

City Hall praises 4-day workweek

City officials say they saved \$120,000 between 2008 and 2009 with schedule

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Shortly after 8 on a recent Thursday morning, a secretary at City Hall was getting ready for a long day - followed by a long weekend.

"It's my Friday," she said with a smile.

The next day, Charles Goston was coming by to see the mayor about issues in east Gainesville and was dumbfounded to find the doors locked.

A year and a half after Gainesville went to a "four-10" schedule - a workweek of four 10-hour days - the city has settled into the routine and doesn't look like it will reverse course anytime soon. With such a bleak budget outlook on the radar, the city is calling the schedule a success - one in which it met its goal of saving \$90,000 a year on utility bills, according to budget data from the city.

Some, however, still question the decision to eliminate a day of public access to some city services - and leaders.

Goston, a Gainesville resident and the publisher of Black College Monthly magazine, said it was "disappointing" to discover the city is shut down on Friday.

"The public is not responsible for whatever financial shortfalls the city may be facing," he said.

Comparing the 20-month span of October 2006 to May 2008 with October 2008, when the program started, to May 2010, energy consumption at the buildings on the new schedule - City Hall, the Old Library Building next door and the Thomas Center - has decreased considerably, according to figures from Gainesville Regional Utilities.

Overtime hours for city employees also have gone down by more than 18 percent, and the average city employee logged about 10 fewer sick-leave hours between the 2006-2008 and 2008-2010 ranges, according to data the city provided to The Sun.

City Manager Russ Blackburn said an employee team looking into ways to cut costs came up with the idea for the four-day workweek in early 2008. That July, he



Erica Brough/Staff photographer
Charles E. Goston realizes that City Hall is now closed on Fridays after trying all the doors, Friday, June 4, 2010 in Gainesville, Fla.

recommended that the City Commission approve the switch, saying it would save \$90,000 annually on utility bills.

But concerns were expressed about reduced availability by residents and an obstacle in child care for the city's employees.

At the time, Blackburn said he thought the city actually would be increasing access by being open starting at 7 in the morning and closing at 6 in evening.

In a recent interview, he said the kinks have been mostly worked out and he believed employees were actually more efficient, getting less overtime since now they typically don't have to stay late to get a day's work done.

"I think it's gone very well," he said. "I really do feel like our productivity has gone up and costs have gone down - and actually our employees are happier."

Calls placed by The Sun to city departments before and after published work hours showed departments still were manned, and at 6 p.m., steady streams of employees could be seen exiting the City Hall complex.

Becky Rountree, the city's administrative services director, said the move saved the city more than \$120,000 between the 2008 and 2009 fiscal years: \$90,710 on utilities and \$30,200 on fuel.

There likely will be more savings next year since new heating and air-conditioning systems have been installed and a leak was repaired at the Old Library, she said.

In May, Alachua County officials decided not to adopt a four-day workweek, saying it wouldn't save them enough to make it worthwhile.

"We're more complex than the city is," County Manager Randy Reid said, explaining that there are offices such as the property appraiser and tax collector in the county administration building that, by law, can't close, so only a sliver of energy - and thus money - would be saved.

As Blackburn said, "Where we get the savings is by closing the buildings."

Blackburn said he thinks managers are able to do more because it allows for more peace before 8 a.m. and after 5 p.m. Plus, he said there was a survey done last year that showed 77 percent of employees liked it.

Kurt Lannon, the clerk of the City Commission whose office handles official records, said that after the initial few weeks, there have been few complaints from customers - or employees.

He said it gives him and his staff more time in a day to work on big projects.

Still, he said, "It does make for a long day."

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