

Saratoga Springs City Council votes to continue legal battle over charter reform; 10-year contract for maintenance of city rec fields approved

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — The legal battle between the city and non-partisan city charter change group Saratoga Citizen is set to continue after the City Council voted 3-2 Tuesday to appeal the decision by State Supreme Court Judge Thomas Nolan to approve the group's petition of referendum.

The vote was preceded by an announcement that Nolan had ruled on behalf of the city on the group's second set of signatures, which it was ruled had been submitted too early and would therefore need to be resubmitted to the city.

Mayor Scott Johnson, who proposed the motion to appeal, noted before the vote that the New York Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials (NYCOM) had voted at its Feb. 28 meeting to join the city in the appeal.

"If we do not appeal, and allow this decision to stand as is, we place ourselves, our city, at risk of any future attempts by this or another group of not having a present and valid fiscal note or budget should they seek to later change our form of government," Johnson said before the vote.

He said that while initial talks with hired legal counsel had placed the price of appeal at between \$10,000 and \$20,000, negotiations conducted last week had yielded an estimate of about \$7,500, to be capped at \$10,000, which was the amount approved by the council.

The council voted along the same lines it did when the filing of a notice of appeal in the case was approved Feb. 15 — with Johnson, Public Safety Commissioner Richard Wirth and Public Works Commissioner Anthony "Skip" Scirocco voting in the affirmative and Accounts Commissioner John Franck and Finance Commissioner Kenneth Ivins Jr. opposed.

Neither Franck nor Ivins spoke before Tuesday's vote. During the Feb. 15 discussion on the notice of appeal, Ivins said he wanted to "put this issue to bed."

"It's actually kind of invigorating," Saratoga Citizen organizer Pat Kane said after the vote.

During the public comment period of Tuesday's meeting, Kane and several other city residents spoke in support of allowing the referendum to go to the ballot.

"You own this issue from this point out," he said during his public comment, referring to those council members who supported the vote to appeal. "We're going to continue this fight."

10-year contract for recreation field maintenance approved

The council unanimously approved a 10-year contract with the Saratoga Springs City School District to resume maintenance of the East and West Side recreation fields effective April 1. The city will be paid on a sliding scale, receiving \$130,000 this year for annual maintenance and capital improvements.

Block grant hearings set

The public hearing period was opened on the proposed 2011 Community Development Block Grant Awards. The period will remain open until April 1.

The Saratoga Springs City Council has been presented with the following 2011 Community Development Block Grant recommendations:

- Domestic Violence/Rape Crisis Center Emergency Shelter Counselor: \$15,000
- Legal Aid Society Homelessness Prevention Project: \$12,000
- Catholic Charities Mentoring Program: \$10,000
- Saratoga County Economic Opportunity Council Multi-cultural Services Program: \$4,000
- Mother Susan Anderson Emergency Shelter — Program Funds: \$4,000
- Saratoga Affordable Housing Group — Property Rehabilitation: \$80,000
- Citywide Rehabilitation Grant Program: \$75,000
- Dept. of Public Works — Infrastructure Improvement: \$30,000
- Dept. of Public Works — Senior Center Heating/Cooling System: \$28,670
- Franklin Community Center Facilities Improvements: \$28,500
- Frederick Allen Lodge Historic Building Preservation: \$22,500
- Mother Susan Anderson Emergency Shelter Rehabilitation Project: \$17,500
- Rebuilding Together Rehabilitation Project: \$10,000
- Community Development Program Administration: \$70,000