

JEA continues on A-7

JASMYN looking to raise \$500,000 to combat HIV/AIDS

It will match a grant from Delores Barr Weaver Fund

By Rhema Thompson
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On the eve of the 27th anniversary of World AIDS Day, a local lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender youth advocacy group is launching a \$1 million campaign to stop its spread in one of the state's most at-risk regions.

The LGBT group Jacksonville Area Sexual Minority Youth Network, or JASMYN, announced Monday its new, three-year AIDSFreeJax campaign to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS primarily among Northeast Florida youth — a demographic in particular need, according to director Cindy Watson. Nationally, youth

between 13 and 24 account for more than a quarter of all new infections, and most don't know they're infected, she said.

"For those young people who know that they are living with HIV, only 6 percent have engaged in medical treatment that has led to viral suppression," she told a crowd of about

two dozen city officials and community members.

The number of new cases of HIV in Duval County, as a whole, has increased by about 28 percent the first half of the year, jumping from 156 in 2014 to 200 in the same period this

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STADIUM

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million and \$6.5 million in the last decade, is already used to pay for maintenance to the city's sports complex, which includes the football stadium, arena and baseball stadium, as well as the money borrowed to pay for the \$41 million installation of the stadium's jumbo scoreboards and cabana pool area.

The City Council Auditor's office said paying for the new project with the tax money would nearly deplete its remaining balance, at least in the short-term future. Doing so could force the city to pay for future maintenance costs with money currently used to fund everyday city services, according to the auditors.

That was one of several concerns Becton raised.

"The point of my question is we barely have the dollars to pay for both of these payments," he said.

Despite the auditor's concern that the tax would be depleted and wasn't a stable revenue source, Councilman John Crescimbeni said he's confident it was a concern that could be overcome.

"I guess I'm going to be a little more bullish on Jacksonville," Crescimbeni said.

Councilwoman Lori Boyer

noted the plan is taking money that once paid to build the city's convention center and now maintains the entire sports complex and solely dedicated to the football stadium.

"The concern is simply there has been a historical pattern over many years now of trying to provide additional revenue for the team in order to make this a financially viable enterprise," she said. "I'm concerned about where it ends and what else there is. I'm supportive of the amphitheater and the flex field. ... I'm just concerned we'll have nothing left."

Weinstein noted that the tax money has only paid for the sport complex's maintenance during the last few years. He also said there could be money left over for maintenance if the tax continues to grow in the future.

Sam Mousa, the city's chief administrative officer, said the city will begin next year to consider raising ticket surcharges for events at the arena that could help pay for maintenance.

The auditors also said they were concerned the project's improvements to the stadium's luxury club seating area would remove about 3,000 seats, which would have to be temporarily replaced to meet requirements for the Florida-Georgia football game.

Mousa said the Jaguars would

split the cost of replacing those seats. He said that would cost about \$900,000, according to the best available estimates.

While the city would own the amphitheater and practice facility, most of the money those buildings could generate wouldn't go to city coffers. Under the proposed agreement, Jaguars owner Shad Khan's company, American Thunder, would cover all the operating costs for the venues and keep all ticket, concession and other revenues earned from events. It would also keep all money from sponsorship rights of the facilities.

The city has the right to host five events at the facilities each year, as well as any other events as long as there isn't a scheduling conflict. The city would cover all the costs of those events and keep the revenue.

Becton said in order for the deal to be a true partnership, the city should split the revenue earned from the facilities and have greater guarantees to host its own events. However, his attempt to add that provision to the deal failed.

The city's only source of revenue from events it doesn't host would be a ticket surcharge that has not yet been set. That money would be pledged toward the upkeep of the facilities and would be matched by the Jaguars.

While the surcharge for the tickets hasn't been set, Mousa said it could generate as much as \$800,000 a year. Although that money is limited to maintaining the new facilities, he said the council could later decide to use it for the stadium if there's enough to do so.

Councilman Aaron Bowman raised concerns about the amphitheater possibly competing for events with the arena.

However, the two facilities would unlikely compete for the same events, said Bill McConnell, general manager of SMG, which manages the city's sports complex. Instead, he said the amphitheater would likely fill a "sweet spot" for performers who only perform in outdoor arenas or couldn't fill the entire arena.

The committee also added a provision to address concerns that noise for the amphitheater will carry across the river into the St. Nicholas neighborhood, which has been an issue for concerts held at Metropolitan Park. Under the provision, the amphitheater would face away from the water.

The plan will continue to be reviewed by committees on Tuesday. If it passes through each one, it will be ready for a final vote by the full council next Tuesday.

