

COLIN BAENZIGER  ASSOCIATES  
EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

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*Section 4*

*Howard W. Brown*

*Flagler Beach City Manager  
Candidate Report*

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*Cover Letter and Resume*

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR., ICMA-CM**

West Palm Beach, FL 33412

☎: 305-788-9647 | ✉: [Howardwbrownjr@gmail.com](mailto:Howardwbrownjr@gmail.com)

June 8, 2023

City of Flagler Beach  
Attn: Colin Baenziger and Associates  
105 S. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street  
Flagler Beach, FL 32136

**RE: City Manager Vacancy – City of Flagler Beach**

Dear Honorable Mayor Suzie Johnston and City Commissioners:

I am pleased to express my sincere interest in serving as the City Manager for the City of Flagler Beach. After reviewing the job announcement and other information provided by Colin Baenziger and Associates, I find that I am willing and able to meet the expectations for this position. As an experienced and credentialed City Manager, I have in-depth knowledge of financial management, strategic planning, municipal bond financing, negotiations, executive leadership, and other skills necessary to effectively lead the administration in achieving the goals of the organization. It is important to note that I have national experience as a City Manager in the states of California, Oklahoma, and Florida. I grew up and started my career in the Florida panhandle by working as a Code Enforcement Officer on Pensacola Beach, Florida.

I have enjoyed every position I have held in my career particularly the most recent position as Village Manager at the Village of Indiantown, FL. I had the opportunity of a lifetime to be selected as the Village's first permanent manager for a newly incorporated municipal government in South Florida. I was able to utilize my years of experience as a public administrator to accomplish many things during my tenure there and I would like to highlight a few:

- Purchased a multimillion-dollar private water and sewer plant and positioned it to be a profitable/revenue generating asset of the municipality. I was successful in obtaining a loan from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to acquire the asset. Once the Village acquired the asset, the Village received 80% loan forgiveness thereby reducing debt service and creating a huge savings for rate payers.
- Participated in developing several funding requests to make major upgrades to the sewer plant. Through working collaboratively with private entities and our local state delegation, the Village was able to secure a \$20 million state appropriation, which is currently being used to make major capital improvements to the Sewer Plant. Additionally, the collaboration secured an additional \$5 million to pay for sanitary sewer improvements for a new charter school in Indiantown.
- Since 2019, under my leadership, the Village of Indiantown has applied for more than \$75 million in grants and has received over \$23 million in grant funding. We aggressively took advantage of retaining the services of several grant writing organizations specializing in pursuing grant funds.
- I, along with the Village Council, developed and carried out the implementation of a five-year strategic plan that was completed within three years of Council's adoption. The strategic plan covered the following:
  - Developed a five-year roadway and pavement maintenance plan. Completed all phases of the plan within three years, two years ahead of schedule.
  - Purchased a multimillion-dollar water and sewer plant from a private provider below market value and repositioned the water plant to become a revenue-generating entity, thereby saving rate payers in the short and long term.

## **Section 4**

Please take a moment to review my attached resume and credentials, which further highlight over 25 years of success. I am excited to speak with you about the opportunity to bring my "can do" attitude, skills and experience to your city.

With your success in mind,

Howard W. Brown, Jr.,

**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR., ICMA-CM**

[Howardwbrownjr@gmail.com](mailto:Howardwbrownjr@gmail.com)

West Palm Beach, FL 33412 ☎ 305-788-9647 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/howardwbrownjr/>

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**CITY MANAGER & CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

A visionary leader and turnaround expert with 25+ year's leadership experience in both municipal government and the private sector. Proficient in planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and evaluating results of day-to-day municipal operations focused on implementing policy directives by working independently and coordinating with various departments, agencies, and the public within the city. Adept at labor negotiations, community development, project management, and financial and budget knowledge to accomplish a vision.

*Leadership    Budgeting and financial management    Staff Mentoring & Development  
Program Implementation    Verbal and Written Communication  
Office Administration    Relationship management    Contract Negotiation    Municipal  
Management*

**CAREER HISTORY**

*As Village Manager, Village of Indiantown, FL*

*January 2019 – January 2023*

*Incorporated December 31, 2017, the Village of Indiantown is unique, being the 413th municipality incorporated in South Florida.*

- **Negotiated a multimillion-dollar** interlocal agreement with Martin County saving the residents of the Village ~ \$1.5MM throughout the interlocal agreement for Fire Rescue Services.
- **Created and implemented a 5-year strategic action plan** together with the initial Village Council; we hit the ground running, achieving it within 3-years.
- **Negotiated and purchased a private water and sewer plant for \$8.5MM**, subsequently managing to have ~80% of the loan to purchase the asset forgiven. In addition, we negotiated a 0% interest rate over a 30-year term. This was the best water and sewer acquisition deal ever done in Florida.

*As City Manager, City of Bell*

*January 2016 – October 2018*

*The City of Bell, CA, is an incorporated city in Los Angeles County, California. Accountable for the day-to-day operations of all City departments, \$32MM in annual operating and capital budgets, and 150+ employees serving a daytime population of 50,000+.*

- **Led the City through its first-ever recodification** of all city codes of ordinances, including retaining a consultant to conduct a charter review for Council Consideration.
- **Prepared a balanced budget**, successfully adopted by the Mayor and Council two years in a row despite declining property, sales taxes, and rising pension costs.
- **Organized several neighborhood groups, including Neighborhood Watch**, and met regularly with residents to sell the city's Strategic Plan and City Priorities approved by the Mayor and Council.

*As CITY MANAGER, City of Muskogee, Oklahoma*

*January 2014 – January 2016*

*The City of Muskogee is an incorporated city located in the Tulsa, Oklahoma, metropolitan area.*

- **Collaborated with the Mayor and City Council to develop** an employee compensation plan and labor relations strategy for three collective bargaining agreements: Police, Fire, and Non-uniformed employees.
- **Wrote the Muskogee 2020 Strategic Plan**, adopted by the Mayor and City Council.
- **Oversaw day-to-day operations of all city departments** while managing a \$61MM operating and capital budget and 600+ employees serving a daytime population of more than 50,000.

*City of Opa-Locka, FL*

*January 2010– January 2014*

*The City of Opa-Locka, FL, is an incorporated city in Miami-Dade County, FL.*

**ACTING ASSISTANT CITY MANAGER (2013-2014)**

- **Led the reorganization of the Building Services Division** to reduce the budget deficit by 25% and created the city's first Certificate of Use program, generating ~ \$1MM per annum.
- **Executed the directives of the City Manager, Mayor, and City Council** while managing a municipal organization with a \$13MM annual operating budget and 190 employees, serving a population of 16,000.
- **Directly supervised and managed** Police, Human Resources, IT, Finance, Public Works, Parks and Recreation, Planning and Community Development, Code Enforcement, and Building and Licensing Departments.

**DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (2010- 2013)**

- **Prepared the city's first Annexation Plan** based on the Miami-Dade County Code and the State of Florida Annexation law
- **Managed/directed all Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** funding, including project management/grant proposal writing.
- **Received 1.2 Million Community Challenge Planning Grant** – from the United States Housing and Urban Development Department. Only two cities within the state of Florida was awarded.

*Director, Planning and Development Services, City Of Albany, GA*

*October 2007– July 2010*

*Neighborhood Improvement Manager – Planning and Zoning Department City of Lilburn, GA*

*September 2002 – October 2007*

*Chief of Code Enforcement City of Lauderdale Lakes, FL*

*June 2000 – September 2002*

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**EDUCATION**

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Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2022)  
**Certificate, Program for State and  
Local Government Executives**

University of West Florida, Pensacola, Florida (1995)  
**Master of Public Administration**

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida (1993)  
**Bachelor of Science in Criminology**

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**CERTIFICATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Credentialed Manager**, International City Manager's Association (ICMA)  
**Certified Urban Planner**, American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) - Certification No. 24680  
**National Incident Management Systems (NIMS) Certifications:** ICS 100, 200, 300, 400, 700 & 800

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**BOARD APPOINTMENTS / MEMBERSHIPS**

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International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Full Member  
Florida City and County Management Association (FCCMA), Full Member  
American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), Full Member  
American Planning Association (APA), Full Member

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**VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES & CIVIC CONTRIBUTIONS**

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Habitat for Humanity, Albany, GA  
Boy Scouts of America, Tulsa, OK and Indiantown, FL  
International Rotary Club of America, Rotarian, Tulsa, Ok, and Albany, GA

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**HONORS – AWARDS – PROFESSIONAL RECOGNITION**

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National Defense Service Medal – Persian Gulf War, United States Army  
Humanitarian Service Medal - Hurricane Andrew Disaster Relief, United States Army  
*40 under 40* – most influential persons - Albany Herald, Albany, GA



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*Candidate Introduction*

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**EDUCATION**

Certificate, For Senior Executives in State and Local Government, Harvard University, 2022  
Master of Public Administration (MPA), University of West Florida 1995  
Batchelor of Arts in Criminology, Florida State University (BA), 1993

**EXPERIENCE**

Management Consultant	2018 – present
Village Manager, Indiantown, FL (South Florida)	2019 – 2023
City Manager, Bell, CA (Los Angeles, CA metro area)	2016 – 2018
City Manager, Muskogee, OK (Tulsa, OK metro area)	2014 – 2016
Acting Assistant City Manager, Opa-Locka, FL (Miami, FL metro area)	2013 – 2014
Planning and Community Development Director (Miami, FL metro area)	2010 – 2014
Planning and Development Services Director, Albany, GA	2007 – 2010
Neighborhood Improvement Manager, Lilburn, GA (Atlanta, GA metro)	2002 – 2007
Chief Code enforcement Officer, Lauderdale Lakes, FL (Ft. Lauderdale)	2000 – 2002
Environmental Code Enforcement Officer, Pensacola, FL	1995 – 2000

**BACKGROUND**

The Village of Indiantown, Florida, is the state's 413th municipality, incorporated on December 31, 2017. It is situated in western Martin County, FL, and currently has a population of 8,000 residents. The municipality is undergoing significant development, with two pending residential building projects expected to triple its population within the next five years. The Village was incorporated to address Martin County's resistance to residential, retail, and commercial housing growth. The Village boasts a property tax base exceeding \$2 billion dollars.

I was hired as the first permanent employee by the Village of Indiantown in 2018. Since then, I have recruited over 40 employees and developed a staffing plan that, if approved by the Village Council, will result in a workforce of over 75 employees in the next two years. I directly supervised department heads. The general fund budget is approximately \$12 million dollars, with total funds amounting to around \$14 million dollars. In previous positions, I have managed over 600 employees and operated with capital budgets totaling more than \$90 million dollars. The Village of Indiantown currently faces three significant issues:

1. Water and Sewer Infrastructure: The Village acquired a private utility company due to major operating and infrastructure problems, leading to poor water quality reported by residents. The purchase was made possible through a DEP SRF loan, which 80% of the loan was ultimately forgiven based on demographics and circumstances.

2. **Rising Cost of Services:** Unlike most cities, the Village relies heavily on personal property taxes rather than real estate taxes. NextERA (formerly FPL) constitutes approximately 80% of the Village's general fund operating budget through its strategic storage yard and solar farms.
3. **Recruiting and Retaining Critical Employees:** Due to Indiantown's geographical location, certain positions, such as Public Utilities and Public Works Director, have posed challenges in terms of recruitment. These positions require certifications and professional engineering licenses, making it difficult to find permanent hires. Even outsourcing these positions created challenges as the private sector met the skill and certification requirements but resulted in increased costs.

### **GENERAL MANAGEMENT STYLE AND EXPERIENCE:**

The City of Flagler Beach, Florida, presents an opportunity that aligns with my personal and professional goals. As an administrator, my role would involve directing administrative processes to ensure efficient city operations, based on policies adopted by the Mayor and City Council. I consider myself a coach, employing a collaborative and team-oriented management style. I prioritize high-performance staff and a supportive council to make critical policy decisions.

Based on 360 interviews from my previous City Manager positions, I have been described as a turn-around expert and results-oriented manager. My staff has commended my genuine care for employees and the creation of a workplace where self-motivated individuals bring forward programs and solutions benefiting the public. Feedback from elected officials has been mixed, but performance evaluations in several communities have indicated that I am trustworthy, accessible, knowledgeable, and a consensus builder. Community building and providing leadership for improvement are my greatest strengths. I am an attentive listener and problem solver who understands how to align organizational goals with the governing body's vision. As a manager, I prioritize goal setting with direct reports, establishing performance goals for departments and key staff members to ensure the implementation of council policies. Additionally, I set professional and personal goals for my direct reports, as long as they benefit the organization.

My biggest achievement to date has been being selected through a national search to create a newly incorporated city, hiring staff, acquiring a private water and sewer company, and developing and implementing an approved strategic plan within three years of incorporation. However, I also acknowledge a significant failure early in my career as a Department Head. I was tasked with developing a comprehensive software system for the City's accounting, budgeting, and permitting processes. Unfortunately, the project suffered from a lack of engagement from end users, resulting in significant delays, functionality gaps, and increased costs. I learned the importance of including appropriate personnel from the start and incorporating end users' business requirements to avoid issues caused by a top-down approach.

Howard W. Brown, Jr.

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Terminating employees for the city's benefit is part of being a City Manager, and I have recommended and been involved in all employee terminations in my previous three jurisdictions. I believe in progressive discipline and adhering to established personnel policies, always prioritizing the organization's best interest.

### **CHALLENGE AND APPROACH FOR CITY OF FLAGLER BEACH:**

The primary challenge for the City Manager in Flagler Beach will be understanding the council's expectations and working with the board to determine the most effective approach. Within the first six months, I would focus on familiarizing myself with the council, staff, and the public to gain a comprehensive understanding of the city's challenges. If a strategic plan is not already in place, I would propose developing or updating an existing one, including an action plan to be accomplished within the first year.

I have experience working well with the mainstream media, valuing transparency and incorporating external communications with the local press. In previous roles, I designated a public information officer for City Hall, Police, and Fire Departments, ensuring effective communication through various channels. However, during my tenure as Village Manager for the Village of Indiantown, I faced a challenge involving two local social media bloggers who attempted to tarnish the City Council's reputation and mine. Barbara Clowdus, one of the bloggers, wrote several articles falsely claiming that I falsified my resume by misrepresenting my role as Acting Assistant City Manager at the City of Opa-locka and stating that I was not a credentialed manager with ICMA. Additionally, she accused me of enrolling myself illegally in the group health insurance and not providing the Village Council with information received during Fire Rescue negotiations with the County. These allegations were entirely baseless and without merit. Another blogger named Eric Miller would repost Barbara Clowdus' articles and express his opinion that the Council was turning a blind eye to these serious issues. Despite these false and negative statements made by the bloggers, I received consistently positive performance evaluations from the City Council throughout my four-year tenure as Village Manager. It is important to note that the Council members never publicly or privately discussed these blogs with me because they recognized them as false and an attempt to embarrass both themselves and the Council. I remained focused on my responsibilities and continued to effectively fulfill my duties as Village Manager despite these unfounded attacks.

During my leisure time, I prioritize spending time with my family. I actively participate in civic organizations dedicated to supporting those in need and contribute to my church community. Additionally, I have an interest in antique weapons and genealogical research.

Howard W. Brown, Jr.

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**SIX ADJECTIVES OR PHRASES TO DESCRIBE MYSELF:**

- Ethical
- Intelligent
- Innovative
- Charismatic
- Knowledgeable
- Results-Oriented

**REASON FOR LEAVING MOST RECENT JOB:**

I resigned as Village Manager of Indiantown during the Council meeting on December 8, 2022, effective January 31, 2023. Following the August 23, 2022 election, where I lost majority votes on the council, I met with the newly elected Council Members and determined that negotiating a departure would be in my best interest.

**CURRENT/MOST RECENT SALARY:**

My current salary is \$166,024, not including auto allowance and fringe benefits.

## **Section 4**

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*CB&A Background Checks*

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**Background Check Summary for  
HOWARD WENDELL BROWN, JR.**

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**Criminal Records Checks:**

Nationwide Criminal Records Search	No Records Found
County	
Palm Beach County, FL	No Records Found
Martin County, FL	No Records Found
Los Angeles County, CA	No Records Found
Muskogee County, OK	No Records Found
Miami-Dade County, FL	No Records Found
Dougherty County, GA	No Records Found
State	
Florida	No Records Found
California	<i>Records Maintained by County. See Above</i>
Oklahoma	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found

**Civil Records Checks:**

County	
Palm Beach County, FL	No Records Found
Martin County, FL	No Records Found
Los Angeles County, CA	No Records Found
Muskogee County, OK	No Records Found
Miami-Dade County, FL	No Records Found
Dougherty County, GA	No Records Found
Federal	
Florida	No Records Found
California	No Records Found
Oklahoma	No Records Found
Georgia	No Records Found

**Motor Vehicle**

Florida No Records Found

**Credit**

Excellent

**Personal Bankruptcy**

No Records Found



**Background Check Summary for  
HOWARD WENDELL BROWN, JR.**

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<b>Sex Offender Registry</b>	Not Listed
<b>Education</b>	Confirmed
<b>Employment</b>	Confirmed
<b>Social Media</b>	Nothing of Concern Found

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, 15 U.S.C. 1681-1681Y, credit and bankruptcy information are very sensitive and should not be used be in the consideration of hiring. The information is included for each candidate because we do not want you to be surprised if third parties raise what they consider to be a concern. Also, some states have limited the reporting to seven years, so any records older than that will not be available in those states. In addition, motor vehicle reports are limited to three to seven years, depending on the state.

**Background Check Summary for  
HOWARD WENDELL BROWN, JR.  
Personal Disclosure**

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**Personal Disclosure Questionnaire**

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Name of Applicant: Howard Wendell Brown, Jr.

The following questions are designed so that we will be able to make full disclosure to our client concerning your background. Please answer them honestly. Cutting corners or misrepresenting your past will result in you being eliminated from all further searches conducted by this firm. We understand that frivolous charges are sometimes made and that charges do not mean you were guilty. We also understand that you may have been wronged and needed to seek compensation. The bottom line is that we want to be certain that our client is fully informed. If you have any questions, please contact us for clarification.

**Please explain any yes answers on a separate sheet of paper.**

1. Have you ever been charged or convicted of a felony?  
Yes                      No      X
2. Have you ever been accused of or have been involved in a domestic violence or abuse incident?  
Yes                      No      X
3. Have you ever declared bankruptcy or been an owner in a business that did so?  
Yes                      No      X
4. Have you ever been the subject of a civil rights violation complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes                      No      X
5. Have you ever been the subject of a sexual harassment complaint that was investigated or resulted in a lawsuit?  
Yes                      No      X
6. Have you ever been charged with driving while intoxicated?  
Yes                      No      X
7. Have you ever sued a current or former employer?  
Yes                      No      X
8. Please list links to all your social media accounts (Facebook / Instagram / LinkedIn / Twitter, etc.) and your personal web page if you have one.      Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and LinkedIn
9. Is there anything else in your background that, if made public, would cause you, our client or our firm embarrassment if it came to light through the press or any other mechanism?  
Yes                      No      X
10. Please provide a list of any lawsuits in which you are or have been a party either as plaintiff or defendant.  
None

Attested to: Howard W. Brown Jr.  
**Signature of Applicant**

**Please email this form via PDF DOCUMENT to [Monique@cb-asso.com](mailto:Monique@cb-asso.com) or via fax to (561) 621-5965 no later than 5:00 PM MST 06/14/2023.**  
**(Note: Please be sure to sign the form with your actual signature if you are sending Fax or PDF Document)**

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*CB&A Reference Notes*

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**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Janet Hernandez – Councilmember, Village of Indiantown, FL, 772-708-5344**

Ms. Hernandez worked with Mr. Brown while he was Village Manager between 2019 and 2023. She was one of the councilmembers who initially hired him. She would give him the rating of 1000 out of 100 if she could. He is a great person and employee. He did what he was asked to do, which was the impossible. Because Indiantown was a brand-new village, they did not have anything put into place yet, but through his leadership they accelerated the timeline and established everything needed in record time.

One of Mr. Brown's most urgent assignments was to lead the village in purchasing the water utility. When the village incorporated, the water utilities were still owned by a private entity who had not done many necessary upgrades on it. There were frequently water backups into residential homes. During Mr. Brown's first year as Village Manager, he helped the village purchase the water utility and received \$15 million from the state to upgrade the system.

The Village of Indiantown was a very stressful municipality to manage because it was so new. Mr. Brown had to build everything from scratch, including hiring employees and department heads, making progress with budget constraints, fixing roads, buying the water utilities, and planning for the future. He managed it all very well and was up for the challenge. He listened to councilmembers and made sure everyone was on board before moving forward with anything.

Mr. Brown left Indiantown on good terms. He did not participate in anything controversial or embarrassing while serving as the Village Manager. While they are a highly political area and people criticized him on social media for various untrue things, he is the best man for the job. He is innovative and brings new and forward-thinking ideas to the municipality. He will be an excellent manager for any location.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Team player,
- Effective,
- Communicator,
- Go getter,
- Makes things happen, and
- Strategic planner.

**Strengths:** Communication with the council members and the public. He treats everyone equally and knows how to work with differing personalities. His manager reports are excellent, he gives insight on what is happening in the various departments.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Jackie Clarke – Former Councilmember and Mayor, Village of Indiantown, FL  
772-634-2233**

Ms. Clarke has known Mr. Brown since he was hired as Village Manager in 2019. She was one of the first councilmembers elected and was elected Mayor in 2021. She learned a great deal from him. He came to Indiantown with over 20 years of experience. He helped them network with other cities, and they were in a good position when he left. He helped them start from scratch. Hiring him was the best decision they could have made for their new municipality. He made the transition much easier for them because he knew how to put all the pieces together.

Mr. Brown is a visionary. He helped them receive grants, bought the water utilities, brought in new staff, and taught the councilmembers everything they needed to know to run their village. When they were first incorporated the councilmembers had a many ideas they wanted to try. Mr. Brown brought in a consultant and helped them narrow the list to ensure their priorities were achieved. He did this by making a strategic plan with concrete decisions and steps to achieve the Council's goals. He held strategic meetings and kept them on target. With his leadership, they completed many of their goals quickly, which validated his recommendations to the councilmembers. He knows what he is doing and knows how to organize the team around their common interests.

Mr. Brown is quick on his feet. He helped the village purchase property to build a city hall because the village was leasing their office space and had a tenuous relationship with the landlord. He knew that it was important to own their own city buildings. He also helped them quickly purchase the water utilities before an outside third party could buy the contract.

Mr. Brown knows how to navigate different personalities. Ms. Clarke would hire him again and recommends him as a manager for any location. He passed every test they gave him with flying colors. He is professional and ethical. He will be an asset to any community who wants innovation and who needs someone to help bridge the gaps.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Innovative,
- Caring,
- Fair,
- Open ear,
- Bridges the gap, and
- Knowledgeable.

**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Strengths:** Open to the public. He had an open-door policy and went out to meet the residents where they were.

**Weaknesses:** Because the councilmembers were so new and sometimes were not clear on what they needed to do, Mr. Brown had to correct and clarify what the council was saying at times. Even though they needed that correction, it was hard for some people to take.

