

Push to sell JEA over for now, Jacksonville councilman says

By Steve Patterson

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Jacksonville City Councilman Matt Schellenberg has dropped a campaign for the city to put JEA up for sale.

Schellenberg asked the council Rules Committee Monday to withdraw a resolution he filed in October encouraging Mayor Alvin Brown to seek proposals from businesses interested in buying the city-owned utility.

That may not be the last word on the subject.

“I’m only temporarily walking away from it. I think, ultimately, it’s something the city should seriously consider,” Schellenberg said, adding he was bowing to reality.

“Right now, I don’t have the votes for it on the council,” he said.

Schellenberg has chaired a special committee on the utility’s status that met in October and November. He said he plans to file a final report within a couple of weeks.

The idea of selling has come and gone for years. Council President Bill Bishop said when he approved the committee that he thought selling was a bad idea, but it was important to let the committee explore the idea.

The council’s auditors told the panel JEA would be worth \$2 billion to \$2.5 billion over 30 years if the city kept ownership, but that an investor-owned utility would value it between \$1 billion and \$1.2 billion. The auditors said putting it in private, for-profit hands could also cause rates to increase.

The city is scheduled to collect \$106 million from the utility this fiscal year. It adds nothing to the school system’s revenues because its property isn’t on the tax rolls.

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