

Two JEA board members submit resignations to Mayor Lenny Curry so far

By Nate Monroe

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In response to Mayor Lenny Curry's request Monday for across-the-board resignations from the JEA board of directors, John Hirabayashi, president and CEO of Community First Credit Union, submitted his resignation effective immediately.

That leaves the board with just enough members to have a quorum - the minimum number of members required to take any action at a public meeting - for its regularly scheduled meeting Oct. 20.

"I appreciate having had the opportunity to serve the Jacksonville community and I wish you and your administration all the success in the future," Hirabayashi wrote Curry in a short email Monday night.

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Curry's call for resignations was prompted by Times-Union articles describing a JEA practice of putting scripted talking points in documents given to board members prior to their meetings and two years of meetings in which no board members registered a single dissenting vote. The stories highlighted concerns about the board's compliance with the Sunshine Law, governance issues and what Curry's office has described as the board's "purported dysfunction."

In the past few weeks, Curry met with board members and conducted an internal review of records produced in response to a Times-Union public records request.

While Curry said he found no evidence demonstrating a deliberate attempt to skirt the Sunshine Law, he was left with strong concern over the way the board does business.

Curry had not sought immediate resignations from the board, asking them to continue service so JEA's regularly scheduled meeting Oct. 20 can take place. He asked for their resignations "to be effective only if and when I accept them," and a top Curry official said the mayor is open to keeping some of the five members when he makes final decisions in the coming days.

Prior to his call Monday for the remaining five JEA board members to resign, two others - Lisa Strange Weatherby and Peter Bower - had previously stepped down.

Board member Husein Cumber, the executive vice president for corporate development for Florida East Coast Industries, also submitted his resignation Monday evening, telling Curry he is interested in remaining on the board.

“Serving on the JEA Board of Directors has been a rewarding experience,” Cumber wrote. “Therefore, I am hopeful that you will consider me for the new JEA board of Directors you appoint in the near future.”

With Hirabayashi leaving immediately, four board members remain on the seven-member board, the minimum necessary for the board to take any action next week.

Curry named replacements for Weatherby and Bower: Tom Petway - an insurance executive and a founding, former partner in the Jacksonville Jaguars - and Delores Kesler, the founder of a staffing company that became MPS Group, the parent company of Modis.

The City Council agreed Tuesday it would place those nominations on an emergency track allowing for a vote on their confirmation to take place prior to Nov. 1 in the event any other current JEA board members step down and leave the board without a quorum.

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