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**Susan Owens – Administrative Services Director, Village of Indiantown, FL, 954-801-2789**

Ms. Owens has known Mr. Brown since 2019. She started as Village Clerk but was reclassified as Administrative Services Director in 2022. They worked closely together and interacted on a daily basis.

Mr. Brown communicates well with the public. He takes time to listen to others and tries to explain to them what the issues are and help them resolve their questions or concerns. He is an excellent public speaker. He respects others and is not authoritative when talking to others. He is comfortable in both formal and informal settings.

Mr. Brown did the budget himself for the first few years of being Village Manager because they did not yet have a financial services director. Working with a consultant, he handled the budget very well. They were even able to reduce the taxes two years in a row. He has good financial skills.

Ms. Owen is not aware of anything in Mr. Brown's conduct that would be considered embarrassing for a future employer. There is always false information about people on social media, and he is not an exception to that, but Mr. Brown's conduct was always professional and strictly above the law.

Mr. Brown was one of the best supervisors Ms. Owen has ever worked with. He allowed her to grow in her position and take on new responsibilities. He will be an excellent manager and director wherever he goes.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Charismatic,
- Caring,
- Innovative,
- Professional,
- Engaging, and
- Communicative.

**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Strengths:** Knows how to respect and motivate people. He has experience from all around the country and knows how to run a municipality.

**Weaknesses:** Could give feedback to his employees more often. Because they were a new town, they did not have a human resources system set up yet, and so did not have formal employee evaluations for the first year. However, evaluations were more regular after the first year.

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**Renita Presler – Planning, Zoning, and Appeals Board Member, Village of Indiantown, FL  
772-260-7902**

Ms. Presler has known Mr. Brown since he was hired as Village Manager for Indiantown in 2019. She is a politically active local resident who serves on the local planning, zoning, and appeals board. She interacted with Mr. Brown on a monthly basis with the board, and always attends the village council meetings, which occur twice a month. She is very aware of what is happening in her community and had a front row seat to Mr. Brown’s performance as Village Manager. She believes him to be the right person at the right time. The Village of Indiantown needed his exact qualifications and personality to help them transition from being unincorporated to being incorporated. He was challenged beyond measure in helping them with this process, but he excelled beyond what anyone expected. He was wonderful and exactly who they needed to lead this transition.

Mr. Brown taught the city how to function as a municipality. He adjusted his management style to suit their needs. He gave them more direction at the beginning on everything from how to run a meeting to how to write grants. He stepped back a little in the next few years when it was appropriate to draw back as employees got their feet underneath them and understood the processes better.

Mr. Brown has tremendous foresight. He recognized that they needed to buy the privately owned water company and made that happen, which was a gigantic leap for such a young community. Many residents thought that it would cost too much money, and that it was too big of an undertaking, but he had the vision and the drive to know that water was a critical piece for them to own. Now the residents collectively consider the purchase to be one of the smartest things the Village ever did.

Mr. Brown will make an excellent manager anywhere he goes. He is selective on where he goes and saw the Village of Indiantown as a prime and unique situation. Any municipality that hires him will be very pleased with his performance.

**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Patient,
- Caring,
- Good listener,
- Sensitive,
- Stands his ground, and
- Foresight.

**Strengths:** Open door policy, willing to meet with anyone who calls to speak with him about anything. He takes time for others.

**Weaknesses:** Resigned too quickly.

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**Ivory Vann – Former Councilmember, City of Muskogee, OK (918) 360-9191**

Mr. Vann worked with Mr. Brown from 2014 until 2016 while Mr. Brown was the City Manager for the City of Muskogee. He did a great job. He interacted well with Mr. Vann and accompanied Mr. Vann as he visited different departments to see how they were run. Mr. Brown's personnel hires were strong. He confidently turned things over to his staff and they accomplished the goals he set for them. He managed his staff but got involved as well and knew what was going on. He made good decisions generally.

Mr. Brown solved a huge problem for the city. When he started at the city, they were incredibly behind on a juvenile detention center building project. Mr. Brown took control of the project and recruited a Florida engineer to step in and help the city. The project was completed on time. The city also had a project of urban renewal for a mini mall. Mr. Brown was involved in the project which included moving the detention center across town.

Mr. Brown maintained the organization at a high, professional level. For years, Muskogee employees did not attend the National League of Cities. Under Mr. Brown's influence they started attending again and learned a great deal through networking. Mr. Brown made this possible. He has good financial skills; he managed the purchasing committee and the Finance Director when dealing with the city's finances. They built a Martin Luther King Center, the only one in Oklahoma.

City Managers attend a number of meetings representing the city; Mr. Brown fulfilled this role and was often out in the community. He was active on Foundation Boards and community projects. He worked well with the public both one-on-one and in a group. He was customer service oriented. He was upfront about whether he was able to help you or not. Mr. Brown kept Mr. Vann informed of developments with the city through weekly reports on the different departments. Mr. Vann never saw Mr. Brown stressed.



**Reference Notes**  
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Mr. Brown dealt well with controversy with the City Council. There were some council members who felt he could not do well enough. These council members may have a differing opinion of Mr. Brown than the one stated by Mr. Vann. Mr. Vann is not aware of anything in Mr. Brown's background which would be of concern; he was not on the council during the hiring process. Mr. Brown always conducted himself in a professional manner. Mr. Vann would hire Mr. Brown and thinks he will make a great manager for any community.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Professional,
- Involved in the community,
- Christian,
- Caring,
- All about the business of the city, and
- Takes pride in doing his job.

**Strengths:** Always followed up with people on different items, got things done in a timely manner, and was all about taking care of business.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Joe Kelley – Commissioner, City of Opa-Locka, FL (786) 362-1346**

Mr. Kelley worked with Mr. Brown between 2009 and 2014. Mr. Brown was a former employee and the Director of Community Development and Planning. He was an excellent employee. He was quite reliable and worked well with the Commission. Mr. Kelley and Mr. Brown had a great working relationship. Mr. Brown worked well with outreach and Community Development; he presented innovative ways to create jobs. He looked for opportunities to get economic development to the city, but also encouraged people to hire locally.

Mr. Brown created a strong department through his quality hiring decisions. He made good decisions by seeking advice and looking at various resources when it was appropriate. Mr. Brown is an innovator but can also maintain a high performing organization.

Mr. Brown worked well with the community. His amiable nature aided him at being out in the community. He listened to residents' issues and worked with the Commission on resolving those concerns. He worked well with the public one-on-one and in a group. He is very articulate. He adapted and understood the concerns, regardless of the setting.

Mr. Brown was proactive in keeping Mr. Kelley informed. If there was legislation coming down which could impact Mr. Kelley's department, he kept Mr. Kelley abreast of the situation. Mr. Brown wanted himself and the staff to be engaged as a team to carry out the organization's

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vision. He led this way to accomplish the task at hand in a timely manner. Mr. Brown managed his budget and staffing. He maximized resources to get the best results.

Mr. Brown did his best to resolve situations. He is good at articulating solutions and giving recommendations to the commission on how to solve and/or deal with it. Unemployment was high in the city. Mr. Brown understood the need for economic development and reached out to businesses to strengthen them so they, in turn, could hire local employees. He is customer service oriented; he understood the community.

Understanding that it is all about the community helps Mr. Brown with stress. He recognizes it is not just a 9 to 5 job; you have to put in the hours and go beyond the mark.

There are always issues which arise in government, sometimes you must make tough decisions or recommendations. These job hazards are the only controversies with which Mr. Brown has dealt. Mr. Kelley does not know of anything regarding Mr. Brown's background or conduct which would concern an employer. He does not know of anyone who would have a differing opinion of Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown will make a good city or county manager. He has had enough experience in the Planning and Community Development Department and other areas of government to understand how the pieces work together. Mr. Kelley would hire Mr. Brown.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Structured,
- Disciplined,
- Humorous,
- Understanding,
- Committed, and
- Team player.

**Strengths:** Ability to listen and understand a situation, trying to understand the needs of elected officials and blend them together for a solution.

**Weaknesses:** Had a difficult time telling elected officials when a task was impossible.

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**Kosal Kong – President, Chamber of Commerce, City of Bell, CA (562) 413-4835**

Mr. Kong has known Mr. Brown since 2016 and they worked together until 2018. They interacted in a professional, friendly capacity. Mr. Brown was incredibly willing to work with the Chamber. He was very cooperative and understanding of their needs and was a great supporter of the Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Brown made great decisions which benefited the

**Reference Notes  
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city and the Chamber. He kept the Chamber informed of the items which will affect them. When they worked on agreements, Mr. Brown accomplished tasks in a timely manner.

Mr. Brown's innovation was seen as he worked with the city to bring it out of the catastrophe it went through. He is well organized, which helped him to maintain a high performing organization. He is outgoing and used this quality to lead the employees in accomplishing the organization's vision. He frequently attended meetings supporting his endeavors. Mr. Kong has never seen Mr. Brown respond to stress negatively. At times when he has been frustrated in meetings, he still spoke very professionally.

Mr. Brown was constantly in the community attending meetings, shopping locally, and building relationships with businesses and community. He attended Chamber of Commerce meetings in an official capacity and supported events put on by the Chamber. He is quite friendly and speaks nicely with everyone. He worked well with the public in a group and one-on-one. He interacted closely with retailers and gave them the same great customer service which they give their customers.

The City and Chamber of Commerce had a damaged relationship due to prior leadership and they did not trust each other. Mr. Brown worked hard on resolving and repairing this issue. This relationship has improved. They signed a contract for the Chamber to work on future events with the city again. This conflict was a significant issue which Mr. Brown has helped fix. He tries to find solutions to every problem. He is an excellent negotiator.

Mr. Kong is not aware of even a rumor of misconduct in Mr. Brown's past. There is nothing in his past or present actions which would concern an employer. He has not been involved in anything controversial in the time Mr. Kong has known Mr. Brown.

Although there may be Council Members who disagree with Mr. Brown, Mr. Kong does not know of anyone who does not like him. He has done a great deal for the city behind the scenes. He helped the city financially, socially, and economically. The City of Bell is developing a downtown because of Mr. Brown and the projects he set in place. Mr. Kong would love to have him onboard. He was a great Manager for Bell.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Capable,
- Understanding,
- Enthusiastic about his plans,
- Willing to listen, and
- Calming, calms a situation.

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**Strengths:** Good communicator.

**Weaknesses:** He is very busy and sometimes the Chamber does not get the time they need.

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**Nathan Davis – City Attorney, City of Albany, GA (229) 431-2805 (229) 407-0938**

Mr. Davis worked with Mr. Brown between 2007 and 2010. Mr. Davis interacted with Mr. Brown a great deal as the Planning Department and City Attorney's office worked together frequently. Mr. Brown performed excellently. He enjoyed talking over complex issues, appreciated advice and took part in a great number of matters. He never interacted negatively but was a pleasure with which to work. He kept Mr. Davis informed of the happenings in the Planning Department by dropping by the office and talking over the issues. He provided information ahead of time so the City Attorney's office would not be rushed but able to do a good job. He was always on top of the issue, put out a good product and always looked out for the City's best interest.

Mr. Brown knows and understands the issues. He made good decisions because he got to the point of the issue and figured out how to respond to it. He innovates, runs an organization well, and can be a change agent when needed. He is extremely well organized. As a leader, Mr. Brown involved his employees. He understood the processes and worked closely with everyone, so they knew what was going on. He wanted to do a professional job and get it done right.

One of the biggest projects Mr. Brown solved was the LED sign ordinance. He came up with limiting the number of signs rather than just eliminating them which pleased business owners and residents alike. It was a huge undertaking and Mr. Brown accomplished it without seeming stressed to those around him. He always stayed on top of the situation and never waited till the last minute. He accomplished things in a timely manner.

Frequently, Mr. Brown worked out in the community. As the Planning Director, he headed up or sat on the Planning Commission as well as the Historic Preservation Commission. He also attended public hearings regarding zoning. He attended those meetings and answered questions proposed by the community. He drafted agenda items about changes in ordinances for elected officials and then presented these items to the City Commission. He has a great deal of experience going before the Commission. He worked well with the public one-on-one and in a group.

Due to his great personality and good demeanor, Mr. Brown is customer service oriented. He will do well in front of an elected body; he is quite personable. Although the City did not have big budgets, Mr. Brown set and stayed within his budget, demonstrating his good financial skills.

From his time in Albany, Mr. Brown has not been involved in anything controversial. There was no hint of anything unsavory in Mr. Brown's conduct or background while Mr. Davis worked

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with him. Mr. Davis has not heard anything contrary to what he has stated concerning Mr. Brown.

Mr. Davis would absolutely hire Mr. Brown if he could. He was a real asset to the city and will be an asset anywhere he goes. He will do a super job as a city or county manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Articulate,
- Punctual,
- Intelligent,
- Easy to work with,
- Good demeanor, and
- Good co-worker.

**Strengths:** Smart, easy to talk to and work with.

**Weaknesses:** None identified.

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**Peggy Castano – Former Executive Administrator, The City of Opa-Locka, FL  
(786) 261-7199**

Ms. Castano has known Mr. Brown since 2012 until 2014 when she worked as his Executive Administrator for Planning and Community Development. Mr. Brown performed his job excellently. He kept staff informed by always being in communication. This was part of his excellent follow through; the staff always knew what was going on and understood the vision. He was extremely approachable, which opened to many teachable moments. At times he saw potential in the employees which they did not see in themselves. This helped him in making good personnel decisions; he ended up with high quality employees.

When faced with a project, Mr. Brown delegated tasks then followed through to the end. He led an incredibly high paced work environment and motivated employees to get on the band wagon and make things happen. The annexation application for the city was an intense project, due to Mr. Brown's management it was completed two months ahead of schedule. He completes tasks in a timely manner.

Mr. Brown is a good mix of different management styles. He is an innovator who works efficiently and productively. He always wanted to have a good turnaround on projects. He also maintained an organization which performed well and had high production. All tasks were done with the city in mind and how to move it forward most efficiently.

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The person in charge of grants for the city was incredibly overwhelmed. She informed Mr. Brown a week before the grants were due that she was not going to work on the three grants which the Planning Department needed. Mr. Brown sprang into action to solve this problem. He quickly put together a committee to complete the grants. Some people on the committee were inexperienced with grants so he taught them what they needed to know. The three grants they applied for were all approved.

Mr. Brown made good decisions in general. He has good financial skills and is customer service oriented. Opa-Locka saw an increase of Spanish speaking citizens moving into the city. Mr. Brown desired to communicate and understand the customers. He took it upon himself to learn Spanish and is now fluent, all due to his customer service skills.

Even though Mr. Brown faced difficult situations with many moving pieces, he always had a smile on his face. Ms. Castano never witnessed him stressed. He knew the task would get done; there was never any other option.

Mr. Brown often completed projects out in the community. He worked on a project with the Community Redevelopment identifying the six pillars of efficiency which was one of the requirements for the CDC Grant. He works well with the public and has experience doing it one-on-one and in a group.

Mr. Brown's conduct was always in the most professional manner. He has not been involved in anything embarrassing or controversial in the time Ms. Castano has known him. She is not aware of anyone who has a differing opinion of Mr. Brown. She would definitely hire him. He will make an excellent city or county manager.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Leads by example,
- Visionary,
- Motivates everyone around him,
- Responsible,
- Caring, and
- Professional.

**Strengths:** Follow through, saw a project through completion.

**Weaknesses:** Not able to let projects take its course, needs to accelerate things. Tends to over think.

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**Reference Notes  
Howard W. Brown, Jr.**

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**Kelvin Baker – Former City Manager, City of Opa-Locka, FL (305) 335-9174**

Mr. Baker has known Mr. Brown since 2012 where the latter worked for Mr. Baker for the City of Opa-Locka until 2014. Mr. Brown is an extremely intelligent gentleman who knows his job. He was willing to take the initiative and work outside his area when the need arose. He was a great planner who followed the critical path process. With his innovation and planning capability, he had a significant project at the end.

Mr. Brown was the acting manager when Mr. Baker was out of the office. They worked well as a team making decisions jointly. Once they agreed on what to do, Mr. Brown moved the decision forward. He was loyal to Mr. Baker and carried his vision to the employees. He made sure the areas of responsibility were in compliance with the vision. He kept Mr. Baker informed through verbal and written communications. He also provided the elected body with updates. Mr. Brown had a good rapport with the elective body.

Mr. Brown was often out in the community. Through gathering input and community involvement, he accomplished many initiatives. One of Mr. Brown's areas of authority was Community Development. He frequently represented the city at community meeting in this capacity. Mr. Brown is experienced and good at working with the public. Mr. Brown got the community involved in an annexation project for the city and was successful in bringing it to a vote. He interacts well with the public one-on-one and in a group setting.

There was a particular area of the community which had the capacity to be developed. The property owners proceeded to develop the area without gaining the proper permits. Mr. Brown looked into the issue and found the solution was rezoning the properties to mixed use. It was now legal for the property owners to develop the area. This decision was beneficial for the city as well. Prior to Mr. Brown, this situation was a major problem for property owners and the city; no one had the foresight of how to fix it.

Mr. Brown is customer service oriented and accomplishes tasks in a timely manner. Mr. Brown followed guidelines and prepared his own budget, in which he stayed within the limitations provided. Ultimately, he was successful in getting a budget adopted and moved forward. He was part of the executive team which provided input for the overall budget of the city. Mr. Brown manages stress well; he jumped on getting things done when they needed to be completed.

Mr. Brown spent a great deal of time reviewing candidates and making sure they were a good fit. He made good personnel decisions by analyzing before hiring. Mr. Brown went out amidst the employees and led them.

The City of Opa-Locka had a difficult zoning situation arise. There was a 30-day cooling off period before a zoning policy could be implemented. One Commissioner's constituent wanted to open a daycare the day after the approval of the zoning change. The Commissioner told the person they could open their business. Mr. Brown let the person know they could not open immediately. They met with the Commissioner and the citizen, though the meeting did not go

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well. Mr. Brown handled the controversy well and did not fall to political pressure; he stuck with policy.

Mr. Baker is not aware of anything in Mr. Brown's background or conduct which would embarrass an employer. No one has shared with Mr. Baker a negative opinion regarding Mr. Brown.

Mr. Brown has done well with his career. He will make a good city or county manager. The proof is in all the places he has already worked and the marks he has made there. He is on track to have a major impact. He is ambitious and wants to do more to help the public. He has good morals, is trustworthy, and follows the code of ethics precisely. Given the chance, Mr. Baker would hire Mr. Brown today.

**Words or phrases used to describe Howard Brown:**

- Innovative,
- Ambitious,
- Determined,
- Loyal,
- Respectful, and
- Good sense of humor.

**Strengths:** Creative, very prompt and on time meeting deadlines, good writer, great planner – both short- and long-range planning.

**Weaknesses:** Got discouraged when projects were not approved.

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**Prepared by:** Amanda Jenkins  
Colin Baenziger & Associates



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*CB&A Internet Research*

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**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-village-manager-abruptly-resigns/article\\_786af8ca-7bda-11ed-84f5-0bcf54c21378.html](https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-village-manager-abruptly-resigns/article_786af8ca-7bda-11ed-84f5-0bcf54c21378.html)

Hometown News  
December 15, 2022

**Indiantown Village Manager abruptly resigns**  
**Village Manager Howard Brown resigned suddenly during the Dec. 8 Council meeting with few comments**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

Without any public forewarning to residents or Village Council members here, Village Manager **Howard Brown** abruptly turned in his resignation Dec. 8 prior to a scheduled discussion on his upcoming performance review slated for January 2023. While only briefly alluding to a previous conversation between himself and Mayor Susan Gibbs-Thomas, Mr. **Brown** offered no explanation to the reasoning behind his sudden decision.

Upon reaching the performance review discussion, which the mayor had asked be bumped from the beginning of the agenda to the last item that evening, both she and the village manager appeared to struggle over who should make the official announcement. “Mr. **Brown**, do you have any comments?” she asked. “Well, Mayor I was going to wait on you,” he replied. “You can tee it up.” “It’s kind of self-explanatory,” Mayor Gibbs-Thomas continued, as she searched for the exact words. “I wanted to get a jump [start] on the performance review, and so that’s the reason this item is on here. We’ve had discussions, and we have this I guess here. Once again, I don’t know how to tee it up any more than that. Do you have any comments?”

Mr. **Brown** then dropped the bomb on the those in attendance that evening as he spoke to the Council of a recent conversation with Mayor Gibbs-Thomas. “What the mayor’s talking about [is] we met this past Wednesday and talked about a number of things related to this particular item,” he said. “What we got to was distractions and those kinds of things that are occurring throughout this time I’ve been here. So, what the mayor and I discussed was a separation agreement. So, this evening you have before you a separation agreement where I would agree to resign and part ways with the Village of Indiantown.”

While neither the village manager nor the mayor elaborated on those distractions, Planning, Zoning & Appeals Board Member Anthony Zweiner, did allude to some of them as the only member of the public to speak prior to Mr. **Brown**’s announcement. “Tonight, I want to express my great concern over what must be called a conflict of interest,” he said. “That being having a village manager who owns a consulting business. That’s questionable in its own right, but having a manager that has almost complete authority over the hiring and firing [of employees] and the wages and the benefits. It’s kind of ludicrous in my opinion.”

In his following comments, Mr. Zweiner insinuated that Mr. **Brown** hired “a crew of selective people to follow him around from town to town,” in order to contract them as consultants. “I’m

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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not saying this is happening, [but] it gives the appearance and potential for it to happen,” he continued. “If what appears to be possibly happening is happening, then it’s a great little kick-back scheme. And I’m told while unethical, it still may be legal. There’s no checks and balances here, [so] I guess it comes back to one’s level of integrity.”

After Mr. **Brown**’s subsequent announcement, Mayor Gibbs-Thomas asked Council members for a motion to accept his resignation effective that day and agree that he would continue to receive his current rate of pay and benefits through Jan. 31, 2023, as well as a payment for Village healthcare coverage during this severance period in accordance with the terms of the separation agreement. That agreement also stipulated a general release of claims from Mr. **Brown**. Councilman Carmine Dipaolo made a motion to accept his resignation, which was seconded by Councilwoman Angelina Perez.

Before the roll-call vote, Mayor Gibbs-Thomas asked for any commissioner comments. Councilwoman Janet Hernandez was the first to respond, lauding Mr. **Brown** for his accomplishments since his hiring in January of 2019. “I want to take this opportunity to thank Mr. **Brown** for coming in here when it was the Wild West,” she said. “You helped guide us to get training, we did [and] we learned. Every time we went to the League of Cities, everyone kept on saying how great Indiantown looks because Indiantown was the step-child of Martin County for many years. We appreciate everything you have done for the residents of Indiantown.”

Vice-Mayor Guyton Stone followed, emphasizing how well Mr. **Brown** had worked with staff. “Thank you for working with us, a new council that was pretty much rookies,” he said. “I know that wasn’t easy, and I thank you for dealing with staff. We’ve got a lot of sad faces because I don’t see one staff that looks pleased with you leaving.”

For her part, Mayor Gibbs-Thomas emphasized the difficult balancing act required of any municipal manager. “In your time here at the Village, there has been a lot accomplished,” she said. “I have told you time and time again, there’s no way I’d have your job. We are elected to serve everyone in Indiantown, and when we hear from everyone in Indiantown, we know what is needed: It’s staying tuned to the involvement of everyone in Indiantown. We have to have that in order to move forward.”