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JEA

Continued from A-1

represent a compromise of sorts by the board, which has been almost entirely reappointed after coming under intense scrutiny from City Hall in recent months. Some of that criticism came from city officials' disdain for JEA's long-practiced bonus program, which was originally set to offer significantly higher payouts to its employees until Monday's board decision.

"We are responsible to everybody, the entire city ... to do this in an equitable, fair way," said board member Delores Kesler. "Saying we're going to throw it all out and have no bonuses is not equitable and fair to the people who were here at the time."

Prompted by controversy, Mayor Lenny Curry replaced nearly the entire seven-member governing body, leaving only Husein Cumber — executive vice president for corporate development for Florida East Coast Industries — from the prior board. One vacancy remains.

Board members unanimously elected insurance executive Tom Petway, a prominent civic and business leader, as chairman. He oversaw a low-key meeting Monday, signaling a desire to move past controversy.

Petway immediately announced one change: He created a compensation committee to discuss the future of the employee bonus program and how to measure McElroy's annual job performance in the coming years.

"We need to move on," Petway said, adding the debate should be about the 2016 payout criteria.

Curry asked for and received resignations from the entire board after Times-Union reports about Sunshine Law issues and other concerns related to the way the city-owned utility handled public business in recent years. The mayor criticized what he said was a board that he felt lacked executive-level experience and lost focus on holding JEA leadership accountable.

That means the new board, which Curry filled with several well-known Jacksonville business leaders, was left in the awkward position of weighing controversial employee bonuses approved by a prior board.

"I know this puts the board in a challenging position ... " McElroy said.

JEA says the bonus program, which it calls "Pay for Performance," encourages top performance from employees. Utility officials say the program has helped saved JEA millions over the years; there must be savings in order for bonuses to be paid out.

Board members also had to determine a way to rate McElroy's job performance without having observed his performance for virtually the entire year.

McElroy's contract makes him eligible for a bonus of up to 15 percent of his annual salary based on a board evaluation. Board members decided to stick with a formula that only considered objective goals the previous board tasked McElroy with meeting. He got full credit for meet or exceeding some of those goals, like cost controls on the electric and water systems, while falling short on others, like workplace safety.

Subjective goals — like gauging his relationship with City Hall — were zeroed out, limiting how much he could hope to take home.

The compensation committee will discuss how to move forward with the 2016 bonus program and McElroy's evaluation prior to the full board's January meeting. The committee meeting date has not yet been set.

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FARM

Continued from A-1

Soon his knife dripped blood. It's elemental work, as old as humans themselves. Life and death — an everyday thing on the farm.

And it's something he knows about all too well.

Griffis is an Army combat veteran, once a sergeant in the 82nd Airborne Division, who spent a year in Iraq from 2009-2010 and sixth months in Afghanistan in 2012.

Reid Chitty, who lives in Jacksonville Beach, was a sergeant with Griffis during those deployments. Over the phone, he described his friend: "Old school, man, is the easiest way to say it. Very wild and obnoxious but by the book. He was one of those NCOs [non-commissioned officers] the privates didn't want to cross. But he never expected anything he wouldn't have done himself."

Chitty told the story of a day in Afghanistan — May 7, 2012 — when a 350-pound roadside bomb destroyed Griffis' armored vehicle, killing three of the five men in it. "He crawled out of it and started pulling them out of the truck. He's a freakin' war hero, buddy."

At the farm, on chicken butchering day, Griffis' mother, Debbie, urged her son to tell about that day. Tell about the Purple Heart and the Army Commendation Medal, she said.

He kept working. "It's nothing really special," he said. "It's just an award earned for action in combat."

"Yes it is," his mother responded. "You and the paramedic were the only ones to get it that day."

He was injured in the explosion. "Bumps and bruises and scrapes, a torn ligament in my ankle," he said.

Yet he still misses the time he spent at war.

"I miss the camaraderie. I miss the brotherhood. I miss jumping out of airplanes. I miss going to combat. As far as missing the Army itself? No, I don't, not at all."

Griffis said he didn't like being taken out of combat and made a recruiter in Ohio, where he worked with "desk jockeys" out just for themselves.

And he's frustrated at the effort it took him, after eight years in the service, to gain an early discharge to help save the family farm. His brother Chad, who has Crohn's disease, got too sick to run it by himself. Soon after David Griffis finally got his discharge last year, he had to take over managing the business himself.

Griffis says he likes the life — the tempo of it, the hard work.



David Griffis gets ready to process a chicken in what he calls "killer cones" at his Cognito Farm.



