

## Bonita council rejects taxpayer bill of rights proposal

By TARA E. McLAUGHLIN

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BONITA SPRINGS — Bonita Springs City Council laid to rest a so-called taxpayer bill of rights with a 4-2 vote.

Councilman Pat McCourt had motioned the item be continued to Oct. 21 because Councilman Bill Lonkart was absent.

Lonkart has been a supporter of the charter amendment that would ask voters if there should be a cap on city spending.

McCourt and Councilman Richard Ferreira supported the amendment.

“It is not a taxpayers bill of rights,” said Councilwoman Martha Simons. “It’s a registered voters bill of rights.”

Nonresidents who own commercial property in the city would not have a say.

Councilman John Spear, who had been the swing vote and helped craft the amendment’s language, voted against it without explanation.

Jan Sagget, a member of the Charter Review Committee, said the amendment would be taking a swipe at City Council as elected representatives by putting spending decisions in the hands of the voters.

“There’s a difference between voting your constituents and voting what’s right,” Sagget said.

The amendment also did not satisfy some in favor of spending caps.

It was less stringent than the proposal made by the political action committee, Taxpayer Action Group, including a guaranteed minimum increase in spending.

“I think it’s a counterfeit taxpayer bill of rights,” said Ron Pure, who heads the group.

In other matters:

- The city’s Historic Preservation Board will develop a plan to delay demolition of old buildings.

Councilwoman Janet Martin, a liaison to the board, said there should be a mechanism in place to allow for alternatives to demolition of buildings that could be deemed historically significant. The delay would allow for alternatives, such as relocation or salvaging.

Martin said 19 buildings are designated historical properties, but “there are other properties, lots of properties, that don’t have that.” The delay, possibly 30 days, would affect buildings 50 years old or older.

City Council agreed 6-0 to ask the board to come back with details for review.

Councilman John Spear was skeptical of the plan.

“This all sounds very nice and touchy-feely good but it really has an opportunity to allow government to intrude on some pretty significance rights,” Spear said.

Mayor Ben Nelson said the delay must be used to execute the alternatives rather than use it to try to find them.

- The city will write a resolution supporting a free-standing emergency room.
- City Council approved 6-0 standards for its Old 41 Road redevelopment area.

The changes also allow for developers to pay a fee in lieu of parking requirements and establish an architectural design review process.

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