While the two newest members of the Council, Councilman Carmine Dipaolo and Councilwoman Angelina Perez, also thanked Mr. **Brown** for his service, the former recalled discussing some of the controversial issues with him since he was elected last August. “We’ve had conversations about the subject,” Councilman Dipaolo said. “I’m not going to get into it, but I appreciate what you have done in the Village. Sometimes it’s just time to move on.”

Several members of the public also addressed the Board prior to the Council vote, beginning with former Councilwoman Jackie Gary-Clarke, who admitted she was not surprised. “It’s going to be sad to see you leave,” she said. “All I can tell people is be careful of the seeds that you sow because they surely will come up again. At the end of the day, there’s nothing wrong with us having to part, but be sure you’re doing it for the right reasons. We’ve got more done in the last

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five years than we've done in my lifetime of being here." While recently re-appointed PZAB member Milton Williams lauded Mr. **Brown** for doing "a Herculean job in this Village," Indiantown resident Linda Ivory placed much of the blame for his departure on systematic racism, a theme repeated by other public speakers that evening. "The saddest part about this whole thing is that I still see so much racism among us, and this is what it's all about," she said. "Most of the people in here don't want to see an African-American man running this town. Y'all can say what you want, but that's the way it is."

Another PZAB Member, Christa Miley, attributed the purchase of the Indiantown Water Company, the publication of Village press releases in both English and Spanish, Village roadway and drainage improvements and a renegotiated fire-rescue contract with Martin County to Mr. **Brown**'s efforts. "**Howard** I would like to thank you for everything you have done in the Village, and I commend you for all of your hard work," she said.

Indianwood homeowner Doug Caldwell was the last member of the public to speak, reserving most of his comments for council members. "I don't have to come here and praise Mr. **Brown** [because] he already knows how I feel about him," he said. "All decision-makings are hard. It's a difficult job because you've got the public telling you one thing, you've got facts telling you another thing and you've got to sort it out and make the best decision. I think the mistakes that you will make, you have to answer for them."

Mayor Gibbs-Thomas then sought a consensus for holding a discussion the following week on how to proceed with both an interim and new village manager search. The only hold-out was Councilman Dipaolo, who insisted the Board could make a decision that very evening to utilize the services of the Florida League of Cities to help find a new manager as it had done in the case of Mr. **Brown**. The Council then voted unanimously to accept the latter's resignation, as well as appointing Administrative Services Director Susan Owens as acting Village manager.

At press time, the Village Council was slated to discuss the new manager search on Dec. 15.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Howard W. Brown, Jr** is listed below.]

<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/local/martin-county/2022/12/12/village-of-indiantown-seeks-new-manager-after-howard-brown-resigns/69720218007/>

[https://issuu.com/flcities/docs/qc\\_2022\\_q3](https://issuu.com/flcities/docs/qc_2022_q3)  
Third Quarter 2022

**Quality Cities**

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**2022 FLC Home Rule Hero Award Recipients**

Recipients of the Home Rule Hero Award are local government officials, both elected and nonelected, who consistently responded to the **Florida League of Cities'** request to reach out to members of the Legislature and help give a local perspective on an issue. This year, the following municipal officials are receiving the award, and there are a record number of Home Rule Hero recipients. We thank you! To learn how you can be a Home Rule Hero, go to *bit.ly/3v3Gq8p*.

Village Manager **Howard W. Brown Jr.**, Village of  
Indiantown

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[https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-council-wrangles-through-change-order/article\\_67a617a2-18b3-11ed-bb59-2b2dad13ead9.html](https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-council-wrangles-through-change-order/article_67a617a2-18b3-11ed-bb59-2b2dad13ead9.html)

Hometown News  
August 11, 2022

**Indiantown Council wrangles through change order**  
**Board approved \$62,829,25 amendment to \$2 million Booker Park stormwater project for driveway aprons**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

The Village Council here nearly got bogged down in the weeds Aug. 4 when Village Manager **Howard Brown** requested a \$63,000 change order to the Booker Park stormwater project being funded by a \$2 million state appropriation. Council members approved acceptance of the funds in February of last year for the project that is currently under construction by CAPTEC Engineering of Stuart and scheduled for completion on Dec. 26 of this year.

Mr. **Brown** first mentioned the need for the additional funding during the July 14 meeting in order to restore access to vacant lots affected by the project. Southwest 171st Avenue resident Samantha Newkirk owns a vacant lot next to her home and also spoke during that meeting because a new stormwater swale in the right of way is now blocking her access. “Before they dug that hole, it was drivable, and I don’t think I should be paying for no one to pour my driveway,” she said. “I just asked for you to put the dirt back so I could be able to use it. They told me that I had to pay for a drainage pipe, and they would put the driveway back. I purchased the property, so I want to have access to drive up on it.”

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas and other members of the Board subsequently requested Mr. **Brown** return the following month with additional information for a formal agenda item on the matter. The latter read that item during the latest meeting, although the maximum cap for the driveway aprons was higher than the \$62,829,25 stated in the change order sent to the Florida Department of Transportation on May 10 by Village Engineer Kyle Shasteen. “At our last Council meeting, Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas requested this item come before you,” he said. “This item specifically allows me to be authorized to coordinate, develop and implement a program to install approximately 31 asphalt driveways at vacant lots in the Booker Park drainage project area in the amount not to exceed \$69,000. There’s a change order attached to the agenda item just for information because we know about how much we think 31 driveways will cost. This money will come from the American Rescue Plan funds.”

Mayor Jackie Gary-Clarke then asked for a motion prior to discussion, which was made by Vice-Mayor Anthony Dowling and seconded by Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas. Councilwoman Janet Hernandez immediately expressed her opposition. “I don’t think that we should approve this right now,” she said. “The only thing I would be willing to do is okaying the Village manager to send letters. I want to see how many of these property owners are interested before I do a determination, and I would like to have Kyle the engineer here to present to us.” The vice-

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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mayor offered to amend his motion but wanted Councilwoman Hernandez to explain her reasoning. “I’m assuming that we just want to slow this process down – is that what I’m getting?” he asked. “I need more clarification, because remember, this is money that we’re spending,” she said.

Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas then chimed in, referring to the previous conversation in July. “Didn’t we have the same discussion whenever we asked you to bring it forward, this same thing was asked that it has to be more defined,” she said directly to Mr. **Brown**. “So, we didn’t do that before we brought it forward again and we’re asking for that same thing again?” When the mayor interjected that she thought Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas was confusing a housing project discussion with that on the stormwater, the latter adamantly rejected that notion. “At the last meeting we discussed there will be a process, and if I’m not mistaken, Vice-Mayor Dowling said he wanted to see exactly what that process would be,” she continued. “We stated the same thing at the last meeting: We’ll contact them and have them sign off yes or no.” “I attached it to the item,” Mr. **Brown** said in his defense.

The councilwoman disagreed, making reference to the items attached to the agenda item, which included Mr. Shasteen’s letter to FDOT and a letter from CAPTEC approving the change order amount, which also includes 24 extra contract days to complete the extra labor. “It doesn’t have anything to do about the process we talked about previously as far as contacting the landowners and having them indicate exactly where they want the driveway at,” Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas insisted. “I think we are creating a lot more work for staff than needs to be because we know if absolutely everybody decides yes, it’s going to cost us \$62,000. If we only have 15, then it’s less money. I think we have all the information we need.”

After a brief Council debate on how much time the Village should give property owners to respond, Indianwood Golf & Country Club resident Doug Caldwell came to the podium to express his potential concerns. “You’re putting public money into private property,” he said. “If that be the case, I’ve got some stuff over in Indianwood I might need fixed, some driveways and some drainage issues. I can’t understand why you would enhance the value of somebody’s property by putting an access roadway to there. If it’s in the right of way, that’s another issue.”

Mr. **Brown** immediately rejected the suggestion the Village would spend federal funds on private property. I just want to clarify, this is the driveway apron or driveway pan, this is not the entire length,” he explained. “This is just so the property owner can access the lot – it’s not on private property.”

Village Attorney Wade Vose concurred. “Mr. Caldwell makes a very good point,” he said. “We generally look for a public purpose when we’re spending any money, but here we’re spending in our right of way. As the result of an action we did in doing these improvements here, there are parcels that don’t currently have practical access to them. So, I’d say it’d be legal as a public purpose to use.”

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Mayor Gary-Clarke herself asked for clarification on just what the Board was asking the vice-mayor to add to his original motion. “We just want to know the number of interest before we proceed,” she said. “Is that what I’m hearing from Councilwoman Hernandez?” “I’m confused,” Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas blurted out. “If it’s approved for \$62,000, why are we not moving ahead? Why do we have to know that there’s only going to be 20 people?” In her response, Councilwoman Hernandez reiterated her desire to hear from the Town engineer. “I’m not the engineer, [and] I’m not an expert in regards of what would happen if we do this,” she replied. “We might have a [negative] cause and effect.”

Interim Public Works Director Patrick Nolan then came to the podium to try and untangle the web being woven by Council members. “Really it is an engineering fact if you don’t do the driveways, you’re not going to complete your drainage project because you’re going to have holes in your drainage,” he said. “There will be parts of the drainage that won’t work property if we don’t finish it properly.”

For his part, Mr. **Brown** warned the Council that giving the property owners several weeks to respond might keep CAPTEC from finishing on time and ultimately increase the project cost. “We just couldn’t send a letter out and give them 60 or 90 days,” he said. “Everybody’s not going to respond to us. These people that respond, once we know who they are, they can tell us where this driveway can go [and] we’ll work to make that happen.”

After much further discussion, Vice-Mayor Dowling amended his motion to include the letters, but by that time neither Mr. Vose nor Village Clerk Susan Owens understood the exact timeline. “Just to clarify, no construction activity is going to occur until all the letters have been received,” she said.

Both Mayor Gary-Clarke and Mr. **Brown** simultaneously disagreed with that assessment. “If you’re going to do this, I just want you to say, here **Howard**, handle this, don’t spend more than \$62,000,” the Village manager said. “That’s all I need.”

The Board subsequently voted 4-0 to approve just that, with Councilman Guyton Stone absent.



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Hometown News  
July 28, 2022

**Indiantown Council rejects complaint against manager**  
**Council majority attributed manager’s failure to submit mandatory written info on deadline to being overworked**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

The majority of the Village Council here found no merit to allegations July 14 from one of its members that Village Manager **Howard Brown** had demonstrated a significant lapse in judgment by failing to submit required written notices of employee salary and benefit negotiations until five months after the deadline.

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas initially aired her concerns on June 9 related to an ordinance the Council passed last December giving the village manager authority to go beyond the standard salary and benefits package for an existing or potential employee on a case-by-case basis. Because Mr. **Brown** was not physically present that evening, she requested a future agenda item, which was set for the latest meeting. During the Dec. 9 ordinance discussion, Village Attorney Wade Vose assured Board members that the village manager would “notify the Village Council members in writing within seven days” if he utilized his new-found authority. The latter did so for both an existing and potential employee a month later, but Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas said she only learned about it from a memo sent to the Board on June 1.

Mr. **Brown**, who typically reads agenda items to the Board during Council meetings simply read the title of the one related to the complaint against him on July 14. “Potential actions to address recent village manager actions,” he said.

Because he did not read the item summary, Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas took it upon herself to inform both the community and her fellow Board members of the background of the incident. “I’ve requested the agenda item to open the floor for Council discussion and potential Council action regarding these concerns,” she said. “So, that pretty well spells it out. Mr. **Brown**, is there anything you would like to speak to?”

“Well, it is true that I did not provide the Council with it in writing within seven days,” he said. “Obviously there’s a lot going on here at the Village, and my apologies for that, but my intent was to make sure the Council had it in writing. It just didn’t occur within seven days, and for that, I apologize.” The councilwoman insisted the issue had nothing to do with personality differences but spoke “to our sworn duty to uphold the law that we make.” She then asked Mr. **Brown** for a potential solution to ensure that each and every Council member receives the same information since some Board members said he had notified them verbally while she didn’t recall that notification. “I do a bimonthly report to the Council, and it’s also posted on our

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website,” Mr. **Brown** said. “I can include that in my bimonthly, so that way not only the Council has it, but the public would have it as well.”

For Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas, that future written notification of his employee negotiations was too little and too late. “This is not a high-school math test – we have the highest ethics and principles,” she continued. “Seeing how things get so busy, I’ll chalk it up to a failed test, giving those charter rights that we have that the public said during a referendum don’t give those away. We gave them away and it failed. So, I think it’s appropriate we talk about rescinding those, since things get so busy.”

Just as in June, Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas got no traction with her fellow Board members on holding the village manager accountable for his failure to abide by the ordinance stipulation. She particularly got push-back from Vice-Mayor Anthony Dowling, who was the only Council member failing to respond to multiple Hometown News email requests for comment after the previous discussion. Now the vice-mayor hinted at amending the employee policy to rescind the written notification requirement rather than the authority itself, as he had been the lone dissenter on the Dec. 9 vote to require such notification in the first place. “Now, he’s apologized – which I don’t think was necessary – but we admit our wrongs and keep it moving,” he said. “I think we need to revisit that policy because we want to prevent these type of things from happening in the future. But let’s talk about reality – we’re short-staffed – and you have so much work with so little people. What we have done is given our village manager busy work instead of allowing him to do what he does.”

The vice-mayor also insinuated the timing of the agenda item had to do with the upcoming August primary. His own seat on the Board, along with that of Mayor Jackie Gary-Clarke and Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas, is up for reelection. “Things are being uncovered to cause trouble to say that our manager doesn’t walk in integrity, which I believe is a lie,” he said. “As we are moving forward, mistakes are going to happen. We’re literally building this thing while we’re running it. I think it’s kind of ingenuous for something so minute to blow it up.”

Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas, however, insisted the controversy was not election related. “I did not choose the timing – we all received the memo on June 1 – and it was brought up at the June 9 meeting,” she said. “I don’t care what season it is, it’s when the issue came up.”

Councilman Guyton Stone, who in June spoke of the ability of anyone to make a mistake while telling the Hometown News reporter that “there’s a conversation that needs to be had” about the incident, expressed frustration with that same conversation a month later. “I feel like this is just wasting time,” he said. “Do we have a motion on this item or do we just move on?” When Vice-Mayor Dowling responded that he didn’t “even know what the motion would be,”

Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas reiterated her position. “My thought was we take back the authority that we gave,” she said. When the vice-mayor then asked Mr. Vose to opine on the Council’s potential options, Mayor Gary-Clarke reminded the Board that neither she nor Councilwoman Janet Hernandez had been given the chance to speak. “Let Janet speak, and then I’m going to speak, because we’re fixing to close this out,” she said. For her part, Councilwoman

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Hernandez believed Mr. **Brown** already had too much on his plate having to oversee both the town and its water and wastewater facility purchased in 2020. “He’s trying to do two enterprises, [and] basically you have to see the water company as another business,” she said. “I understand we are human and he has said sorry, and if you don’t accept that, that’s you. He has given us a solution – putting it onto the bimonthly report – and if you don’t want to accept that, I don’t know what you want to accept.”

Mayor Gary-Clarke concurred, keeping her comments much briefer. “All of us are human at the end of the day,” she said. “Listen, you ain’t trying to crucify nobody because you didn’t get the report at your allotted time. So, I stand behind Mr. **Brown**.”

Village Clerk Susan Owens subsequently read a public comment into the record submitted by a Hometown News reporter, which were a series of questions that Mr. **Brown** had declined to respond to in June. They basically asked why he waited so long to provide the written information, his reasoning behind desiring the new authority and whether or not such negotiations might set a negative precedent. Mr. **Brown** choice not to respond that night, and Mayor Gary-Clarke told him to continue with the agenda since no motion was on the floor. Later that evening, Indiantown resident Linda Nycum dashed off an irate email to the Council, insisting her public speaker form to comment on the matter had been misplaced. “I still feel strongly about expressing my two cents’ worth,” she said. “An employee of our village disregarded the rule of law that you put in place to protect us. No one had the guts to agree that a mistake was made and needed to be addressed. You are supposed to be the leaders, not the employee. I question the decision to give the manager the authority to bypass the rules and regulations you all set in place. One crack in our armor of rules will lead to a larger one down the road: If you bend now, it will be expected later.”

While Ms. Nycum said July 24 that Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas was the only member of the Board to respond to her email, Mr. **Brown** himself finally responded to a July 19 email from the Hometown News requesting comment. “In hindsight, I should have provided the written notice to the Council much earlier,” he wrote. “I have taken the necessary steps to provide the elected official’s such notices in a timely manner. I requested this authority from the Village Council because we needed to attract and retain experienced and top talent for various positions in the organization. In this competitive work environment, we have to provide prospective and current employees with competitive compensation and benefits.” The village attorney failed to respond to multiple requests for comment by deadline.

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Hometown News  
June 23, 2022

**Indiantown Council member questions manager credibility**  
**Howard Brown’s failure to comply with new policy requirement has councilwoman demanding answers**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

Village Town Manager **Howard Brown** may soon find himself defending his credibility after submitting a formal written notification to the Village Council members on June 1 that he was actually mandated to submit. The credibility issue stems from the fact that the written notice needed after the use of his new authority to negotiate employee benefits was actually due to Council members last January.

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas brought the issue to light during board member comments at the June 9 Council meeting, admitting a couple of things had taken her by surprise after being out of town for a week. One of the most serious to her was the memo she received via email from Mr. **Brown** titled Retention and Recruitment Tools Update. He wrote the memo to inform the Council of his use of a new negotiating power that the majority of its members had bestowed on him during the Dec. 9 meeting so he could negotiate above and beyond the Village’s existing personnel policy in order to woo new employees or keep existing ones from jumping ship. During that second reading of the ordinance amendment, Village Attorney Wade Vose told Council members he’d added a new sentence at their request to ensure public accountability by Mr. **Brown** in the use of that new negotiating power. “If this is authority is exercised, the village manager shall so notify the Village Council members in writing within seven days thereafter,” he read Dec. 9.

After significant discussion between the Board members that same evening, they voted 4-1 for approval, with Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas dissenting because she insisted the majority of Indiantown residents had already voted on a ballot initiative to leave such decisions in the hands of the Council. In Mr. **Brown**’s memo, he detailed a Jan. 10 agreement he made with the Village’s then grants writer and administrator to provide her a one-time gift of 80 hours of annual leave so she wouldn’t leave the Village for a position at Indian River State College. He also described the hiring of the Village’s first Parks & Recreation director in which he offered her a one-time gift of 80 hours of additional annual leave on Jan. 19 in lieu of a higher salary request. Mr. **Brown** did not formally notify the Village Council within seven days of each incident as Mr. Vose informed him last December, but instead dashed off the memo on June 1.

Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas was particularly miffed at one sentence of Mr. **Brown**’s accompanying email. “I started to send an email back saying that his first sentence was wrong because he hadn’t spoken to me about that, and he wanted to make sure that we were aware in

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writing,” she said. Because nearly six months had passed since that December debate, the councilwoman went back to review the video of the Dec. 9 hearing. That’s when she confirmed that Mr. **Brown** failed to meet his legal requirements in the use of that new authority. “In looking at this memo, the dates that tool was utilized was Jan. 10 and Jan. 19, and we received notice in writing on June 1,” she said. “In one instance, that’s 142 days after the action was taken, [and] on June 19, it was 133 days [afterward]. That’s a long way from seven days required in that ordinance. I don’t think 142 days and 133 days is following protocol: It’s not being cognizant of responsibilities.”

Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas also lamented the fact that Mr. **Brown** had allowed the Meet the Village event hosted by Vice-Mayor Anthony Dowling to be held at Post Park without any kind of advance permission granted by the Village of Indiantown. It became particularly worrisome for her when she realized that event included a bounce house, a children’s attraction for which the Board had not yet confirmed whether or not it had insurance liability coverage for it. “If something would have happened, that would have been interesting for the Village,” she explained. “I still cannot get my head around the fact that we had an event in Indiantown without any kind of permit [and] how that was allowed to be. My confidence is shaken in the Village manager allowing an event to happen where there was absolutely nothing as far as responsibility filled out even on an application. That’s three instances right there. My question is, what quality of work and standards are we demanding and requiring? This is not best practices in any of it.”

When Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas subsequently asked her fellow Board members if they preferred to discuss the issue that evening or set an agenda item for the next meeting, Mayor Jackie Gary-Clarke quickly answered for the group as a whole. “Set an agenda item for the next meeting to have a discussion,” she said.

The mayor than asked Mr. **Brown** – who was only participating remotely that day – if he had any comments. “Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas talked about having an item on the agenda,” he said. “We probably just need some clarification on exactly what that would entail, but we’d definitely put it on the agenda for the next meeting.”

Since no other members of the Council offered any commentary on her complaints that evening, the Hometown News sent each of them the same two questions, asking whether they didn’t consider the additional benefits being offered by the Village manager for employee retention and hiring a “potentially dangerous precedent” and whether they thought he should be censored or punished for the oversight of the legal notification requirements.

As of press time, only Vice-Mayor Dowling had failed to respond to multiple emails. Mayor Gary-Clarke said via email June 19 that she was satisfied with Mr. **Brown**’s June 1 memo and didn’t act as if his failure to comply with the written notification within seven days was an issue for her. “I have confidence in our village manager [because] we all talk to him on a weekly basis,” she said. “I was informed verbally at my weekly meetings prior to Mr. **Brown** making those decisions.”

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Councilwoman Janet Hernandez, a big supporter of giving the Village manager that new authority last December, concurred with the mayor’s sentiments in her own email response June 20. “The Village manager notified us verbally of his actions after his actions,” she said. “Due to the overwhelming work in the Village and lack of staff, this clearly was an unintentional oversight by Mr. Village Manager. There was no time when we were left in the dark.”

Councilman Guyton Stone – who was actually absent during the June 9 discussion – said via telephone June 16 he didn’t think the issue should be overlooked but didn’t believe Mr. **Brown**’s actions were severe enough to warrant his dismissal as hinted at by Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas. “I definitely think there’s a conversation that needs to be had,” he said. “I don’t think it should be swept under the rug. People make mistakes, and that doesn’t mean they should lose their job over something like this. I’ve been in that situation before as a businessowner, and it can happen.”

The Hometown News also sent Mr. **Brown** a few questions asking about both his failure to comply with the ordinance amendment requirements and Vice-Mayor Dowling’s event at Post Park. While the latter did not reply to two emails requesting a comment, Mr. **Brown** referenced the June 1 memo in a brief email on June 19 but did not mention the issue of the Post Park event and the bounce house. “I would like the opportunity to respond, but since this matter involves potential personnel, I will respond directly to the Village Council at the upcoming meeting,” he said.

The next scheduled meeting of the Indiantown Council coincides with the Hometown News publication date of Thursday, June 23 beginning at 6:30 p.m.

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Hometown News (Fort Pierce, FL)  
May 12, 2022

**Indiantown wins \$550,000 Civic Center grant**

Author/Byline: Donald Rodrigue

The original \$350,000 Rebuild Florida Critical Facility Hardening Program grant the Village won in mid-2020 to fortify the Civic Center for use as a hurricane shelter recently grew to more than half a million dollars after the Department of Economic Opportunity offered \$200,000 more to incorporate a pet shelter as well. Village Manager **Howard W. Brown Jr.** provided a brief history of the grant's evolution to the Village Council on April 28. The municipality has been negotiating with the leadership of the Indiantown Civic Club, Inc. on the public/private collaboration for almost two years now.