John Spencer, 18 and one of Cognito Farm's two employees, feeds chickens in a floorless, hooded coop.

"There's something about being here," he said. "Me and the animals. Not a whole lot of people to worry about."

Chitty, his Army comrade, said Griffis talked about farming the whole time they were deployed overseas. He has visited his friend on the farm, to see the new life he's leading. "It's probably the happiest I've ever seen him," he said.

Debbie Griffis thinks her son is where he needs to be, doing what he needs to be doing. "I think everybody needs healing once they go to war, because it's so ugly because of the things that people are able to do to each other," she said.

At Cognito Farm, Griffis raises chickens, turkeys, cows and pigs, selling directly to customers and restaurants. The farm is 194 acres, of which he's working about 100.

Low-lying and rich, it's good land, by Florida standards, he says.

The farm was founded in 2006 by Jerry and Sam Williams; the

Griffis family took it over in 2013.

Since 1961, the family ran a Southern restaurant in tiny Kenansville, an inland town in Osceola County. They got into farming because of the restaurant: When they couldn't find good enough sausage, they began raising hogs of their own.

Both Chad and David Griffis were inspired by the philosophies of Joel Salatin of Polyface Farms in Virginia, who was featured in the bestselling book, "The Omnivore's Dilemma," and the documentary, "Food, Inc."

It's an alternative method of farming that rotates animals from field to field, moving them frequently so that the pasture — and animals — remain healthy. At Cognito, the cows go first, followed by the chickens. In between, the land is left to rest for 20 days before the cows are moved back.

Laying chickens live in what Griffis calls "portable egg mobiles" — wheeled tractors that look like a pioneer's wagon. During the day, they can wander outside, hemmed

in by portable electric fencing and protected from predators by a couple of "guard geese" that wander the field among them.

They're pretty ferocious, said farm worker Ben Malkin, 25, and can even honk out a warning when circling hawks make their move.

The broiler chickens, meanwhile, live in floorless, hooped-roof structures that are moved forward a few feet every day. That way the chickens have fresh grass to eat along with their organic feed. Moving them is a simple method: Workers pull them by a rope attached to the front of the coop.

On this day, the farm's two employees — Malkin and John Spencer, 18 — also moved turkeys, which were bound for Thanksgiving dinners, to a new section of field, taking the portable fencing with them.

It's hard work, Griffis said: "Not only am I a farmer, I'm an accountant, a plumber, a carpenter, an electrician, a salesman, a secretary."

Griffis figures he puts in about 70 to 80 hours a week, on the farm and at markets. Even that's not enough.

"I've got more demand than I have supply right now," he said. "I can't produce enough. I have never produced enough of anything to actually meet the demand."

He knows why. "People are sick and tired of eating crap, this factory-farmed garbage," he said. "People want real food. They want real flavor in their food."

Griffis calls it the Real Food Movement, and he expects it to grow. He figures that will encourage others to look at different ways of farming. "People ask me all the time: Can you feed the world this way? Well, not by myself I can't."

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AIDS

Continued from A-1

year, state Department of Health records show.

The trend among LGBT youth is getting worse, Watson said. "It's absolutely an upward trend. ... It's people of color and MSM [men who have sex with men], while others are bottoming out," she said.

The new campaign will focus on getting more young people educated, tested and treated through a \$500,000 matching grant from the Delores Barr Weaver Fund.

Currently, the center works with about 50 HIV-positive youth in the area.

With more money, which they plan to match the fund's grant up to \$500,000,

Watson said the group will be able to treat at least another 80 HIV-positive individuals and hire more case managers to expand the program.

Another \$100,000 gift from the Hall-Halliburton Foundation announced at the event will help make that possible, JASMYN officials said.

But the task ahead for the group is large.

With 200 new HIV cases and 102 new AIDS cases reported in the early part of this year, Duval remains one of the highest reporting counties in the state.

Florida, as a whole, continues to be one of the leading states in the country for new cases of HIV/AIDS, according to the state Department of Health.

As of September, the

health department reported a total of 5,077 new HIV infections and nearly 2,000 new AIDS cases in the state.

Curbing the disease begins with more testing and less stigmatizing, Watson said.

The stigma of the disease is often what prevents young people from getting tested, advocates say, but M. Maximillion Wilson with the Health Department in Duval County said he hopes the community will reach a day when more testing yields fewer results.

"One of these days I'd love to get to the point where we find no cases because there were no cases to find, not because we saw fewer people taking the test," he said.



Cindy Watson, executive director of JASMYN, announces a \$500,000 grant from the Delores Barr Weaver Fund as part of the group's AIDSFreeJAX campaign.

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