

## JEA board member Lisa Weatherby refuses mayor's demand to resign

**By David Bauerlein**

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The showdown between Mayor Lenny Curry and JEA board member Lisa Strange Weatherby will end with City Council members deciding whether she stays or goes from the utility's board.

In a sharply worded letter delivered Thursday, Weatherby rebuffed Curry's demand for her immediate resignation and said he is injecting partisan politics into the makeup of boards overseeing the city's independent authorities.

"I find your request for my resignation to be nothing more than a thinly-veiled effort to engage in political party cronyism," Weatherby wrote.

In response, Curry plans to file legislation that would remove Weatherby from the JEA board, which would require a two-thirds vote of the 19-member City Council to oust her.

Curry met individually with JEA board members this week after a Sept. 20 Times-Union article described a JEA practice of putting scripted talking points in documents given to board members prior to their meetings. Curry reacted to the article by telling his staff there are "serious governance and legal issues here ... we need to confirm facts and act."

This week, Curry met individually with five other JEA board members.

After Weatherby did not go to a scheduled meeting with him Tuesday, he sought her resignation.

"It is regretful that you were unwilling to also participate and share meaningful dialogue with us," Jordan Elsbury, director of appointments, wrote to Weatherby. "In light of this, we have concluded that you do not

share the same values and commitment we hold for strengthening mayor and board appointee relationships.”

## **MEETING DISPUTE**

Weatherby said in her letter Thursday that she was willing to participate in “meaningful dialogue” with the mayor, but since Curry would have staff members with him during the session, she thought it was a reasonable request to have an attorney with her or else have the meeting in an open-door session where the public could attend.

Weatherby wrote in her letter that boards like JEA were set up as “independent bodies, not subject to the prevailing political winds” with staggered terms for board members overlapping the transition from one mayor to the next.

“But what has become apparent from your recent requests for resignations from board members is that your administration seeks to do nothing more than pack the city’s ‘independent’ boards with your political supporters,” Weatherby wrote.

“In doing so, you and your administration are not serving the citizens of Jacksonville but only those who share your political view. It is unfortunate that a process that was established to remain politically independent is now being corrupted to facilitate party politics.”

Weatherby supported Mayor Alvin Brown, a Democrat, in his re-election attempt. Curry, a Republican, defeated Brown.

Curry wrapped up the JEA board member meetings Wednesday and has not determined what the next steps will be, said spokeswoman Marsha Oliver. The meetings were “very productive” for Curry and the JEA board members, she said.

“He’s pleased with the meetings, certainly,” she said. “He appreciated the time and the commitment and the dedication of these members.”

## **5 RESIGNATIONS**

JEA Chairwoman Helen Albee sent Curry an email after their Wednesday afternoon meeting, thanking him for the session. "I look forward to working with you and your staff to address the many challenges ahead for JEA and the city of Jacksonville," Albee said.

Since taking office July 1, Curry has sought and received resignations from five board members who were serving respectively on the Jacksonville Aviation Authority, Downtown Investment Authority, JaxPort, Jacksonville Planning Commission and JEA.

Peter Bower resigned last week from the JEA board at Curry's request after Bower said he would only meet Curry in a public meeting or with an "independent observer" in the room.

Two members of the Jacksonville Planning Commission - Lisa King and Joey McKinnon - refused to resign in the midst of their terms, so the City Council will decide by a majority vote on whether to remove them.

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**Weatherby's letter:**

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