"Back in 2020, the Village applied for a DEO grant, where we received \$350,000 from the state to make it into an emergency shelter," he reminded Council members. "Mr. Dick Werkmeister, the president of the organization, agreed to allow us to make an application on their behalf. In 2021, Gov. Ron DeSantis announced that we were awarded the \$350,000 amount. Back in February, DEO informed us there was additional money out there that they recaptured, and they asked that we consider making this a pet-friendly shelter for people during these hurricane events."

Mr. **Brown** emphasized that the actual cost to the Village of Indiantown associated with the grant would be minimal compared to the actual award of \$550,000. "Our fiscal impact right now is about \$15,000, and that will be considered an in-kind match toward this project," he said. "We recommend the Council accept these funds, approve this grant agreement and authorize the mayor to execute these said funds."

Councilman Guyton Stone, however, believed the Village of Indiantown needed assurance that its grant investment would be protected if either Mr. Werkmeister or Indiantown Civic Club Vice-President Craig Bauzenberger decided to sell the facility in the future. "I know there was a discussion at one point regarding us having first right of refusal," he said. "Was that discussed, and did we come to an agreement on that?"

Mr. **Brown** informed him, however, that a verbal agreement was all he had at the moment. "I met with Mr. Workmeister and Mr. Bauzenberger yesterday at three o'clock," he said. "They both agreed that they would agree to such terms. It was a gentlemanly handshake, but obviously we'll have to get that into a written agreement. I'm sure Dick can talk more about it, but we agreed to the first right of refusal. This just sets forth the motion to get the money, but we still have other things we've got to do in terms of the agreement, the paperwork that we have to do, the RFP, all of that."

Councilman Stone, however, still expressed hesitancy without a document legally binding the parties to just such a commitment. "Instead of it being verbal, I would like to see something in

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writing first," he insisted. "I would like to see something probably at the next meeting that they did accept it and it's in writing." Village Attorney Wade Vose, in turn, advised the concerned councilman that such a formal contract could take longer than just a couple of weeks. "It may be the meeting after the next meeting," he said. "As long as the wheels are turning," Councilman Stone chimed in.

The village attorney also pointed out the purpose of the current resolution before the Board that evening. "As **Howard** mentioned, this is just accepting the grant agreement from the state – it's not spending any money," he explained. "The worst-case scenario – if it's not going to happen here [and] it all doesn't come together – we can pull the plug and give the money back. This is the next step forward to get the money from the state for this, and then we can make sure it's all sorted out before we utilize any of those grant funds."

For her part, Councilwoman Janet Hernandez wanted clarification on the grant's cost to the Village. "The \$15,000 fiscal impact is coming from the general fund, right?" she asked. "Yes ma'am," Mr. **Brown** answered. "And that is to pay for staff time?" she continued. "This was Tracy Bryant's time, Mr. **Brown** said, referring to the Village's grant manager.

Because the village manager's discussion with the Civic Club leadership had touched on the Council's ability to use the Civic Center for its Thursday board meetings should it decide to repurpose the current Town Hall Chambers, Vice-Mayor Anthony Dowling hoped to put the Village into a better negotiating position. "We should be able to use the building, not necessarily whenever we want, but at a significant discount price," he said. "I think if I'm not mistaken, we get charged to use the building." In response, Mr. **Brown** emphasized that the recent negotiations had indeed put the Village in a more favorable position. "Obviously we had an agreement with Indiantown Civic Center where we paid them so much for the Thursdays that we use," he said of the present agreement. "But [with] this option that we're talking about, we wouldn't be paying: It would be open for our Council meetings on Thursdays."

Still not satisfied, Vice-Mayor Dowling hopes the \$550,000 planned enhancement to the facility will subsequently give the Village even more usage privileges. "What if we had an event or something like that," he asked Rhetorically. "I don't want to limit it to just a Council meeting because I think we should consider when we want to use it if it doesn't conflict with whatever they have going on, and at a discounted rate. Obviously, we're carrying the torch here. I just wanted it to be on the record."

Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas believes the Village has already had a favorable agreement with the city and lauded the Civic Club's leadership for its cooperation to-date. "I know that the previous agreement we had was a minimal amount, like \$25 or something," she said. "I am thankful we have the relationship that we have with the Civic Club, and their willingness to always work with us. I think this [resolution] is a culmination of that partnership, and I think it will benefit Indiantown residents immensely going into storm season." The Council then voted unanimously to approve the resolution.



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Hometown News  
February 10, 2022

**Indiantown Council approves manager’s Harvard course**  
**Village manager offered to forego all other training in current fiscal year and pay the difference himself**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

The Village Council here voted unanimously Jan. 27 to offer its support so Village Manager **Howard Brown** can participate in a three-week leadership conference offered this year through Harvard University.

The Council discussion on Mr. **Brown**’s request came after Village Clerk Susan Owens introduced the agenda item related to the village manager’s annual employee evaluation conducted in January. She reminded Council members that the village manager had sent a memo to each of them clarifying his intention to seek the 3 percent annual cost of living adjustment and 80 hours of annual sick leave, items his original contract didn’t stipulate because they didn’t exist when he was hired. He also requested permission to attend the Harvard course in his memo and agreed to forego any other normal training this fiscal year.

“The current manager’s salary is listed as \$145,344.33,” she said. “However, on Jan. 25, Mr. **Brown** issued a memorandum saying he would be electing to take the 3 percent COLA that was given to the remainder of the other employees. That would bring his current salary to \$149,704.66. At this point, this item is open to the Council to discuss any further salary or benefit increases and the evaluations given.”

The evaluation form used by Council members was adapted almost one-for-word from the seven categories of evaluation criteria used by the City of Stuart for its city manager. Those categories ranged from how Mr. **Brown** exhibits composure, resiliency and the ability to manage difficult issues addressing the Village to how he anticipates and analyzes problems with the ability to develop effective, creative and/or innovative approaches for resolution.

While most Council members offered no comment on their evaluations, Councilwoman Janet Hernandez praised the village manager while emphasizing to the public that this was not the moment whether to consider his continued employment or not. Mr. **Brown**’s contract has no termination or renewal date, which means he’ll be an employee of the Village until a majority of the Village Council decides differently. For her part, Councilwoman Hernandez had marked five of the seven categories on his evaluation form as exceeds expectations on Mr. **Brown**’s evaluation form, “I would say Mr. **Brown** as village manager has done a great job,” she said. “Let me just make sure that the public knows an evaluation is not the time where we wait to fire him. You know – like a teacher – any superior has an evaluation every year. Usually those

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evaluations are done to see if he deserves a merit increase.” In the continuation of her discourse, Councilwoman Hernandez appeared to be responding to public comments she’d fielded recently about the manager’s performance. “If I am upset about anything, I go to him during our personal one-on-one meetings and I tell him,” she continued. “That’s where I have the opportunity to express what the residents have said, if they have questions or they have concerns about the manager. So, it’s not done during the evaluations.”

Vice-Mayor Anthony Dowling, who had marked four of the seven categories as exceeds expectations and the remaining three as meeting them, had his finger on the motion trigger. “I appreciate all the stuff that you have done and the encouragements that you have shared to push this Village forward,” he said to Mr. **Brown**. “So, we’re ready to vote.”

Ms. Owens reminded him, however, that no vote was necessary on the COLA, which would be automatic. Councilwoman Hernandez, however, wondered about the village manager’s decision in his memo to go on the Village health insurance plan implemented after he came onboard. The Village currently pays him \$6,000 annually to fund his own health insurance. “We don’t have to approve that?” she asked. “You know we’re giving him a \$500 [monthly] stipend, and we want to make sure it’s set in stone so that people don’t say, oh, he’s taking the stipend and he’s taking the health insurance too. Transparency is key here.”

When Mayor Clarke asked Ms. Owens if she needed to get a Board consensus or take a vote on the insurance/transparency issue, the latter insisted the village manager would automatically go on the health insurance plan in October, which didn’t require a vote. Village Attorney Wade Vose then chimed in with his own advice. “It can be put in the minutes where it was discussed and confirmed that that’s what’s going to happen,” he said referring to the end of the \$500 stipend. “That’s probably all we need to do.”

Mr. Vose followed that up with a brief explanation on how other cities handle merit raises in response to further questioning by Councilwoman Hernandez. “I can tell you in other cities it’s all over the place,” he said. “You tend to see more increases in the beginning number of years – this is just general experience.”

Mayor Jackie Gary-Clarke then asked if any Board member wanted to make a motion for a merit raise, but Mr. **Brown** himself short-circuited that conversation. “The only thing I would like is for the Council to support me in the leadership program that I was accepted to at Harvard, and that’s it,” he said. “If I get a scholarship from the International City Managers Association or I can use my existing VA benefits to pay for it, that’s how I’ll do it.” “What is the cost of that program?” asked Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas. “It’s \$13,000,” Mr. **Brown** answered. “But he’s going to incur the costs himself,” Vice-Mayor Dowling reminded her before making a motion to support the request.

Mayor Clarke then wanted her own clarification. “Okay Mr. **Brown**, so we can have transparency, please explain some scholarships or whatever you’re seeking and what you’re asking of us so I could be clear,” she said. The village manager emphasized that he would apply

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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directly to the ICMA for a scholarship, attempt to use his own VA benefits and ultimately use his own money for the course if nothing else pans out. “I would forego any other training through ICMA or The American Planning Association, in order to not do two or three things, just this thing,” he reiterated. Councilwoman Gibbs-Thomas posed a few more questions, ranging from whether the village manager would participate virtually or in person and what the financial difference would be to the Village after discounting the cost of any other training this fiscal year. Mr. **Brown** believed his normal training would constitute about half of the \$13,000 fee, but he did not have a clear answer on whether he’d actually have to go to Massachusetts or not. “I believe it may be virtual because of COVID, but I think they may have resumed because I know that the window is this coming July,” he said. “I think last year it was virtual.”

Councilman Stone then seconded the vice-mayor’s motion with a comment. “He’s not asking for us to pay for the course – it’s basically just the time off,” he said.

Wanda Nycum was the only member of the public to speak that evening prior to the vote, expressing frustration with the village manager evaluation process. “I read the manager evaluations, and I didn’t find them specific enough to tell me what you think of the past year’s work,” she said. “The questions were too generic; the answers were more like grading with an A, C or an F. I encourage you to go back to the detailed evaluation forms used before and those recommended by the organization which certifies our manager as having the qualifications needed for the job.”

The Board then voted unanimously to support the village manager’s request. When Mr. **Brown** failed to supply the Hometown News with a weblink to the course, the reporter ultimately found it and discovered a couple of flaws in the information he presented to the Village Council on Jan. 27. The Senior Executives in State and Local Government course cost is actually on-campus only and costs \$16,900, nearly \$4,000 more than he said repeatedly to the Village Council.

While Mr. **Brown** insisted via email Feb. 7 that he’d be paying his own travel expenses to Cambridge, Ms. Owens affirmed he wouldn’t need to take personal time for the training. “Mr. **Brown** will not technically be on leave as he will still be on Village business, the same as if he or any employee were attending any of their shorter trainings/conferences,” she said Feb.7 via email. “I am certain Mr. **Brown** will be working outside of his sessions during the training.”

When Mr. Vose was asked by the Hometown News whether the Council would need to revote on its support since the cost was significantly higher for the Harvard course than they were told, he simply said he anticipated “the matter will be fully clarified in advance of Mr. **Brown** attending the Harvard program.” For his part, the village manager simply explained via email that the price for the course had changed and emphasized that he would “not be requesting per diem while there or requesting reimbursement for air travel or mileage while there.”

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-preliminarily-approves-7-3-million-budget/article\\_81fe5e58-f8ed-11ea-8bc9-c70ae371e620.html](https://www.hometownnewstc.com/news/indiantown-preliminarily-approves-7-3-million-budget/article_81fe5e58-f8ed-11ea-8bc9-c70ae371e620.html)

Hometown News  
September 17, 2020

**Indiantown preliminarily approves \$7.3 million budget**

Author: Donald Rodrigue

The Village of Indiantown Council gave its initial unanimous approval Sept. 10 of the municipality’s proposed \$7.3 million 2020/2021 Fiscal Year Budget and 1.6304 millage rate, as well as setting the final budget hearing for 6 p.m. Sept. 24 via the Zoom platform.

Council members provided limited feedback during the first public hearing on the budget and millage rate, which was preceded by three prior workshops characterized by in-depth discussions. Village Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** simply introduced the proposed millage rate, which reflects no change from the current rate. “The General Fund is supported by a 1.6304 millage rate, which is 2.84 percent over the rollback rate,” he said in reference to the rate at which municipalities could roll the tax rate back in order to receive the same income due to higher property values. “At 95 percent, the millage rate will generate a net amount of \$3.2 million. Property tax revenue makes up approximately 65 percent of the general Fund budget.”

Just prior to the Board’s unanimous approval of the budget, Councilman Anthony Dowling asked his fellow Council members to consider expanding the Village’s fledgling Parks & Recreation Department in the future. “I was thinking of a way how we could add taking over the sports and having those under one umbrella,” he said. “I think there was some discussion about that around the incorporation time... [and] this may be an opportunity for all of us to support our kids. Definitely we can discuss this at the strategic [planning] meeting that’s going to take place on Saturday.”

Parks Superintendent Albie Scoggins then described his department’s efforts since incorporation and told the Board he would need more hands on deck to fulfill the councilman’s desires. “As you know, we’re kind of in the infant stage of building our Parks and Recreation services,” he said. “The first order of business was to bring our parks up to a certain standard and] repair all the equipment from the irrigation systems, to plumbing, parking lot lights and fencing. Those are all works in progress as we speak. We have to have some staff if we’re going to do our own Village of Indiantown recreation programs.”

Council members did, however, offer more commentary on the budget and millage rate during the third and final budget workshop held Sept. 3. During that meeting, the town manager provided more details on the makeup of the budget. “It’s a barebones budget,” Mr. **Brown** said. “It has no increase in our ad valorem tax rate... [and] there are no major organizational changes. It’s got 19.5 positions in it, and it includes paying for a lease at the new temporary Village Hall. That also includes the purchase of the water and sewer plant, so we’re assuming we’ll have that

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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under our umbrella effective Oct. 1. We’ve already getting some folks trained and hiring two new utility billing clerks.” The \$4.9 General Fund makes up the biggest chunk of the village budget, which is funded by a variety of sources including property taxes, state-shared revenue, intergovernmental revenue, fines and permit fees. The \$2.1 million Water and Wastewater Utility Fund – new to the budget this year due to the imminent purchase of the plant – comprises the second-largest portion of the budget, followed by the \$225,000 Capital Improvement Fund. As did most of Florida’s municipal leaders this year, village staff had to prepare for a potential loss of state revenue due to the effect of COVID-19 on the economy. “There is declining revenue,” Mr. **Brown** explained. We may not see it now, but these things run in cycles, and so we have to look at declining revenue or flat revenue trying to provide services. We did reduce our budget revenue projections for the state-shared revenue side, but it looks like we’ve gotten a little bit more than we thought. We’re doing well in terms of our reliance on other things. We’ve had an increase in residential real estate, which has been helpful.”

Immediately following the town manager’s presentation, Councilwoman Susan Gibbs-Thomas questioned him on how Martin County’s decision to expand its Fire-Rescue budget might financially impact the residents of Indiantown. The Village receives those services from the county, which funds them through a municipal services taxing unit. Mr. **Brown** offered his own insight before handing the question off to Village Attorney Wade Vose. “The agreement that we have pretty much says we are opting into the county’s MSTU process,” he explained. “The agreement we structured allowed us to levy the first year. The second and every year after that, they would meet the levy. Two years ago, it was \$5.9 million – it could be less, it could be more – it’s really a pass-through, so that amount the county is using to fund the Fire-Rescue/EMS.”

For his part, Mr. Vose insisted that Village staff had no real say-so over the county’s decision to raise the assessment. “I would caution using the term pass-through at this point,” he said. “That is the arrangement that we had before where we were imposing the millage: We’d get the money and pass it right on to the county. The county now directly imposes that Fire MSTU millage in the unincorporated county and within the Village. We have no control over setting that millage, [and] that does ultimately increase the tax burden.”

Mayor Janet Hernandez also wanted to ensure the proposed budget included funds for helping the Village obtain future grant monies. “Talking about the water and sewer and us buying it and the legislative action that’s coming, do we have grant writers in our budget?” she asked.

Mr. **Brown** then reminded her and her fellow Board members that the Village has contracted for those services since its incorporation. “We have \$36,000 that we set aside to do grant writing,” Mr. **Brown** responded. “We didn’t hire a person to do that; what we did [is] we outsourced different things to companies that specialize in certain things. We hired Kimley Horn, paid them \$3,000 and they wrote the last grant where we got the \$50,000. We have another arrangement with a Community Development Block Grant consultant where he doesn’t charge us: He writes a grant for us, and if he gets it, we would [then] enter into an agreement with him.”

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Because the mayor mentioned the Legislature, Mr. Vose emphasized the difference between grant funds and those released directly from the state. “When I talk about grants, we’re talking about a preexisting program where you can go and try to get money as opposed to going to the Legislature and just trying to grab it from the general fund,” he said. “The two main avenues are effectively being worked, and I think the plan to continue working them with regard to water and sewer is the state revolving fund, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection and United States Department of Agriculture. Keep in mind while those are financial lending sources, they often – if we can finagle it right – come with a forgiveness component, which is great.”

In response to a concern expressed by Indiantown resident Tony Zwiener, Mr. **Brown** insisted that the Town’s two new billing clerks would not be replacing any current utility employees. “Part of our agreement is we will absorb all of their employees,” the latter said. “They will become Village employees. We are in the process of all these transitional things, meeting with their staff and going over what our benefit package is for them.”

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Howard W. Brown, Jr** is listed below.]

<https://fccma.org/2020/09/congratulations-to-2020-icma-awards-recipients/>  
September 2020

**Congratulations to 2020 ICMA Awards Recipients**

25-Year Service Award Recipients  
**Howard Brown, Jr.**

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches  
HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.  
(Articles are in reverse chronological order)**

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FCCMA  
July 17, 2020

**Meet Howard Brown, Village Manager, Indiantown**

*How long have you been a FCCMA member and why did you join?*

It was January 2019 as a full member.

*Are you an ICMA member, why did you join, and how long have you been a member?*

Yes, I joined ICMA because I wanted to be part of the changing face of local government. I have been a full member of ICMA since 2003.

*Please describe your areas of formal/advanced education (if applicable).*

I hold a BS Degree in Criminology from the Florida State University and an Master's Degree in Public Administration degree from the University of West Florida.

*Why did you select a career in public service?*

I had an affinity for local government from the time I was a child, watching the garbage men pick up the garbage in my neighborhood. I would see my grandparents during holidays give gifts to these public servants. I quickly realized their work was of tremendous value and impact to the community. After Hurricane Frederick, garbage and trash pick up was suspended and we quickly recognized how invaluable these workers were to the organization and to the community at-large. The seeds of public service have been planted in me since then.

*Have you always been in the public sector or have you had experience in the private sector?*

Yes, I have devoted over 25 years of service in city and county government.

*Please tell us about your current position and give a brief job description if you are not a City Administrator/Manager.*

I currently serve as the first permanent Village Manager with the Village of Indiantown. I have occupied this position for nearly two years. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer in a Council-Manager form of government. The Village of Indiantown is Florida's 413th municipality and is located on the Treasure Coast of Florida.

*Please describe your typical day.*

Organized Chaos. I consider myself a master conductor in an orchestra of chaos on any given day. I resolve conflict, manage emotions, put out fires, and pay the bills on time without failure. On a more serious note, I am very focused starting my day around 6:00 a.m. and ending it sometime around 8:00 p.m. Starting a new municipality is tough work which forces me to be highly organized and think out of the box for innovative solutions. I recognize the council's policy has to be broad based and inclusive with the goal to enhance the community and improve each resident's quality of life.

*What is your favorite part of the job?*



**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Directly impacting and enhancing people's quality of life. I like to be a change agent or turn-around expert either way I enjoy getting things done.

*What is your least favorite part of the job?*

Dealing with disciplinary actions and personnel issues. It's time consuming, distracting and requires an enormous amount of energy; some would say it's par for the course.

*If you are involved in any volunteer or leadership activities in your community, please share with us a bit about what you do and why it is important to you.*

I am involved in the Boy Scouts of America and have been part of this organization either as a child, Scout Master, Board Member, etc since 1981. I really enjoy being around people and see young people learn new things and how they are excited about learning about the outdoors.

*What is your most memorable experience on the job?*

When I promoted an individual to department head who was a natural leader but had been overlooked for many years. He hit the ground running and transformed that department. I knew this individual was ready and proved that I made a great hire. Another memorable experience is seeing two subordinates that I personally mentored go on to become city manager.

*What are your hobbies/interests?*

Golf, camping, fishing. I am also an ancient weapons enthusiast.

*If you could give one piece of advice to people interested in a career in public service, what would it be?*

Always ask people for three pieces of advice. I would ask a seasoned manager for three pieces of advice.

*Who were your mentors and how have you passed this information down to other aspiring public administrators?*

Alfred Lott, City Manager, Bowie, MD and Tom Combiths, City Manager, retired. I'm always ready and willing to share my good and bad experiences with people in the profession. Lord knows I have made my shares of mistakes and have gained valuable experience along the way.

*What career would you pick if you were to pick another? If you are a student or new to a career in local government management, did you have any other career paths you initially considered, and why did you ultimately choose public service?*

Probably positions in food science and engineering.

*Do you have a story you can share about how being a member of FCCMA has helped you or impacted you in a positive way?*

Having worked as a city manager for many years in California and Oklahoma, FCCMA gives me a Florida perspective and insight from other seasoned Florida city managers across the state as we work collectively to manage our municipalities.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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<https://www.tcpalm.com/story/news/local/martin-county/2019/05/17/local-officials-have-unanswered-questions-migrants-expected-come-indiantown/3704834002/>

Treasure Coast Newspapers  
April 12, 2019.

**Martin County officials have questions about unknown number of migrants into Indiantown**

Author: Sara Marino

With an unknown number of migrants possibly coming to Indiantown in the near future from the southern border, local officials and law enforcement agencies are beginning to create plans, but they have questions that have gone unanswered by federal employees. "Without knowing the magnitude of the influx (of migrants), it's hard to say what the impact it would have on Indiantown," Donna Carman, the executive director for Indiantown Chamber of Commerce said.

Thursday evening, Martin County Sheriff William Snyder said he got a phone call from a border patrol agent saying there's a chance that some of the about 1,000 migrants that are expected to fly into Palm Beach International Airport in the coming weeks might be headed to Indiantown. Snyder said Indiantown was mentioned as one of the places where migrants are expected to travel to because some of the people have noted that they have family in the area. No other parts of Martin County were specifically named, but that doesn't mean Indiantown is the only place where migrants might be sent. "We have a community patrol policing unit that is very well-versed in policing the different special interest groups in Martin County and the minorities, and we will make some kind of effort to check in with these people, maybe provide some information to them on law enforcement and what law enforcement in America means," he said.

According to a report in the South Florida Sun Sentinel, a senior official with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, said the proposal is only part of a "contingency plan" that is still in the works. According to a press release from U.S. Customs and Border Protection, because of "capacity limitations at many U.S. Border Patrol stations on the southern border, and the limited capacity of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to accept transfer of family units" migrant families who do not have a criminal past have been released since March 19 and given Notices to Appear. As of Friday afternoon, more than 400,000 families have been released in the country under these circumstances. Snyder said Friday afternoon a deputy went out to churches and food banks in the area and spoke with members about the area's resources questioning if it had enough to sustain an increase in population.

**Howard Brown Jr**, the Indiantown Village manager, said Homeland Security did not reach out to them Thursday evening or Friday morning and much is still unknown. **Brown** said Friday morning his agency began reaching out to local food banks and shelters to ensure the area has enough supplies. If Indiantown were to have an influx of a few hundred people, he said it wouldn't be a problem, but a few thousand people could create housing issues down the line.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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U.S. Rep. Brian Mast, R-Palm City, said he was surprised when he heard the news about migrants getting flown to Florida from the southern border. "We don't want any people that have crossed the border illegally coming into our community," he said. "I want to bring this to an end."

Carman said the Chamber of Commerce plans to meet with the Village of Indiantown's leaders to talk about how they plan to handle the potential increase in population. A specific date has not been discussed yet, she said. "Should we have a big impact, Indiantown will step up to the plate," said Carman, who has lived in Indiantown her entire life. "Indiantown has always been good to come together in times of a crisis."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
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<http://www.localgovernmentconsultinggroup.com/services.html>  
October 2018

**Our Mission**

LGCG provides expert, cost-effective professional services to help local governments run more efficiently so that they can better serve their communities and constituents. Our consultants bring deep public/private -sector experience and knowledge to every engagement, thereby helping our clients achieve more for the benefit of those they serve.

**Howard W. Brown, Jr., AICP, ICMA-CM**

**PRINCIPAL**

Former City Manager in several states, including California, Oklahoma and Florida. Nationally Certified Urban Planner while working as Community Development and Planning Director in Florida and Georgia in several cities.

- Credentialed City Manager, International City Manager's Association (ICMA)
- Full Member, International City Manager's Association (ICMA)
- Member, California City Management Foundation (CCMF)
- Member, California City Manager's Association (Cal-ICMA)
- Certified Planner No. 24680, American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP)
- Member, American Planning Association (APA)
- Former Member of Florida Planning Association (FPA)
- Former Member of Georgia Planning Association (GPA)

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[CB&A Note: To view the separation agreement in its entirety, please follow the link below.]  
<https://www.cityofbell.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=12005>

[CB&A Note: To view Mr. **Brown**'s letter of resignation, please follow the link below.]  
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:0ad6d97e-0d74-3a88-a6fb-eb5885e19941>

September 26, 2018

**City of Bell**

**Agenda Report**

DATE: September 26, 2018

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

FROM: **Howard W. Brown, Jr.**, City Manager

APPROVED BY: **Howard W. Brown, Jr.**, City Manager

SUBJECT: Consideration of Non-Renewal of Contract Agreement and General Release and Waiver of Claims- City Manager

**BACKGROUND & DISCUSSION**

On September 26, 2018, City Manager **Howard W. Brown, Jr.** announced his separation from employment as Bell's City Manager. Mr. **Brown**'s separation would be effective as of the close of business on September 30, 2018. Mr. **Brown** has served as the City Manager since January 2016.

Mr. **Brown**'s employment contract provides for a three (3) year term of employment from January 2016. This agreement expires on January 3, 2019. The City and Mr. **Brown** have mutually decided not to extend the employment contract and that Mr. **Brown** will separate on amicable terms at the end of September, which is prior to the end of the term of his contract. The attached Non-Renewal of Contract Agreement would provide Mr. **Brown** the salary the City is contractually obligated to pay him under the employment contract through the end of the term of the contract. This amount is \$49,436.40.

Separate from the issue of Mr. **Brown**'s separation and early termination of his employment agreement, The attached General Release and Waiver of Claims would pay Mr. **Brown** \$130,000 in exchange for a release of all claims he would potentially have against the City.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Non-Renewal of Contract Agreement
2. General Release and Waiver of Claims

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Los Angeles Wave  
November 17, 2017

**Bell rises from ashes of municipal scandal**

Author: The Press

Seven years after being catapulted into the national spotlight by the largest municipal corruption scandal in the country, the city of Bell celebrated its 90th anniversary and looked toward the future. In 2010, former City Manager Robert Rizzo, Mayor Oscar Hernandez, Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia and four city council members were arrested and charged with misappropriation of public funds. At the time of his arrest, Rizzo was receiving \$787,637 in compensation, almost double the salary of the president of the United States.

In the end, seven city officials were convicted on graft and corruptions charges and were given sentences ranging from probation to 12 years in prison. Today, with a new city government in place, Bell is striving to put the past behind. One of the major initiatives the city has put in place is transparency and economic development.

At the Bell's 90th anniversary Breakfast Celebration and State of the City Address Nov. 4, City Manager **Howard Brown** spoke about the measures Bell has installed to ensure accountability. "We have a state-of-the-art website where all of the city's documentation is posted," he said. "Every year, we post our salary and public benefit information, so the public is aware. Our city council meetings are streamed live online, so people can watch them live or download them." He noted that many of the transparency laws that are currently in effect at the state level were put into place following the Bell scandal.

Bell was awarded with a "Sunny Award" for its efforts by the nonprofit Sunshine Review, a national organization that advocates for increased government transparency. Bell has developed a master plan to revitalize its major thoroughfares and intersections. With new zoning laws in place, the city is in negotiations with its first brewery on Gage Avenue and Pine Avenue. New landscaping, retail and commercial development is also in the works for the downtown area.

Homelessness and providing employment resources are major priorities. Bell partnered with the Salvation Army to construct a multi-story permanent housing complex for the homeless and veterans.

Officials also negotiated with the Los Angeles Unified School District to bring the Richard Slawson Southeast Occupational Center to the city. The center offers training in vocational industries such as cosmetology, automotive repair and computer science. "My hope for the city of Bell is that for our 100th anniversary, the world will see the city of Bell for what it is: a community filled with hard-working people that are worth their weight in gold," Vice Mayor Ana Maria Quintana said.

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<https://www.cityofbell.org/Home/Components/News/News/451/18?arch=1&npage=2>  
June 1, 2017

City of Bell California  
News List

**City of Bell Awarded the GFOA for Financial Reporting**

**City of Bell Awarded the Highest Recognition for Financial Reporting**

The City of Bell has been awarded the ‘Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting’ by the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) of the United States and Canada for its comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR). This award is “[t]he highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting,” according to the GFOA’s news release of April 2017. The last time the City of Bell was awarded this accolade was seven years ago. The award comes at a perfect time as the City is working on bond refinancing and improving its credit rating.

“The City of Bell is proud to receive such a distinguished award. With the support of the City Council and hardworking staff, there’s nothing that our city will not be able to accomplish,” said **Howard W. Brown, Jr.**, City Manager.

Congratulations to the Finance Director Tineke Norrdin and her team for this remarkable accomplishment.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Howard W. Brown, Jr** is listed below.]

Daily News of Los Angeles (CA)  
May 23, 2016

**BEAUMONT ARRESTS - Cities are hopeful after scandals fade away**

Author/Byline: David Downey

It hurt. Bell native Alicia Romero said hearing her hometown being branded one of the most corrupt cities in America was devastating. “We’re so much better than that,” she thought in 2010, after the disclosure that the then-city manager was receiving a seven-figure compensation package in this blue-collar town with fewer than 40,000 residents. Today, Romero serves as mayor of the little community along the Los Angeles River, southeast of downtown L.A. And while Bell has yet to fully repair its tarnished image, it is financially sound after coming to the brink of bankruptcy, Romero said.

Current City Manager **Howard W. Brown Jr.** said in a phone interview Friday that Bell, with a \$26 million budget, has since built up a reserve of \$18 million.

Bell has “bounced back very impressively,” said Douglas Johnson, a fellow with the Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College who has studied municipal scandals. Johnson said Bell’s experience — as well as the comeback trails trod by scandal-scarred San Jacinto and Pasadena — should offer hope to beleaguered Beaumont residents and city employees stung by last week’s flurry of arrests and criminal charges accusing seven former administrators of misappropriating nearly \$43 million from the fast-growing city over two decades. “It’s shocking and saddening to see things like this continue to pop up,” Johnson said.

One thing’s for sure: As many eyes are on Beaumont now, many have focused on Bell in recent years. And Bell’s mayor believes her city is better for it. “We are a success story. We have recovered,” Romero said. “We want to be known now as a city that is not going to be defined by that scandal in the past.”

**Brown**, the new city manager who was recruited in a nationwide search, said Bell isn’t defined by scandal. After formerly managing a city in Oklahoma, **Brown** took over the helm Jan. 4. “I looked at it. I prayed about it. I just thought it was a good fit,” **Brown** said. “I know a different Bell. I know a Bell of honesty and hardworking people.”



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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
December 12, 2015

**Proposal would expand sidewalks study**

Author/Byline: D.E.

A proposal to expand the scope of a study to determine ways to address sidewalk maintenance beyond the central business district could get a second look, but financial feasibility will play a big part of the consideration.

Ward III Councilor Ivory Vann said restricting the scope to sidewalks and rights of way in downtown Muskogee "is unfair to residents who live in other parts of the city." Vann said there are sidewalks in Muskogee's older neighborhoods where sidewalks pose safety risks.

Muskogee, like most municipalities across the state, assign the task of maintaining the public rights of way to the owners of property that abut the sidewalks. A committee formed earlier this year is considering a recommendation relieving owners of property in downtown Muskogee of that responsibility.

Planning Director Gary Garvin recently told city councilors that committee members have "determined that downtown needed to be looked at differently." He said the proposed change for the downtown district is "a major priority" for committee members. "The next step will then be to determine who is responsible for maintaining the rights of way," Garvin said during a recent meeting. "If the city is going to be responsible, how will that be funded?"

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.**, citing provisions of the city's five-year strategic plan, agreed there should be a greater focus on the central business district. At the same time, he acknowledged the need to address sidewalk needs in the city's older neighborhoods. "I am in favor of a phased approach, but we should look at our downtown first because that is the area we have identified as an important part of our economic development goals," **Brown** said. "But we need to have a plan to address sidewalks in our older neighborhoods — the property owners didn't put those sidewalks in, the city did — and we want to be respectful of our residents."

**Brown** said any plan must take into consideration the availability of funds. He identified several possible sources that include increased retail sales and related tax revenue, a dedicated sales tax or the use of street and alley funds.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
December 8, 2015

**Councilor pushes for customer service review**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors will be asked on Tuesday to approve the formation of a task force to see how customer service might be improved. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the city's new website, which was rolled out earlier this year, is designed to address councilors' concerns about customer service. Its features include the ability to log complaints filed by residents and then track the city's response.

Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson said his proposal is based upon his desire to "dig into the data" compiled by those online features and determine how it can be used to take customer service to the next level. He said that data can be used to identify the underlying issues that might have contributed to problems identified in those complaints. "I think that is the beginning ..., the first initial step," Johnson said about the website's customer-service features. "What I am proposing is ... to take that next step ... and see how it is working — my goal and that of all the councilors is to provide superior customer service."

Johnson said he has used the online customer complaint feature several times and considers it a useful tool. What he hopes to accomplish with the task force, if it is approved, is to get the data to see if his experience is shared universally. "From what I know thus far, it is very effective, but perception and reality can be two different things," Johnson said. "And the website is just the first step, it is not the total solution to our customer relations."

**Brown** agreed, saying the website's customer-service features have been used frequently by city councilors in response to constituents' concerns and inquiries from residents about code enforcement issues. **Brown**, who will be leaving at the end of the year after accepting a job in Bell, Calif., said he wanted to provide councilors with an update regarding those features but is "running out of time."

"That is what you would do: Look at the data and let it tell you where you need to go next," **Brown** said about the next steps Johnson said are needed. "This is about transparency: We have been encouraging people to go online and see for themselves the activity occurring in their wards."

Johnson's proposal will be considered when councilors convene their Public Works Committee meeting. The meeting will be at 4 p.m. in City Council Chambers of the third floor of the Muskogee Municipal Building.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
November 24, 2015

**City manager resigns to take California job**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

While residents are making decisions about next year's municipal elections, city councilors will be laying the groundwork necessary to select a new manager to oversee Muskogee's day-to-day operations. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** tendered his resignation Monday after accepting a similar position for the city of Bell, Calif. The Los Angeles-area municipality was rocked in 2010 by scandals that attracted national attention. Problems in Bell surfaced after investigative journalists revealed that salaries for officials in the city of 36,000 were among the highest in the nation. By 2014, seven Bell officials — the manager, mayor and city councilors among them — had been convicted of graft and corruption.

**Brown**, who reportedly will earn a base salary of \$192,000 a year plus benefits when he begins his new job Jan. 4, said the Los Angeles County municipality has turned the corner and is "poised to become a new Bell." **Brown** said he is ready to build upon efforts made there during the past three years. "As a professional manager you always have to be prepared to evaluate what you are doing, and I decided it was time to look at other opportunities," **Brown** said Monday while assembling a transition plan. "Muskogee has been good to me, affording me an opportunity to come to her as city manager, and this move is another career opportunity."

**Brown** was selected during a what he described as a "very competitive" nationwide search that ended Nov. 4, when Bell city councilors unanimously approved a recommendation to hire him. Bell officials announced their decision Friday.

**Brown** said he is most proud of the development of a five-year strategic plan that was adopted during his 23-month tenure as Muskogee's 27th city manager. He also cited greater inclusion of city councilors in the budget-making process, more transparency in the delivery of government services, and retail development as other major accomplishments.

Several of Muskogee's elected leaders wished **Brown** the best with his future endeavors. Deputy Mayor James Gulley said he hopes the move "works out well for him." "You hate to lose somebody and have to start over again, but you never want to keep a man from bettering himself," said Gulley, who has helped select two city managers since Walt Beckham retired in 2008. "He seems to think this move will better his career — I hope he got some good experience here that he can take with him and make a difference out there."

Ward III Councilor Derrick Reed said it was no surprise to learn that **Brown** was keeping his options open and considering a career move. He credited **Brown** for greater diversity among members of committees and neighborhood involvement in government affairs. "The composition of city committees has grown diverse, with more neighborhood groups becoming involved in

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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city affairs, and the city's partnership flourishing under **Brown**'s leadership," Reed said. "My hope is that model of collaboration in these areas would carry over with the new leadership." Councilors Dan Hall, Ward II, and Marlon Coleman, Ward IV, also wished **Brown** well but expressed little desire to rush the process of selecting his successor. They, like Gulley, believe initial steps should be taken to initiate the process but thought it best to interview applicants after the municipal elections have been settled. "I've been around this management team for 11 or 12 years — we have great managers who are dedicated and conscientious," Gulley said. I don't think we need to be in a real rush — I think we will be all right."

An interim manager is expected to be appointed Dec. 8 during a special City Council meeting.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Los Angeles Wave  
November 20, 2015

**Bell hires new city manager**

Author: Unknown

The city will begin 2016 with a new city manager.

The City Council Nov. 12 hired **Howard W. Brown Jr.**, currently an administrator for the city of Muskogee, Oklahoma, to start Jan. 4 at a salary of \$192,000 a year. The vote was 4-0 with City Councilwoman Ana Maria Quintana absent, a city spokesperson said.

The nationwide search was conducted by Bob Murray and Associates, an executive recruitment firm out of Roseville, Calif. The post was vacated by Doug Wilmore, who left in February, the spokesperson said. Murray interviewed each council member to create an ideal candidate profile that would move and lead the city forward. The candidate interviews were a twofold process. There was a professional panel of city managers which provided the City Council with their feedback and perspective. The candidates also were interviewed by the City Council. The process resulted in the selection of **Brown** the spokesperson said.

“We are very excited to have found someone as qualified to become our next city manager,” Mayor Ali Saleh said. “Mr. **Brown**’s background in community development strongly fits our current need to move the city forward and implement our planning and economic development plans. We look forward to his leadership.”

**Brown** said he was looking forward to working with the mayor, City Council and staff. He also said he would like to meet with the residents of Bell to work on an action plan to move the city forward. He brings more than years of experience in the field of community development and is a seasoned city manager, the spokesperson said.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
November 12, 2015

**City Council cancels communications equipment upgrade**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors backpedaled a bit this week, revoking their tentative grant of authority to spend up to \$30,000 for equipment upgrades needed to provide the capability of transmitting high-definition signals to its public access cable channel. They unanimously granted a request for the equipment upgrades a week ago during a Finance Committee meeting, moving the item forward as part of the City Council's consent agenda. Typically, such items are approved as a package — with one vote and no discussion — unless a request for further consideration is made. Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson made that request Monday, pointing out the request would require the expenditure of funds not included in this year's budget, for which sales tax revenue lags projections by about 2.5 percent. Johnson asked his colleagues to table action for six months, and they agreed — again, unanimously. "It was ... stated that it wouldn't be any problem if this wasn't done at this time," Johnson said, recalling discussions during the Finance Committee meeting. "With us seeing the budget number where we are at and the concerns I have for budget, I just don't see us making that expenditure ... until we see the budget numbers turn around."

For the first four months of fiscal year 2016, which began July 1, the city received just more than \$8.17 million in sales tax revenue. That is up about 0.42 percent, or \$33,870, from the \$8.14 million deposited into city coffers during the first third of fiscal year 2015 but well short of the 3 percent growth projected for budgeting purposes. The city spent about \$10,000 in 2012 to upgrade the camera system used in the City Council Chambers. At the time, the local cable provider was unable to provide high-definition service for the public, educational and government access channels, and that service was not expected to be available until 2018. Information Technology Director Chris Cummings said Suddenlink Communications at the time said the projected timeline "has been accelerated." Cummings put together an upgrade package that would include the purchase of a new four-camera system at a cost of \$20,399 and additional equipment needed to record and transmit a high-definition signal at a cost of \$7,743.36.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the planned upgrades to the public access cable channel are included in the five-year strategic plan adopted a year ago and revised in April. **Brown** considers a high-definition signal to the public access channel as a way to improve the city's image. In addition to adding the capability of transmitting a superior signal to consumers who subscribe to the cable provider's high-definition menu of channels, **Brown** said the city is beginning to offer new content on the public access channel. That content, he said, can be secured at little to no cost. **Brown** said funding for the proposal would have come from the capital outlay account. While the expenditure was not budgeted specifically, he said the money could be made available without having to redirect it from another department or purpose.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
November 9, 2015

**Demolition program eliminating eyesores at rapid rate**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Dilapidated housing is being cleared from Muskogee neighborhoods at an average rate of about 24 structures a month since a mass demolition program was implemented in July 2014. During the past 16 months, 308 demolition permits have been issued for the razing of eyesores that pocked Muskogee neighborhoods. Almost half of those demolitions were structures removed with funding from a \$1 million City of Muskogee Foundation grant and matching funds from revenue generated by a 0.18 percent sales tax approved by voters. Planning Director Gary Garvin said the remaining demolition projects were funded by community development block grants and individuals who opted to get ahead of the city. The city's demolition efforts also appears to have spurred property owners to remove structures from the rolls of condemned houses by repairing and remodeling projects. "We've had 86 structures repaired — those had been condemned, appealed through hearings, permits issued and repairs made," Garvin said, adding that 56 more properties are in the permitting or rehabilitation phase. "To put all of that into perspective ... there are about 445 structures that were previously condemned that have been addressed in a year and four months." Garvin said most of the projects are located within the original townsite, but they are being undertaken throughout the city. Pointing to a map that marks each completed project, Garvin likened the plotted points to the scatter pattern left by the pellets of a shotgun blast.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** attributed the increase in private activity within this realm to the city's "stick-and-carrot approach" with property owners. When efforts to work with owners of abandoned or dilapidated property fail, the city must pursue its condemnation and demolition options, but help is available when those efforts bear fruit. The help that can be offered includes the ongoing rehabilitation program, also funded by the foundation, that provides up to \$20,000 for exterior repairs for income-qualified homeowners in designated areas of the city. A newer program provides incentives worth up to \$25,000 for new residential construction on infill lots, but funding for that has been depleted.

"While we are tearing down a record number of homes, we shouldn't have gotten to where we are today in the first place," **Brown** said about the initial backlog of nearly 500 structures slated for demolition. "We are going to make sure we get these (dilapidated structures) out of our community, and we are going to have to practice what we preach if we are going to make our community better." There have been discussions about accelerating the demolition program, which would add 25 cents to the \$2.15 a square foot provided for in the present contract, or shifting some projected savings to the incentives program for infill housing. **Brown** said he favors the accelerated schedule for demolition. "Mowing an overgrown lot is a lot better than having to demolish a building," he said. "An adjacent property owner is more likely to buy that lot and maintain it."

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
October 11, 2015

**City budget concerns block proposal to hire lobbyist**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Concerns about the city's budget thwarted a plan to retain the services of a Tulsa-based lobbyists to help leverage legislative change and secure nontraditional funding for big-ticket projects.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** asked city councilors to grant him the authority to negotiate a contract with Capitol Ventures to lobby on behalf of the city at the state and federal level. **Brown** described his proposal as an "economic growth strategy" that would help "move the city forward." "We can do nothing — that is a reasonable course of action — but I would say there is too much at stake to do that," **Brown** said during a recent special City Council meeting. "I think this would be something we could do, and I think it would be helpful — I'm just a manager recommending the very best I can for this city."

**Brown** said the lobbying group, which is led by Tulsa City Councilor G.T. Bynum and his partner, has a proven track record representing the cities of Miami and Bartlesville. He acknowledged the city's membership with the Oklahoma Municipal League, which lobbies on behalf of municipalities at the state level, but argued there is a need for an advocate who can lobby specifically for the city. "I know lobbyists are effective, and they can help us get things done," **Brown** said. "Right now, unless we cut expenses or find additional revenue, we need somebody to help us focus our efforts so we can bring home the bacon."

The proposal drew support from some councilors — three who voted to approve the proposal and others who ultimately killed it. Support from the latter group was tempered by their concerns about the budget, which included no funding this year for lobbyists. Ward I Councilor Lee Ann Langston said she could support the proposal if the city cut its ties with OML and diverted funds budgeted for dues toward lobbying efforts. Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson expressed adamant opposition. "We need to stick to a budget ..., we need to live within that budget ..., we are not meeting budget, and I've got concerns about the budget," Johnson said. "I really would like to move forward with this item, and I think it's a good idea, but I am very concerned about our budget and not is not the time."

**Brown**, citing this year's budget and policy changes setting aside financial reserves, said the city's financial situation is not as dire as it was described during the meeting. He said the estimated \$42,000 price tag on his proposal pales when compared with the potential of bringing in new revenue unavailable otherwise. "We are not in any financial distress or anything like that, and we are spending money wisely," **Brown** said. "This one-time expenditure was not going to hurt the city, but councilors have spoken — I am hopeful this will come back up at a later date."



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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
September 19, 2015

**Water leak results in damage to city property**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

A major water leak this summer at a rental house sparked a round of allegations of wrongdoing and finger-pointing that prompted an internal investigation of the property owner's initial report, the city's response and damage to public property. Allegations included the expenditure of public funds and use of city resources to provide a private benefit. The finger-pointing that followed appears to have been attempts to assign blame for the water leak and subsequent responses.

A report released this week by the city attorney's office attempts to sort all that out by summarizing a series of events that began July 1 and various accounts provided by those involved. Those events, according to the report, began when questions arose about water usage at a house on North Aberdeen Street that exceeded by more than 72 times what is considered normal. Water department workers dispatched to the location reportedly found what they described as "a 'major leak' on the house side of the meter" and assigned responsibility of repairs to the property owner. A technician disconnected water service to the house and "left notification" about the steps that needed to be taken to restore service.

Deputy City Attorney Matthew Beese, who conducted the investigation and compiled a report of his findings, said city workers responded later that month to reports of another leak at the same address. When they arrived, they found water flowing from the meter box caused by a broken water line on the city's side of the meter. Workers told Beese that damage to the line appeared to have been caused by an unidentified person who "attempted to attach the house line to the meter without digging." The person who did the work, according to Beese's report, "likely pried on the meter, breaking the line on the city side," which city crews fixed by laying a new line to the meter box.

On Aug. 3, city workers were dispatched to the same address to investigate faulty information related to the electronic unit that transmits water usage data from the meter. When workers arrived, they found water service "had been turned on prior to arrival" and the electronic sending unit "had been unplugged." Because the leak persisted, water was turned off again. The customer at that address called the city on Aug. 8, acknowledging the leak but maintaining problems on the city's side of the meter made repairs impossible. When city workers responded again, they "found no leak on the city side."

The following day, which was on a Sunday, City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** instructed his assistant to send a text message directing city workers to "set a meter" at the house and restore water service. When workers arrived, they reportedly found that somebody had connected the private supply line to the city water line, resulting with "unmetered flow" of water "to the house." In his report, Beese cites a message from **Brown** sent by email that indicates the "the property owner admitted that he tied directly to the city line," a violation of the city code. Beese

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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also notes the work was done without the requisite permit and inspection and referenced state laws that impose criminal liability for any person who tampers with equipment with the intent to defraud a public utility.

**Brown** said he ordered the restoration of water service to the residence prematurely based upon faulty information provided by the property owner and landlord of the rental property. **Brown** said based upon the circumstances of this event he plans to investigate similar claims more fully in the future. "I later learned there was more to the story, this guy may not have been 100 percent truthful with me when we first talked," **Brown** said, noting he was told the tenant had been without water for several days. "But then again, when a resident comes in with problems like this you have to listen to what they have to say."

According to Beese's report and exhibits, the city incurred costs of more than \$700 for labor, materials and damaged equipment. **Brown** said he is hesitant to pursue criminal charges, but he expects to pursue recovery of the city's costs from the property owner. "These people are our customers, and if they pay their bills and, in this case, for the damage to our equipment, I think we can call it even," **Brown** said. "I don't think we want to send anybody to jail for tampering with a water meter — we spend too much time trying to prosecute folks for these kinds of violation — we just want our revenue."

City Attorney Roy Tucker said he is awaiting instructions from **Brown** about how to proceed. Tucker said he will carry out the instructions he is given.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
September 19, 2015

**Slight increase in sales tax disbursements**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Sales tax disbursements to the city of Muskogee in September crept upward for the second consecutive month when compared with receipts reported for the same period a year ago. Data compiled by the Oklahoma Tax Commission show the city received just more than \$2.06 million in sales tax for the September reporting period. That represents an increase of almost 1.53 percent, or \$30,962.57, from the \$2.03 million disbursed in August 2014.

September sales tax disbursements are based upon actual retail sales reported July 16 through July 30 and estimated sales from Aug. 1 through Aug. 15. Statewide, the agency disbursed nearly \$141.91 million to 514 municipalities, up about \$4.71 million, or 3.44 percent, from the \$137.19 million disbursed in September 2014 to 512 towns and cities.

While the year-to-year gain reported this month was less than what officials had hoped for, it was enough to raise year-to-date totals into positive territory for fiscal year that began July 1. For the first three months of fiscal year 2016, the city received just more than \$6.13 million in sales tax revenue, up about 0.35 percent, or \$21,292, from the \$6.11 million deposited into city coffers during the first quarter of fiscal year 2015, which ended June 30.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** expressed a sense of disappointment with the small gains revealed in the Oklahoma Tax Commission's September report. But any increase, he said, is better than seeing sales tax revenues decline. "What we saw this month is negligible, but that seems to be a reflection of retail sales within the regional market and trends we are seeing there," **Brown** said. "We need more retail sales — I think we will get that as these projects along Shawnee (Bypass) start coming online, but it may be January before we will be able to see the fruits of our labor."

While there was a slight year-to-year gain in the city's share of sales tax revenue disbursed in September, use tax receipts declined when compared with disbursements for the same period in 2014. The commission's September report shows use tax disbursements to the city this month totaled \$140,796, down 1.04 percent, or \$1,485, from the \$142,281 disbursed in September 2014.

Use tax revenue is generated by purchases of out-of-state goods for in-state consumption or use. Sales and use taxes, along with tobacco and franchise taxes, make up slightly more than half of the city's general fund.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
September 15, 2015

**Pilot program to provide oversight of city's expenditures**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors moved forward with the implementation of a pilot program that creates additional layers of oversight for expenditures that exceed \$10,000 but are less than \$25,000. Ward II Councilor Dan Hall initially requested the \$25,000 threshold that requires purchases be competitively bid be lowered to \$10,000 to provide better oversight of city expenditures. He was joined by Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson, but both backed off that demand and supported the pilot program as a temporary measure until a new purchasing manual is assembled and presented. Their hesitation to impose stricter limits on purchases was based upon concerns that it might impede progress of any project requiring expenditures of \$10,000 or more. Hall expressed doubts about those claims Monday when councilors revisited the issue. "I don't see it bogging our city down and stopping us from what we are doing," Hall said, expressing concerns about what he considers questionable expenditures made without City Council oversight. "I know there were a lot of concerns about it, (but this) is just for a short time to see if it (additional review) will work." City councilors ceded some of their oversight authority in August 2013, when they raised the threshold that requires competitive bids from \$10,000 to \$25,000. That move was made upon the request of city administrators who favored a process that was more streamlined and less cumbersome.

Concerns about the relaxed purchasing procedures cropped up in July after a consulting arrangement authorized City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** made with a Florida colleague that began within a month after he was hired. **Brown** took over the city's day-to-day operations in January 2014, and he extended the no-contract consulting arrangement until the consultant's cumulative fees bumped up against the \$25,000 threshold that requires the solicitation of competitive bids. "We need to do something," Hall said last week when he introduced his proposal to mandate competitive bidding for expenditures of \$10,000 or more. "The citizens who voted us into this job expect us to watch over the spending and hold people accountable."

Johnson said in July he was willing to wait until a new purchasing procedure was presented for consideration before reducing the cap for no-bid expenditures. During a Public Works Committee meeting last week and again on Monday, Johnson said he has had a change of heart, but he recognized a need to ease into any change that might be proposed later. "Two months ago I would have said let's wait ..., but then again I had some concerns about purchases that really didn't fall within the guidelines that we've got to get a handle on," Johnson said. "We don't want to limit operations — we want to make sure we are efficient as a city — but we want measures in place to make sure there is accountability." The 60-day pilot program that eventually won support will require additional documentation for all purchases of \$10,000 or more that do not require competitive bidding. The documentation required is expected to show quotes solicited were obtained through a competitive process or justify the absence of that process.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
September 3, 2015

**Investigation of dog adoption continues**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

An investigation of events that led to the controversial adoption of a dog from the Muskogee Animal Shelter was extended Wednesday, causing more frustration for the pet's original owner. Lucy escaped Aug. 17 from a fenced yard of her caregiver while Todd Bean, her original owner, was working out of town and reportedly was impounded the following day. Bean said he called shelter employees twice to inquire about Lucy before a mandatory 72-hour holding period expired but allegedly was told his family pet was not there.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said on Monday he was told Bean's first contact with the shelter came four days after the dog was adopted, which occurred one day after the 72-hour waiting period. Bean produced telephone records on Tuesday that contradict the timeline presented in a report requested by **Brown**. Upon learning about those discrepancies, **Brown** requested an investigation be conducted by the city attorney's office. **Brown** expected that investigation to be completed by the close of business Wednesday but received a request earlier that afternoon for a one-day extension.

Bean, who has won the support of nearly 700 people who have signed an online petition seeking Lucy's return to her original owner, said the delay raises more questions than he had before the investigation began. It also sparked new suspicions. "Are they trying to figure out a way to cover this thing up?" Bean said after learning about the delay. "I don't know why they need more time to investigate. These phone records clearly show I called the shelter within the 72-hour period."

City ordinances provide that any dog found running at large be impounded and must be kept for 72 hours before being placed for adoption, sold or euthanized. An owner of an impounded animal "shall be entitled to resume possession" upon payment of fees and compliance with vaccination and sterilization provisions when applicable.

Deputy City Attorney Matthew Beese, who is conducting the internal investigation, said the request for additional time was made after he recognized a need to expand his inquiry. "In doing the investigation I found it necessary to interview additional people who were not originally considered," Beese said. He also wanted to interview "the original owner to get the other side of the story."

**Brown** said a report of Beese's findings will be released once it is received by his office. **Brown** said he expects the investigation to be completed by Thursday.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
August 23, 2015

**City wants downtown property owners to abate weeds, grass, trash**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

A city councilor lambasted efforts to impose upon downtown property owners the responsibility of abating vegetation that grows between cracks in the sidewalks that abut their businesses. Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman also criticized the language included in warning letters delivered this month to downtown property owners, which he described as "threatening" and "condemning." The letters reportedly sent earlier this month to about four dozen property owners also included a notice that such conditions — and more significant problems such as accumulated trash — left unabated could result with fines of up to \$249 a day.

"Many of our businesses in the downtown area are doing everything they can to be successful as they strive to make a Muskogee a better place for its residents," said Coleman, who also serves as pastor of a downtown church. "How sad and disgusted and disappointed many of us were to receive a letter from the city of Muskogee ... condemning us and threatening us with fines ... for something as simple as grass growing between cracked and broken sidewalks."

City workers, who maintain planters along downtown streetscapes, in the past have applied herbicides to curb the growth of vegetation that emerges from racks in downtown sidewalks. That practice apparently will end after a review of city ordinances and a survey of those adopted by other municipalities revealed the maintenance of public sidewalks falls to the owners of property that abut the pedestrian walkways.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the issuance of the letters was prompted by efforts to improve the appearance of downtown Muskogee and "uniformly administer these codes and regulations." **Brown**, who spent most of his professional career in Florida and Georgia, said he was surprised to learn that duty fell to property owners rather than the municipality in most instances. "We researched our code and worked with the Oklahoma Municipal League to study how other communities handle this," **Brown** said about sidewalk maintenance in central business districts. "Most of the cities in Oklahoma require property owners to maintain the sidewalks that abut their businesses."

The OML survey garnered "126 responses ... from a good cross-section of municipalities" throughout the state. The results of the survey, which attempted to identify the parties responsible for maintaining weeds and sidewalks in residential and commercial areas, found 67 percent, or 84, of the respondents imposed that duty on the owners of commercial property.

Downtown property owners who received the notices included the city of Muskogee, which **Brown** said is "not immune to code enforcement." **Brown** said he was surprised to receive the notice — the language is generated as part of a form letter typically sent in advance of issuing citations for code violations — but he acknowledged city administrators should lead by example.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Coleman assigned no blame to city workers or department heads "for doing what they perceived to be doing their jobs." But he chastised "those who instigated written insults and indignation against hard-working downtown business owners" who "have invested ... money (and) time" to make downtown Muskogee "a better place for its residents." "It's so sad that the city of Muskogee is not accustomed to thanking downtown businesses but quickly and in a hurry to condemn, to criticize and to fine downtown businesses simply for being downtown," Coleman said week while commenting about the notices during a recent Public Works Committee meeting. "New developments are taking place all over the city and every effort is being made to make sure they are open on time or ahead of schedule while those who have sacrificed the longest are under assault by the city of Muskogee."

**Brown** said efforts to clean up the city's central business district may have been handled in a more diplomatic fashion but reiterated the need to improve the appearance of the downtown area. Future efforts will be more proactive than reactive, he said.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
August 12, 2015

**Muskogee County voters pass liquor by the drink**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee County voters approved by a 15-point margin a measure that will allow licensed dining and drinking establishments to sell liquor by the drink on Sundays. Tuesday's special election was the first time voters here weighed in on the issue since 1985, when they approved a ballot proposal allowing sales of liquor by the drink every day except Sundays. Proponents sold the ballot measure as an economic development tool even though there was little to no statistical support for their claims.

Erasing the so-called blue law in Muskogee County was seen by proponents as a way to boost sales tax revenue by luring consumers to Muskogee and keeping residents here from spending money elsewhere. Supporters said lifting the prohibition has the potential to lure new investment from restaurateurs who depend on liquor sales to bolster balance sheets and other retailers.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said he was excited about the outcome of the election, which attracted 8.5 percent of Muskogee County's 35,592 registered voters to the polls. Of the 3,017 who cast ballots, 1,746 supported the ballot measure and 1,210 opposed it. "The voters have spoken ..., (and) I am happy to know we have done something that a majority of the voters agree is moving the city forward," **Brown** said. "I respect those voters who disagreed but hopefully over time we will move the city forward in a direction that voters on both sides will agree is positive."

County commissioners, who will announce later when the prohibition will be lifted, authorized the special election after Muskogee city councilors agreed to foot the \$17,000 cost of the election. Commissioners also were persuaded by Greater Muskogee Area Chamber of Commerce representatives, who pitched a plan for the special election based upon support among its members.

Mike Miller, a member of the chamber's Paul Revere Legislative Committee, said the outcome of the election will provide "a good opportunity for Muskogee to grow." He has maintained the issue never was about "what happens on Sunday, it's about the investment that comes to the community ... from outside sources to build new restaurants." "I think this is a good opportunity for Muskogee to grow, and that is what it's all about," Miller said. "It ... passed relatively easy, and I think that is a sign that voters recognized it was time to review the law and realized there were missed opportunities because it had not been changed in 40 years."

Election results show voters who cast absentee ballots by mail and in person overwhelmingly supported the measure, with 68.2 percent favoring Sunday sales of liquor by the drink. Urban voters also supported the measure with similar numbers. But as ballots returned from rural precincts were tallied, the large lead that emerged shortly after polls closed began to diminish.



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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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That nearly 40 percent lead steadily evaporated, and by the time all ballots were tallied the early 40-point lead shrank to 15 percent.

State law authorizes voters in individual counties to decide whether eating and drinking establishments can sell liquor, wine and strong beer for on-premises consumption. Alcoholic Beverage Laws Enforcement Commission records show two of the six counties that abut Muskogee County — Cherokee and Haskell — restrict on-premise consumption of liquor by the drink.

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
August 6, 2015

**Contract includes 33 percent cost increase**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors signed off on a renegotiated contract with a retail development consulting firm that includes a 33 percent cost increase along with a modification and expansion of duties. The contract, worth \$48,000 a year for Owasso-based Retail Attractions, also clarifies reporting requirements and identifies Retail Business Enterprise Director Don Root as the consulting firm's primary point of contact. City councilors expressed concerns in June about both of those issues, which became a focal point of negotiations.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** initially justified the \$4,000-a-month price tag — up from the \$3,000 monthly fee included in the previous contract — by the relinquishment of claims for expenses. When pressed about how that trade-off would impact city coffers, **Brown** was unable to provide details about expenses reimbursed in the past.

Persistent questioning by Councilors Derrick Reed, Ward III, Janey Boydston, Ward I, and Mayor Bob Coburn prompted a search for past payments for expenses claimed by Retail Attractions. City Treasurer Jean Kingston said her search showed the consulting firm never sought reimbursement for expenses incurred during the fiscal year that ended June 30.

Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson said improved communications was an important issue and sought assurances that language in the new contract addressed that concern. City Attorney Roy Tucker said provisions in the new contract addressing that issue were drafted by the city and accepted by the consultant as part of the final draft.

Rickey Hayes, principal and founding member of the limited liability company, said he was "happy to get the contract approved" and satisfied "with our success so far." Hayes worked with city officials to lure QuikTrip to Muskogee and development in progress and planned for the urban renewal project area. "We are working on some other deals we can't talk about right now," Hayes said. "I think there is a consensus in City Hall ... that we have a good team in place, things are happening, and we are working on new projects."

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
July 17, 2015

**Officials seek tribal help with 911 center budget concerns**

Author/Byline: Harrison Grimwood

Muskogee city and county officials said they will seek tribal assistance to help stabilize a withering 911 center budget. The discussion came about as Muskogee City-County Enhanced 911 Trust Authority board members shuffled their budget to cover a building and equipment loan due in July. “The tribes have a real history of investing back into their communities,” Muskogee County 911 Coordinator Darryl Maggard said.

The trust authority board members started the discussion of reaching out to the Muskogee (Creek) Nation and Cherokee Nation. The board members said they hope the two tribes could provide financial assistance and help lobby state legislators to pass funding measures. Tribal representatives said they were unfamiliar with the issue and would want to study the requests before moving forward.

The Muskogee County Enhanced 911 authority is funded by fees from landline telephones and cell phones. Landline fees, which cost about \$1.50 per bill, have been crumbling away as people cut their cords. The revenue from cell phone fees, set at 50 cents per monthly bill, has not increased despite an apparent increase in the number of cell phones in use, members said. “These services are at risk by the lack of funding, which is happening because of the shift in technologies people are using,” Maggard said.

Senate Bill 278 was designed to address the issue by raising the cellular fee to \$1. Muskogee City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.**, who sits on the board of the trust authority, said the \$1 fee would have covered his bases at the Muskogee County 911 center. “Those bills did not gain traction and actually died in the last legislative session,” **Brown** said. “Part of our strategy will be to request assistance from the tribal governments in the area; we haven’t had a meeting with them yet, but we hope they’ll at least be amiable to having a discussion about it.”

During the trust authority’s regular meeting this month, board members began discussing alternative ways to generate revenue. “City-county (officials) are working hand-in-hand to provide emergency services to the residents, but because our hands are tied on the kind of revenue we can receive we’re seeing it crumble away,” Maggard said.

Maggard said the biggest threat to the 911 center is losing the enhanced features that allow for locating the source of a call. Right now, as a cost saving measure, the center is leaving a staff position vacant until additional funds can be secured, Maggard said.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
July 16, 2015

**Officials: Urban renewal designation would kick-start downtown development**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Proponents of a plan to designate Muskogee's central business district as an urban renewal project area say the proposal is the best way to kick-start downtown redevelopment. Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority commissioners on Wednesday expressed support for the idea, instructing city staffers to finalize a map of the proposed project area. They are expected to revisit the issue once the boundaries are better defined and, if approved, a blight study would have to be conducted to determine whether downtown Muskogee would be eligible for urban renewal status.

Downtown Muskogee Inc. board members initiated efforts to designate the city's central business district as an urban renewal project area. DMI directors laid out their ideas for downtown redevelopment in a letter delivered in June to Urban Renewal Authority Chairman Darrell Russell.

Ward I Councilor Lee Ann Langston, who is serving as DMI's interim director, told commissioners the nonprofit organization is engaged in a number of projects to spur interest in downtown redevelopment. While those efforts have stimulated interest, she said designating the central business district as an urban renewal project area is seen as the best "way to get things kick-started." "We are doing a lot of things, and we are getting a lot excitement about downtown," Langston said, citing efforts to inventory downtown buildings and improve streetscapes and building facades as examples. "But we felt like this was the only way to get things kick-started and get downtown where it needs to be."

Before downtown Muskogee could be designated as an urban renewal project area and a redevelopment plan assembled, a finding of the existence of blight would have to be declared. DMI directors set out a number of factors they believe would support a finding that blight exists within the downtown corridor. Those factors include the deterioration of buildings constructed during the early 1900s, "woefully inadequate" infrastructure incapable of supporting redevelopment, and numerous vacancies within downtown buildings. A "blighted area" is defined by state law as one in which there are properties that for one reason or another substantially impair or limit the sound growth of a municipality.

The elements that constitute blight vary widely, but primarily are considered to be ones that "constitute a serious and growing menace ... to the public health, safety, morals and welfare of the residents" of a municipality. A finding of blight, however, does not require the existence of all elements set out in the statutory definition. "If you choose to designate this downtown area for a blight study, then staff will begin to work on compiling that study for your review," City Attorney Roy Tucker said during the authority's regular meeting. "It is a fairly extensive process and will require many additional sessions and meetings ... to determine whether blight exists."

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Commissioner Jim Wilson expressed concern that a finding of blight might create a negative perception of downtown Muskogee. That stigma, he said, could impact existing businesses.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** tried to dispel those concerns, noting the broad definition of blight that includes substandard infrastructure that is unseen and vacant stores. He said blight also could include sidewalks in a state of disrepair. "Blight is not a term ... that has to include dilapidated buildings or crack houses," **Brown** said. "Blight is a very broad term that can be used to get us to the point where we can use this tool to redevelop the area and open doors to new funding opportunities."

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
July 5, 2015

**Councilor concerned with purchasing procedures**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Concerns about the city manager’s ongoing consulting arrangement with a Florida colleague prompted a push for changes regarding the procurement of professional services. Ward II Councilor Dan Hall said he plans to proceed at “full throttle” until he finds a way to provide more oversight of the practice without hindering administrators dealing with emergencies. Hall said he is being driven by the nearly \$20,000 in fees racked up by a consultant retained by City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** just two weeks after coming on board in January 2014.

The consulting arrangement, for which no contract exists, came to light late last year after a review of documents obtained by the Phoenix pursuant to the Oklahoma Open Records Act. The ongoing consulting relationship, which **Brown** said would be terminated by the end of January, costs taxpayers \$90 an hour. “What really ticked me off is the fact that he told us months ago this would be wrapped up,” said Hall, who broached the issue last week during a City Council meeting. “This is getting ridiculous, and I am all for stopping it — I just have to figure out a way to do that in a way that doesn’t affect our department heads when there is an emergency.”

**Brown** said new purchasing procedures have been developed and are being reviewed by department directors. The procedures he plans to present in July for councilors’ consideration are “much cleaner” and “will be more transparent to vendors” but do not address Hall’s specific concerns. “I think the councilor, his concern is ... about contracts — should contracts be approved by the City Council, (and) I definitely think they should (when they) are over a certain dollar amount,” **Brown** said. “When it comes to professional services, that’s where the rub comes in: You are not going to go out for bids on professional services, you are trying to get the best services based on qualifications.”

**Brown** said Erskin Howard, the consultant with whom **Brown** has relied upon since January 2014, helped him navigate the city’s purchasing procedures and negotiate the terms of construction contracts. The city manager said he noticed “a lot of operational issues” with regard to existing purchasing procedures and “things” he “wanted to really look at ..., get changed and updated.” Other issues **Brown** said he sought help with include a type of construction contract never used previously by the city that he believes streamlines construction projects and reduces costs. The construction-manager-at-risk method was used for the new Martin Luther King Community Center and the Muskogee County Regional Juvenile Detention Center. During a meeting last week, Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson said the Florida consultant is contributing to delays with construction of the new community center. Johnson agreed with Hall that there needs to be more oversight when it comes to the procurement of professional services and advocated for the review of professional service contracts by the city’s legal department at a minimum.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
June 23, 2015

**Councilors approve budget**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors approved a budget for the fiscal year that begins July 1 after extensive wrangling over a number of issues before forging a consensus. Approval was granted with an understanding the city manager would present by Oct. 1 a plan to satisfy councilors' goals to improve employee compensation.

The budget presented by City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** includes a 2 percent wage and salary increase for all employees, but that apparently fell short of unspecified expectations. "Until we address in some fashion ... our employee pay, I am not going to vote for another budget," Mayor Bob Coburn said after a motion had been made to approve a budget option proposed by Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman. "Until I see a strategic plan that says here's what has to happen for us to make those adjustments in employee compensation, to get us where we need to be ..., I have a problem."

Coburn offered no specifics about his demands for employee compensation, but councilors have been working intermittently toward attaining the market median as established by a wage and compensation study. The study was conducted nearly two years ago, and the compensation schedule was adopted almost a year ago.

The budget option approved Monday during a nearly three-hour meeting avoided a second delay of an annual \$1.2 million deposit into a dedicated economic development fund. It also sidestepped a proposal to reduce the city's contribution into the employee health insurance fund. To do that, the option presented by Coleman mandates that \$3.5 million be set aside for emergency reserves and does away with the 13 percent to 15 percent apportionment. Coleman said his plan frees up an additional \$1.41 million for the general fund in fiscal year 2016.

"This makes us solvent without using the economic development fund or the employee insurance fund to balance the fiscal year 2016 budget," Coleman said. "This way we still have a formula in place that ensures we have money for any disaster and we can remain solvent using the revenue already available."

While concerns remained, councilors passed a budget with total apportionments of \$63.88 million. The general fund totals \$32.35 million.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
June 14, 2015

**Councilors rip Brown's bid to divert funds**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

A request to delay for a second year full implementation of an ordinance that directs use tax revenue toward the city's economic development endeavors was met with skepticism and criticism. The ordinance that established the economic development fund passed unanimously in 2011 by city councilors at the insistence of former Mayor John Tyler Hammons. It dedicates up to \$1.2 million of the revenue generated by a 4 percent use tax — an assessment on purchases of out-of-state goods for in-state use or consumption — to promote economic development and job creation.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the \$300,000 diversion of funds is necessary to prop up the budget for fiscal year 2016, which begins July 1. He told councilors the need to cap economic development fund deposits at \$900,000 for a second year is due to “things” that occurred this year.

City councilors balked at **Brown's** request, reminding him about a promise he made a year ago to delay full implementation of the ordinance for only one year. That promise was made as **Brown** prepared his fiscal year 2015 budget — his first after taking the helm in January 2014 — and councilors were hesitant then about making that deal. That hesitation intensified when **Brown** requested a second delay, which was pitched before he presented his budget recommendations for the upcoming year. Councilors got their first chance to weigh in on that document Thursday during a special City Council meeting and public hearing but remained mum.

“When you recommended that last year, didn't we say were only going to do it one time? Are we going to do it every year from here on out, or is this the last time?” Ward II Councilor Dan Hall said Monday in response to **Brown's** request. “I don't even want to do this, but I would rather see a budget ... than just grab at anything we can grab without a reason.” Hall's concerns were echoed by other councilors — Lee Ann Langston, Ward I, and Marlon Coleman, Ward IV, and two residents who turned out Monday for a City Council meeting to oppose **Brown's** request.

Langston said postponing the city's investment in economic development “is not what we need to be doing right now,” and Coleman said the \$300,000 **Brown** wants to use to prop up the general fund should be spent on downtown revitalization. “The city may be in financial straits, but we never will get out of it unless we increase our sales tax base, which I don't think will ever happen until we do something about developing downtown Muskogee,” Coleman said. “If we use that \$300,000 as economic driver ..., we would see a better return than we would if it is used to help balance the budget, which would be just a temporary fix.”



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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Among those residents who “rose in opposition” to **Brown**’s request was Hammons, who described the city manager’s request as both “unwise and unnecessary.” Hammons said the city’s diversion of use tax revenue toward economic development is beginning to bear fruit, and now is not the time to prune the city’s investment in those efforts. “It is unwise, because we are taking away money for a future investment to pay for present needs ..., (and) it is unnecessary because ... you are receiving more money than you have ever received,” Hammons said. “This fund, when it was set up, was designed to be a sacred promise to voters — we need to keep our promise to ... bring ... good jobs to the community, and this fund is how we are going to do it.”

Funds deposited into a general account authorized by the 2011 ordinance may be spent for any purpose related to economic development and has been used to fund economic development efforts provided by the Muskogee City-County Port Authority and the city’s new retail development office. Revenue deposited into an economic opportunity account may be used for incentives to lure high-impact business projects or facilities “that creates new, high-skill, high-wage jobs” that “foster sound growth.”

The ordinance was intended to be phased in during the course of three years, with first-year deposits totaling \$600,000 and second-year deposits totaling \$900,000. During budget discussions in 2014, **Brown** proposed a permanent cap totaling \$900,000 but opted instead for a one-year delay after he encountered some resistance.

**Brown** said his initial draft of the fiscal year 2016 budget assumes councilors will approve his request to cap for another year the city’s investment in economic development at \$900,000 and redirect \$300,000 of the city’s use tax revenue toward the general fund. If councilors reject the proposal Tuesday when it is presented during a special City Council meeting, **Brown** said adjustments will have to be made.

In his draft budget message, **Brown** states revenue projected for the fiscal year 2016 budget from all sources totals \$76.13 million, of which \$32.8 million is available for the general fund. Projected revenue from all sources is up 26 percent from this year’s totals, and revenue that makes up the general fund is projected to be down 0.31 percent from this year.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
May 31, 2015

**Councilors angry over work on city website**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Discussions about the development of the city’s new website exposed a rift between Muskogee’s elected leaders and its top administrators.

The division sprang from an apparent disregard of a directive from city councilors, who expressed a desire in November to be actively involved in the development of the website. When administrators unveiled the final product and announced plans to go live by May 22, city councilors realized they had been cut out of the loop. “As city councilors, when we ask for something we kind of want that to happen — we are kind of getting tired of that not happening,” said Ward II Councilor Dan Hall. “In the future, when we say we want to be involved in something, I think as a city councilman I should be involved in it, and if we ask for it to be brought back to us a couple of times ... it should be brought back to us.”

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** tried to quell the chorus of disdain, citing an immediate need to deploy the website’s customer-service features that are designed to track efforts to respond to residents’ concerns and complaints. He also noted the participation of employees from “every department” and others, an assertion disputed later.

“I was a part of the committee, (and) we were not as involved as we should have been: The meetings were not called in advance — they were last-minute, and I was not able to attend most of the meetings,” said Kimbra Scott, communications and public affairs manager for the Port of Muskogee. “When I got involved I was told that he makes the decisions, and I specifically said there are not enough people at this table to move this forward.”

Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson, the first to express concern about being left out of the website-development phase, emphasized the importance of teamwork and collaboration. While acknowledging dissatisfaction with the process, Johnson said the website should be launched and tested during the course of a month in order to get feedback from users that could be included in future refinement or revision.

Mayor Bob Coburn cautioned his colleagues about pursuing that route because of fiscal concerns. He said it is likely Revize Government Websites would demand final payment for its services once the website is launched, and any leverage the city might have with regard to additional revisions could be lost once that payment is tendered. “When it is paid for, you lose your ability to come back and ask for some of those things that we asked for but didn’t get,” Coburn said. “How are we going to know those things are going to be a part of it and we don’t end up with a \$100,000 website?”

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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The proposal submitted by Revize Government Websites provides for \$32,200 payment for development of the website that includes a suite of available software. Optional support was available for \$3,900 annually after the first year, and the company offers free site redesign after four years if the support package is purchased.

City councilors authorized **Brown** to negotiate an agreement with Revize with the total costs capped at \$50,000. City Treasurer Jean Kingston told councilors this past Tuesday that all but \$10,700 has been paid for the initial \$32,000 payment. **Brown** said he would do his “level best” to accomplish what councilors asked with incurring additional costs. That could include a more sincere effort to coordinate further website development with councilors and other stakeholders they deem important to the process.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
April 30, 2015

**City manager receives raise**

Author: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee’s elected leaders authorized a 2 percent pay raise for City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** this week following their completion of his first annual review. The annual salary increase of \$2,340 was made retroactive to July 1, which means **Brown** is eligible for back pay totaling \$1,950. **Brown** began his tenure as the city’s top administrator in January 2014 with an annual salary of \$117,000 plus benefits.

City councilors who were asked about **Brown**’s salary adjustment said the pay raise is consistent with the 2 percent stipend budgeted this year for the city’s non-uniform employees. **Brown**’s pay raise was made retroactive, they said, to maintain parity with other city employees. “All of them got it, and we felt like that was the right thing to do,” Ward I Councilor Lee Ann Langston said about the decision to make **Brown**’s retroactive salary increase. “We are trying to bring (wages and salaries for) all of our employees up to market level, and if we get there we want to get it a little bit higher to remain competitive.”

The retroactive provision of the city manager’s salary increase means **Brown** would have been on the job only five months before receiving a pay raise. Ward II Councilor Dan Hall defended the decision, noting all non-uniform workers hired before July 1 received the 2 percent stipend regardless of the length of their employment. “Everybody who was on the job — even if it was for only a month or less — got that raise,” Hall said. “Because of improvements that have been made and the steps he has taken, we thought he should get the 2 percent everybody else received.”

**Brown** said the one-time stipend for all city workers was carved out in the budget for fiscal year 2016, which ends June 30. He said non-uniform workers received a 2 percent stipend while police and firefighters were granted a 5 percent stipend. He said the 2 percent pay raise was granted automatically for the two remaining council appointees. Those employees are City Clerk Pam Bates and City Attorney Roy Tucker.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
April 15, 2015

**Committee approves request for foundation board**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Members of a City of Muskogee Foundation committee advanced a request to convert a \$3 million loan, the proceeds from which are being spent to relocate a juvenile detention facility, to a grant. City administrators sought the conversion to free up funds needed to acquire more property within a blighted area in northwest Muskogee that has been targeted for redevelopment. The Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority to date has spent the proceeds from a \$4 million foundation loan acquiring land within the 90-acre project area.

“Our costs in doing that are steadily increasing,” City Attorney Roy Tucker said while pitching the plan to urban renewal commissioners during a special meeting. “We are trying to continue to move quickly in order to acquire all the property ... we intend to acquire ... because as soon as Three Rivers Plaza is open those costs will continue to go higher.” Tucker also won approval from city councilors during a special meeting of the Muskogee Redevelopment Authority, which requested the foundation loan this past year. He said members of the foundation’s economic development committee approved the request, which will be considered April 27 during the next regular foundation board meeting.

The move would free up about \$1.8 million received from the sale of the existing site of the Muskogee County Regional Juvenile Detention Center to Vector Securities Corp., the developer of an \$18.5 million shopping center within the urban renewal project area. The proceeds from the sale of the 13.3-acre tract, along with revenue generated by a tax increment finance district, were pledged toward the repayment of the \$3 million loan.

Tucker said the \$1.8 million is expected to be enough to acquire the “commercially viable” parcels needed to advance the city’s plans to redevelop the first and second phases of the urban renewal plan. There may be a need for additional funding for third-phase residential development of single- and multi-family housing and the associated costs of relocating residents who live within that portion of the project area.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the proposed conversion of the low-interest loan to grant would put the city in a “favorable” position. He described the hopeful outcome as a benefit to the city and the Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority. “I think this is something that benefits the city,” **Brown** said. “It also benefits the Urban Renewal Authority, and it’s consistent with the the urban renewal plan.”

Earnie Gilder, chairman of the foundation’s governing board, said this past week he sees no problems with the proposed conversion. Given the fact that the juvenile detention center will never be a source of revenue for the city or the county, he said the initial request probably should have been for a grant rather than a loan.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
March 18, 2015

**Ethics, speech policies mulled for councilors**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Public communications involving Muskogee’s elected leaders could be placed under a microscope if efforts to develop two new policies advance. Those measures would include an ethics policy and comprehensive communications guidelines that would apply to city councilors. Those proposals were spawned by discussions that took place during a recent retreat.

City Attorney Roy Tucker said the ethics policy would govern councilors’ comments about topics discussed during executive sessions, which are permitted for a limited number of issues. The comprehensive communications policy would set out guidelines for councilors who respond to media and public requests for information. “People want to hear from their elected officials — if I am a citizen, I want to hear what my council member thinks,” said Tucker, who was tasked with gathering existing policies adopted by other municipalities for councilors’ review. “But there should be some help available for those who want some guidance, and we want to make sure we have sufficient training.”

Ward III Councilor Derrick Reed said the decision to explore different policies was prompted by discussions about how to respond to media requests. Reed said the idea appeared to be an effort to subject councilors to restrictions City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** has imposed on city employees. “City employees cannot talk to the media, and they are trying to press that on us,” Reed said. “I would never sign off on anything that would keep me from speaking on behalf of my constituents.”

Ward II Councilor Dan Hall said he would oppose any attempts to silence elected officials. But he recognized a need for an ethics policy and some clarification of existing policies that govern communications between councilors and city employees. “We are elected, and if we want to talk about something, we are going to talk about it,” Hall said, noting some exceptions. “Even though it is governed by state law, we want to make sure that anything discussed in executive session is kept confidential.”

With regard to communications between councilors and city employees, Hall said there appears to be some confusion about what existing policies permit. A comprehensive communication policy, Hall said, could help clear up that confusion. “We need to have some conversations about this,” Hall said.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
February 28, 2015

**VAMC celebrates Black History Month**

Author/Byline: Mark Hughes

Black History month was celebrated at the Jack C. Montgomery VA Medical Center on Friday and involved singing, dancing, speaking and ended with a soul food lunch. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** was the guest speaker who was preceded in dance by the Cherokee Elementary gifted and talented students.

**Brown** recognized the hardship black Americans encountered and noted how important that church was in their lives. He said the irony is that blacks were allowed by many Christian slave owners to attend church but were banned from reading. He noted that it wasn't until 1870 that African-Americans were listed by name in the federal census. Prior to that, census slaves were considered property, he said.

His family history included his great-great grandmother working as a slave on a Selma, Ala., plantation who married a Creek Indian. His grandparents were sharecroppers in Alabama until the 1970s when they moved to Pensacola, Fla. There, his grandmother was a domestic maid and his grandfather a longshoreman.

**Brown** said that he was the first of his family to attend a major college and graduate. He now has two children in college. The city manager highlighted black education by stating that Wilberforce University in Ohio, established in 1863, was the first college dedicated to blacks and the first to have an African-American president. He also noted that in 1897 the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University was founded, making it the only black college in the western part of the United States. It is known today as Langston University, he said.

The military was credited by **Brown** for teaching him “valuable lessons such as leadership, integrity, duty and honor.” **Brown** was a National Guardsman while in Florida from 1990 to 1996, he said. During that time, his unit was deployed several times to include the Gulf War.

His family history includes several relatives serving in almost every branch of service to include a brother who is retired from the U.S. Navy. **Brown** recounted that African-Americans have served in the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War. During World War II, 2.5 million African-Americans registered for the draft, he said. Today, there are about 2.2 million black Americans serving in the U.S. military.

He recounted an interesting historical note. “Cathay Williams was the first African-American woman to enlist in the U.S. Army, making her the first woman to enlist in any branch in 1866 while posing as a man.” The city manager concluded his speech saying he was “humbled and excited about what black history will look like in the next century.”

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
February 4, 2015

**Council will not seek grant**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors shot down a request to pursue a City of Muskogee Foundation grant to fund a plan that limits the amount of compensable sick leave future employees can accumulate. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** sought authorization to apply for a grant worth up to \$180,000 to fund the sick leave buyback plan. That plan, which city councilors approved in December, provides for one-time payments to current employees in exchange for their agreement to impose the caps on future employees.

**Brown** said he intended to match the grant with stabilization funds required to be set aside each year for emergency purposes. He persuaded city councilors this past year to ease the restrictions on stabilization funds and authorize expenditures that would “eliminate a significant financial liability. “We thought that maybe we could implement this plan by going to the Muskogee Foundation for a one-time, 50 percent match,” **Brown** said, noting an overall cost of about \$360,000 for the plan to cap compensable sick leave. “If you recall we asked to change the city ordinance to get this from our reserve ... account.”

Councilors, who denied the request on a 6-3 vote, cited several concerns with **Brown**’s request, which was met with a degree of skepticism from them and at least one concerned citizen. Theresa Reutlinger described **Brown**’s request as “a really bad thing” and urged councilors to exercise due diligence before acting. “I don’t know if there is still more money in reserves or if you have emptied that — I just think this is a really bad thing,” Reutlinger said. “I feel the City Council ... has taken advantage of the foundation — we should be more frugal, kind of treat it like your own checkbook or your own household.”

**Brown** said members of the relevant employee groups already have received payments from the stabilization account for the so-called buyback plan. Even so, **Brown** said he anticipated applying for a foundation grant to offset the expenditure that occurred “a couple of weeks ago.”

At one point Tuesday during Finance Committee discussions, **Brown** said the foundation grant was needed to replace stabilization funds used for the expenditure “just in case we have an emergency.” But City Treasurer Jean Kingston said about \$3.5 million remains in the stabilization fund, the unspent portion of which would be transferred to the general fund July 1 for use during the next fiscal year.

Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman opposed **Brown**’s request, citing concerns about the appearance of over-reliance on foundation funds. Ward III Councilor Derrick Reed expressed concerns about a potential backlash during future labor negotiations. “The perception we will send to our union groups is we had a great challenge this year as far as negotiations,” Reed said.



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“I kind of feel that in future years they will demand items and they know that when it comes to the bottom line we have a source to go get it from and that is the foundation.”

In the end, **Brown** was able to win the support of only three city councilors: Deputy Mayor James Gulley, Ward I Councilor Janey Cagle Boydston and Ward III Councilor Ivory Vann. While the measure was defeated Tuesday, **Brown** may renew his request for consideration Monday during the next regular City Council meeting.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
January 11, 2015

**Brown bills city for colleague's assistance**

Author: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** was on the job just two weeks when he reached out to a Florida colleague for help with three fairly routine matters. **Brown's** first request sought advice about the city's purchasing manual and proposals from vendors involved with the Honor Heights playground project and the new Robison Park skate facility. That consulting relationship blossomed during the following months to include reviewing and negotiating contracts, rendering opinions about Oklahoma laws and drafting letters and agenda items on behalf of **Brown.**

The ongoing consulting relationship comes at a cost to taxpayers, with a rate of \$90 for every man-hour spent working on projects for which **Brown** has sought advice. As of Nov. 25, **Brown** has racked up a bill of nearly \$10,000 for consulting services provided by HME Professional Services, and documents provided in response to a records request show that amount could swell before the relationship terminates.

The consulting agreement with Erskin Howard, with whom **Brown** cultivated a relationship while they both worked for the city of Opa-Locka, Fla., could end by the end of the month, **Brown** said. But without a contract to define the scope of services to be provided by HME and the rights and duties of the parties, that cannot be known for certain.

The absence of a contract — council policy requires all contracts be reviewed and approved by the city's legal team — also made it difficult to uncover the consulting arrangement. **Brown**, who said he was "following protocol," also never asked city councilors to sign off on the agreement, even though contracts for professional services typically involve City Council oversight. A review of the documents provided in response to the records request indicate that only a few department heads knew about the consulting arrangement. Because of a gag order issued by **Brown**, they are prohibited from discussing matters of public concern with reporters without his approval.

Ward II Councilor Dan Hall said he "was surprised" to learn **Brown** had hired "an outside entity" to perform tasks that could be handled by city staff members or local professionals. He questioned the additional costs that have — and will be — incurred, especially during an extended period of budget cuts and flat revenue growth.

"I really felt like we hired a city manager and that he should be able to run our city, and I don't think we should hire a Florida firm to do that," Hall said, noting he knew nothing about **Brown's** arrangement with his Florida colleague until he was approached by the Phoenix. "We have an accounting department, a good city attorney and committed department heads — I think he (**Brown**) needs to utilize our city employees." Hall said that if existing staff members lack the

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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expertise to perform the tasks necessary to conduct city business, the city should offer the training they need to do their jobs. When outside professional services are needed, Hall said, the scope of the relationship should be limited, and councilors should be consulted in advance.

**Brown** defended his decision to seek consultation services from HME’s Howard, who was described as “a seasoned project manager with 30 years of professional experience in planning, design, engineering ... and construction management and business development.” **Brown** also defended his decision to withhold information about his arrangement with Howard from city councilors. “The city of Muskogee has policies and procedures regarding the city’s consultants, which include judges, contractors, engineers and trade specialists,” **Brown** said. “The city operates under a system of checks and balances, in which the City Council does a bimonthly review of all expenditures to ensure that funds are being disbursed properly.”

Although **Brown** described the process used to review claims as “an open process,” it could prove difficult for councilors to weed out six claims buried among the more than 9,500 submitted during the 2014 calendar year. **Brown** acknowledged that the city deals with hundreds of vendors, some of whom he does not know. “It’s definitely an open process: It’s something provided to the council every two weeks, and they are more than welcome to ask me or get a record ... or whatever they want to do,” **Brown** said. “I look at the claims list, I skim over it and look for irregularities, (and) I ask questions just like the City Council during our purchasing meetings.”

Two councilors who serve on the committee that reviews the claims list said they were unaware of the six claims filed by **Howard**, the first of which was paid in March. Until Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman questioned the most recent claim this month, neither councilor had heard of **Brown’s** colleague from Florida.

Ward I Councilor Lee Ann Langston said no information was ever presented about **Brown’s** consulting agreement with Howard, but she nevertheless felt uncomfortable about her inability to answer questions about it. Ward II Councilor James Gulley said he was unaware “of Erskin Howard’s name,” noting the large number of vendor claims presented during the twice-a-month meetings.

Hall said that after he learned about the consulting agreement, he began asking questions and was surprised to learn the extent of HME’s involvement with city projects. Those projects, in addition to the Honor Heights and Robison Park projects, include the construction of a new Martin Luther King Community Center, a juvenile detention facility and gateway signage for downtown Muskogee. The Ward II councilor said that if **Brown** wants to continue the consulting relationship, he should present a proposal for councilors’ consideration. Hall also had questions about the funding source from which **Brown** is drawing to pay for HME’s services.

**Brown** said Howard is being paid from revenue generated by a five-year 0.18 percent sales tax approved by voters in June for capital improvement projects. City Attorney Roy Tucker, in a legal opinion published in August, states that revenue stream may be tapped for consulting

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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services only if they are provided by an independent contractor and the service is related specifically to a capital improvement project approved by voters. Sales tax revenue for the projects approved in June, Tucker said, did not begin flowing into city coffers until September, when the preceding capital improvements sales tax expired. Howard had been paid almost \$2,800 by that time, and only one of the eight or nine projects for which consulting services were sought involved a voter-approved capital improvement project. “I would agree that it would be an appropriate expenditure if it were directly related to a capital improvement project,” Tucker said. “If it is not a CIP project, it would not be appropriate to pay (a contract consultant) from that fund.”

Tucker said that is one reason why it is important to reduce any agreement for professional services to a written contract, which he described as “the best business practice.” He said a contract “identifies the scope of services requested” and other key details that help avoid confusion and conflict. “Having a contract is certainly the best practice, and it allows us to have documentation of the services being provided to the city that can be used to track performance,” Tucker said, citing the importance of accountability and transparency in government. “Another reason I review all contracts is so I can make sure they comport with Oklahoma law and city ordinances.”

Langston, after learning some of the details about the consulting relationship **Brown** struck with HME, said she favors more oversight of these types of arrangements. Although this particular arrangement may be “above-board and legal,” it may be time to revisit purchasing procedures to determine whether changes need to be made, she said.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
December 7, 2014

**Video series promotes city's workers**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Officials rolled out last week the first of a video series that will highlight the work of city employees and the roles they play in the provision of municipal services.

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the series is intended to help achieve one of the goals set out in a five-year strategic plan adopted in November by city councilors. That goal is to empower employees for the purpose of improving the delivery of services and the city's public image. "We want to make sure we highlight these things so the public can see what our guys are doing," **Brown** said Tuesday after the first video was shown during the Muskogee Finance Committee meeting. "We need to do something that ... highlights to the public what city employees do, and I think this is a start."

The video, produced for about \$500, primarily featured the annual Garden of Lights at Honor Heights Park. The video is narrated by Assistant Parks and Recreation Director Rick Ewing and has a few scenes of workers setting up the showcase, but the Christmas light displays appear to be the main attraction.

**Brown** said the first video featured the parks department and the Garden of Lights because its rollout coincides with the Yuletide season. **Brown** described it as an "up close and personal look at city government." Other videos will feature other departments within Muskogee's municipal government, with a "focus on team member responsibilities within each department." **Brown** said the budget for the series was capped at \$5,000.

"Citizens must be informed about city government and all of its responsibilities," **Brown** said. "Through this series of videos my hope is for community members to gain a better understanding of what roles each department executes while maintaining good relations with neighboring communities."

The video was produced by Bare Bones Inc. and directed by Oscar Ray. **Brown** said all the videos will be posted on the city's website and placed on rotation to be shown on Suddenlink Channel 14.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
November 16, 2014

**Brown angles for \$11M renewal loan**

Author: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee’s top administrator said there is an immediate need for about \$11.2 million to spur redevelopment of a blighted area on the city’s northwest side. City councilors approved in October the creation of a special tax district that they hope will generate about \$16.5 million during the next 20 years. Because that funding will trickle in over time, City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** sought — and received — authorization to seek interim funding.

**Brown** said the funding will come in a loan that would be repaid from Tax Increment Financing revenue, but he was unsure about the lending source. A bank likely will be the source, but **Brown** did not rule out the possibility of approaching the City of Muskogee Foundation if traditional lenders turn down the city’s application. “The foundation is definitely an option,” **Brown** said. “But we are going to see first if we can get a loan from a bank.”

Because the city cannot incur debt without voter approval, the Muskogee Redevelopment Authority would be the official borrower. The redevelopment and urban renewal authorities have borrowed at least \$17.3 million during the past year from the City of Muskogee Foundation to promote economic development efforts.

In addition to the loan obligations by the two municipal authorities, **Brown** said the city has almost \$70 million in outstanding loans. Those obligations, which are owed to both public- and private-sector lenders, do not reflect outstanding general obligation bonds approved by city councilors for a variety of infrastructural and capital improvement projects. “You finance a lot of these improvements through debt financing; that is just the way this world is,” **Brown** said. “Especially in Muskogee, they really haven’t done a lot of these improvements using bond financing, so I am hoping we can do some creative things.”

**Brown** said he was unsure how the growing total of loan and bond obligations might affect city government. But state law requires municipalities to pay all obligations due in any given year with income and revenue from that year.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
November 12, 2014

**City adopts 5-year strategic plan to move city forward**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee’s elected officials adopted a five-year strategic plan that aims to achieve three overarching goals intended “to move the city forward.” The plan is the result of eight months of work that began about a month after the arrival of City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** It was assembled by a facilitator, who drew from discussions during a City Council retreat in March and staff retreat in August. The 34-page document adopted Monday outlines a vision and mission for the city along with goals, strategies, performance measures and desired timelines. The plan also provides for regular reporting at intervals of at least twice a year to ensure adherence and progress.

The three main goals identified by the plan include improving the city’s image and delivery of service, spurring economic development and providing a better quality of life for Muskogee residents. **Brown** said the projects considered during the strategic planning process could cost \$158 million or more, so the plan identifies 13 different options for securing the funds needed to pay for those projects. “We know there is about \$158 million of capital projects — not all funded or estimated — that we looked at,” **Brown** said during his initial presentation of the fourth draft of the plan. “That is a lot of money and a lot of priorities, (and) we are going to bring focus on these here in the next three years.”

The vision statement conceived through the strategic planning process is a conceptualization of what officials believe the city should become. The vision statement identifies Muskogee as the “heart of Green Country, where commerce, rich history and culture, arts, sports & education converge with three rivers in everyone’s quaint and vibrant community of choice.”

The mission, as set out in the plan, is “to focus on continued investment and growth of our honored community and unmatched team with pride, inclusiveness and open-mindedness.” The statement is intended to serve as a guide during the decision-making process.

**Brown** said implementation of the plan already has begun even though it wasn’t adopted until Monday. Implementation began with this year’s budget and continued with the passage in June of two sales tax extensions for infrastructure improvements and a dozen capital improvement projects. “A lot of you are probably saying why now, (but) we are doing it now — a lot of this stuff has been focused since March,” **Brown** said when he presented what has been dubbed the Muskogee 2020 Strategic Plan. “So what you will see is a lot of things we are already doing that is consistent with the direction I was given back in March.”

Those initial directions came from city councilors during a two-day retreat facilitated by James Anaston-Karas, with whom **Brown** had worked with in Florida. Anaston-Karas composed the plan using “research, best professional judgment and editorial input from senior city staff to

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consolidate, re-categorize, reword, synthesize, and ... expand upon plan elements.” The plan incorporates components from Action in Muskogee initiatives, a comprehensive plan adopted in 2012, market assessments and the capital improvements package passed by voters. It also includes the city’s plans for urban renewal, development of Love-Hatbox Sports Complex and proposals to develop master plans for downtown development and Davis Field expansion.

**Brown** said in the future, all agenda items presented for city councilors’ consideration will be scored in accordance with the objectives set out in the plan. He said that will help officials remain focused on the desired outcome. “This has been a good exercise for me as a city manager ..., and really we are able to chart our course,” **Brown** said about the strategic planning process. “Staff has direction, and I think we are ready ... to move the city forward.”



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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
October 1, 2014

**Commission OKs eminent domain**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Urban renewal commissioners signed off Tuesday on a resolution authorizing the use of eminent domain to acquire property needed to accommodate the development of a new shopping center. Officials have been able to negotiate the acquisition of all but about 2 acres needed for the first retail development within the urban renewal project area. Tulsa-based Vector Securities plans to build a 102,537-square-foot retail shopping center on the 10.5-acre tract with a separate 6,700-square-foot restaurant.

City Attorney Roy Tucker said parcels already acquired — or ready to be — from private individuals have been bought at an average cost of \$2 per square foot. The group that owns the remaining 2 acres wants \$4 per square foot, but its principals will not sell those parcels unless urban renewal commissioners agree to buy all the land it owns within the project area at a cost of about \$2.6 million. An agent acting on behalf of the Muskogee Urban Renewal Authority was authorized earlier this month to offer \$3.15 per square foot for the 190 parcels owned by the Reynolds Group. Tucker said Reynolds rejected the counter-offer and a discussions of a co-development plan emerged, but commissioners feared it might set a precedent and put them at a disadvantage. “I am not trying to be difficult ..., I am just trying to raise awareness ... (and) as a commission we have an obligation to these people to make sure everything is equitable,” Commissioners Robert Goolsby said. “We are here as a commission to do what is right for the future development of this area and for the city of Muskogee, and we have to recognize what’s good for all the landowners.”

Rickey Hayes, a retail consultant hired by the city, said he liked the idea of a co-development agreement with Reynolds that would allow the investment group to sell land directly to developers. But he expressed concerns about commissioners being locked into a position where they would have to pay \$4 per square foot for land in an area designated for residential projects and potentially put developers of that area at a disadvantage. “Do you want to let him push us in that corner of having to buy him out at his number?” Hayes said. “Those multi-family guys, they can’t pay \$4 — there is no juice in it.” Goolsby and other commissioners agreed, saying property farther south from Shawnee Bypass likely would appraise for less than that which abuts the thoroughfare. Planning Director Gary Garvin acknowledged Vector’s proposal places a graduated value on the land within its project area that is based upon its distance from Shawnee Bypass.

While there was some hesitation about authorizing a condemnation action, City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** argued in favor of that option. He did recognize the value of giving Reynolds one last chance to sell the 2 acres for its asking price without attaching to it parcels outside the Vector project area. “The co-development agreement seems like it’s a little too much — we don’t have the upper hand there, and that is why we have this tool,” **Brown** said about the

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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power of eminent domain. “We just have to look and see if what we are doing is consistent with the urban renewal plan.”

The blighted area designated for urban renewal is bounded by Chicago and 11th streets on the east and west and Shawnee Bypass and Talladega Street on the north and south. The area targeted for the first retail development project is bounded on the east and west by Sixth and Ninth streets and on the north and south by Shawnee Bypass and Katy Street.

Urban renewal commissioners divided the 90-acre urban renewal area into three project areas. The largest area targeted for first-phase development has been set aside for big-box retail projects, while the second- and third-phase areas was set aside by commissioners respectively for commercial infill and residential development.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
September 9, 2014

**Council OKs revamp plan after spirited debate**

Author: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee’s city manager eked out the conditional approval of a chart that sets out his reorganizational goals, but councilors’ reluctance raises questions about how any final plan might be implemented. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said his sweeping reorganizational plan “represents a significant step” toward “achieving long-term financial sustainability.” **Brown** said the plan also addresses “strategic priorities,” invests “in our future,” and better meets “the needs and expectations of our citizens.”

Ward II Councilor James Gulley initially argued for a delay, arguing the additional duties that would be imposed upon the city clerk should be discussed with her before approving the reorganizational structure. City Clerk Pam Bates, who already oversees the revenue department and municipal court, would assume oversight of the parks and recreation department as part of **Brown**’s reorganizational chart. “I don’t know how up-to-date everybody is on this, but we are going to ask the city clerk to take over the parks department,” Gulley said, noting the city clerk is a position appointed by city councilors. “I don’t want to be the city clerk’s agent, but if I am going to pick up 100 new employees I might want to know if there is going to be any more compensation.”

Gulley suggested a one-week delay to give councilors a chance to visit with Bates to get her input about the additional duties that would come as a result of her present oversight of city revenue flowing from the water and sewer departments and the municipal court. Gulley said he withdrew his motion seeking a delay as a compromise to councilors who want to move forward with the creation of a retail and housing development department, which councilors approved subject to the adoption of **Brown**’s reorganization plans.

During the 22-minute debate about whether to move forward with the first of four phases outlined by **Brown** as part of his plan to reorganize city government, the city manager said he made no effort to build a consensus. That acknowledgment came in response to an inquiry from Deputy Mayor David Jones, who said he assumed **Brown** had visited with department heads while formulating the plan. “It’s one of those things that when you are involved, it is something you don’t discuss openly with subordinates,” **Brown** said. “I ... definitely looked at what the management team would look like moving forward so there are a few that I spoke to, but I did not speak to all 13 department heads to get their buy-in.”

Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman, who, along with Ward III Councilor Derrick Reed cast one of the two opposing votes, said he does not understand why so many recent agenda items have been presented in bits and pieces instead of all at once. Presenting items for consideration before they are ready, Coleman said, “just seems silly.” “I think rather than present something in parts, our citizens want to see a plan in its totality before it comes to us for consideration,” Coleman

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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said. “People understand a process or a project better when they understand all of the associated moving parts, and I don’t believe residents are clearly getting that picture.”

City Attorney Roy Tucker said city councilors could make passage subject to favorable findings from their discussions next week with Bates during an executive session. He said parts of **Brown’s** reorganizational plan also will require ordinance changes, which also would be subject to City Council approval. With those assurances, city councilors approved **Brown’s** reorganizational chart for the time being. They could revisit the issue once they have a chance to discuss with Bates the role she would assume as a result of the reorganization proposal.

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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
August 5, 2014

**Plan seeks new city department**

**Brown wants new unit to promote economic development**

Author: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee’s city manager laid out an aggressive plan that includes the proposed creation of a new department designed to promote economic development in the retail and housing sectors. The plan proposed by **Howard Brown Jr.** was sparked by a presentation in May by Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman, who contends there is a need to recruit and retain retail- and service-sector businesses and related jobs. Citing industry reports, Coleman said there is a huge market the city could tap with the right program in place.

During the past three months, **Brown** and city staffers surveyed programs implemented by municipal leaders across the state. The survey, according to a memorandum circulated by **Brown**, found several municipalities — some larger, some smaller — are outspending Muskogee when it comes to economic development outside the realm of industry and manufacturing. “The rapid and fundamental structural changes in the economic environment impact the economic base of many communities and presents challenges to identify opportunities for growth and development,” **Brown** states in the memorandum. “Competition for those opportunities has become intense as jobs and new investment have become priorities for virtually every Oklahoma community.”

In an effort to close the gap, **Brown** proposed the creation of a new city department dedicated to retail development and residential housing. The department would be staffed by a director, assistant director and coordinator, and office administrator. The in-house staff would be assisted by a retail consultant. **Brown** estimated the annual cost of what he has dubbed the department of business enterprise and entrepreneurial investment will be \$382,400. **Brown** predicted the revenue generated as a result of the department’s recruiting efforts would exceed costs during the course of three years.

The survey referenced in **Brown’s** memorandum indicates the department’s proposed budget would be just more than half of what the city of Enid spends, about a fourth of what Bartlesville spends, and nearly twice of what the city of Stillwater spends for similar programs. “The bottom line is we really just need to make the case that Muskogee is a great place to live, work and invest,” **Brown** said, making a case for the creation of the new department. “My recommendation is that with the creation of this new department ... is we create a ... strategy so when we start getting those pieces in the people we hire will have the ability to hit the ground running.”

Deputy Mayor David Jones expressed some confusion about the department and argued there needs to be an effort to avoid duplication of efforts. He said there needs to be a clear delineation between the duties outlined for the department being proposed and what the Muskogee City-

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County Port Authority is doing to retain and attract industrial and manufacturing development. “We need to be in unison here in the city,” said Jones, who represents Ward I. “All of these ideas are good — I want a better Muskogee (and) ... a safer Muskogee — but I want to make sure there is no duplication.”

**Brown** made it clear the proposed department would focus solely on retail development and housing. **Brown** said he would consider changing the name to eliminate any potential confusion. City councilors backed **Brown’s** plan by taking the first steps necessary to create the new department. During their regular finance committee meeting Tuesday, city councilors tentatively approved the creation of the positions to staff the proposed department along with job descriptions.

There was, however, some hesitation to support **Brown’s** request to create additional positions that included what would amount to be an assistant city manager. In addition to the three retail development positions and an administrative services director, **Brown** requested the creation of three other positions: a person to oversee all aspects of the city’s capital improvement projects, a special events coordinator and a facilities maintenance manager.

City councilors denied former City Manager Greg Buckley’s requests for an assistant city manager. Ward II Councilor Dan Hall, who said he was surprised to learn about **Brown’s** plans to add those extra positions, pointed out that fact. In light of flat budgets during the past few years, he would be hesitant about granting final approval.

**Brown** said this year’s budget provides funding for the three positions within the proposed economic development office and the retail consultant. Funding for the other positions, **Brown** said, would come from attrition or savings from other areas. Hall, who voted to pass the second measure along said he plans to have the second prong of the economic development plan pulled from next week’s consent agenda to allow for further discussion.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
June 25, 2014

**City sales tax extensions pass - Both propositions approved by large margin**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Muskogee residents who turned out to vote Tuesday came through for the city with overwhelming support for the extension of two sales tax measures. Proposition 1, which passed with 73.9 percent of the vote, authorizes the extension of a 0.32 percent sales tax, which voters initially approved in 2009. Proposition 1 revenue will fund state-mandated improvements to the city’s aging sewer system. Proposition 2, which garnered support from 61.7 percent of the vote, extends for another five years a 0.18 percent sales tax. Revenue will be used to pay for a dozen capital improvement projects designed to “make Muskogee a better place to live, work and visit.”

While both measures were approved overwhelmingly, the lure of the propositions and a number of county, state and federal elections, attracted relatively little attention. Fewer than 5,100 of about 30,000 registered voters who live in Muskogee, or 17 percent, bothered to cast votes in the special election.

Nevertheless, City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** described the victory as “a giant leap forward” for the city of Muskogee. The passage of Proposition 1 will sidestep the threat of additional sewer rate hikes, and the passage of Proposition 2 will spur forward several projects identified by participants of the Action in Muskogee initiative. “This is really good news,” **Brown** said. “This will give us the money we need to implement the projects the citizens of Muskogee want to see get done.”

Proposition 1 extends for five years a sales tax first passed in 2009 as a way to help pay for sewer improvements required to maintain compliance with a consent order issued in 2008 by the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality. The order was issued after thousands of gallons of raw sewage spilled into a tributary of Coody Creek, which empties into the Arkansas River.

Proposition 2 revenue will fund projects that address issues pertaining to public safety, wellness, infrastructure, economic development and city beautification. Kim Lynch, chairwoman of a political action committee formed in support of both measures, credited the wide-ranging impact of the projects for the broad base of support. “There is not one thing on that ballot that doesn’t touch someone in our community,” Lynch said. “We go from parks to sewer and water, from children to senior citizens, expanding our trails and developing Love-Hatbox” Sports Complex — “that is what really made the difference.”

Ward IV Councilor Marlon Coleman lauded passage of the sale tax measures. Coleman was part of the “Dream Team,” which was organized to drum up support for the construction of a new Martin Luther King Community Center, one of the projects for which Proposition 2 funds were

**Internet – Newspaper Archives Searches**  
**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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targeted. “We are going to dream like never before,” Coleman said after the election results were tallied. “We want to thank the people of Muskogee for being full supporters and giving Muskogee a brighter future.”

Among the Proposition 2 projects are:

- Airport development and improvements — \$250,000.
- Self-contained breathing apparatus for Muskogee Fire Department — \$400,000.
- Water line improvements — \$175,000.
- Water line distribution assessment — \$100,000.
- Kiwanis Center renovations — \$150,000.
- Muskogee Police Department renovations — \$100,000.
- Traffic signal replacement at Country Club Road and Shawnee Bypass — \$450,000.
- Muskogee Public Library building repairs and maintenance — \$175,000.
- Traffic signal installation and synchronization at Court Street viaduct — \$250,000.
- Centennial Trail extensions — \$500,000.
- Martin Luther King Community Center — \$1.5 million in conjunction with City of Muskogee Foundation grant and private funds.
- Demolition of unsafe structures — \$900,000 in conjunction with foundation grants.



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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
June 24, 2014

**Budget approved on final day to act - It projects \$60M in spending from revenues of \$71M**  
Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City councilors bumped up against a deadline Monday, approving the city’s fiscal year budget for 2015 on the last day allowed by state law. Muskogee’s elected officials have been reviewing for more than two weeks the budget proposals assembled by City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** Councilors delayed passage so they could hash out their concerns privately in small groups instead of in public debate. The budget blueprint, **Brown’s** first since he came on board in late January, anticipates total revenue of nearly \$71.66 million. It provides for appropriations of \$60.48 million to various funds and city departments and makes a conservative estimate of future revenue.

**Brown** said the budget is based upon a “cautious and conservative budget strategy.” Much of the budget is contingent upon approval by voters today of five-year extensions for two sales tax measures worth a half-penny on the dollar. “We’ve been reviewing the budget over the past three weeks, started on June 9 with the formal budget presentation and public hearing,” **Brown** said during a presentation and approval process that took fewer than three minutes. “This budget is balanced ... (and) the funding is set aside for (the) Hay (study) — we will take up Hay next month once we meet again.”

Although **Brown** touted progress toward adopting recommendations presented in a employee classification and wage study that took 18 months to complete, Ward IV Councilor Wayne Johnson pulled back on the reins. “When we say adoption of the Hay (study recommendations), I want to caution that this is only one small step of the Hay process,” said Johnson, the only councilor to make a public statement about the budget that guides spending decisions for the fiscal year that begins July 1. “It is not the full implementation of the Hay study — this is really only the first beginning of the Hay process.”

Despite his cautious tone, Johnson praised the efforts of city administrators and the ability to cut expenses in order to afford some progress toward the adoption of the Hay study recommendations. He acknowledged tough choices had to be made but shed no light on what they entailed.

**Brown** said during his June 9 presentation that the outlook for the city’s budget continues to improve, but it is coming slowly. In his budget message, **Brown** said the budget, “underscores a commitment ... to maintain service levels in our core services and implement cost-saving efficiencies wherever possible while preserving the things that make Muskogee great.”

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
May 22, 2014

**Pilot program for parks brings rift - Councilor says program attempt to micromanage**  
Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

A rift surfaced this week regarding a pilot program initiated by the city manager that deals with issues involving the oversight and administration of Muskogee's parks. City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** said the program serves three purposes: It helps him understand the contents of various parks plans, gives councilors a chance to identify issues at parks within his or her respective wards, and improves internal communications.

The program drew consternation from Ward II Councilor Dan Hall who described the program as an attempt to micromanage the Parks and Recreation Department. Hall, who also serves as Parks and Recreation Board chairman, said it is not the job of city councilors to manage the city's day-to-day operations. "My philosophy has always been that we decide and shape policy and oversee spending and that sort of thing," Hall said about Muskogee's elected officials. "It's up to the city manager and the department heads to oversee the day-to-day business — that's not our job."

Hall said when he and his colleagues field complaints about streets or other services, they typically forward that information to the appropriate department head or the city manager. He said he knows of no reason to single out for special consideration the parks department and its administrators. "I would like him to come up and do a review to all of us at one time instead of meeting in little groups," Hall said about Parks Director Mark Wilkerson during a recent meeting when word about **Brown's** pilot program became public. "That opens his time up to take care of our parks."

**Brown** described the program as an informal meeting involving a small group of people to discuss safety concerns and comments about park conditions. The groups include **Brown**, Wilkerson or a parks representative and two councilors elected from the ward within which a particular park is located. "I need to get a handle on what is happening at the parks because I hear certain complaints," **Brown** said, citing as an example the lack of azaleas in Honor Heights Park. "We need the parks board for policy changes, but this kind of thing is more for maintenance issues."

Despite objections to the program, **Brown** said he plans to continue the pilot program. He said he would provide for city councilors in June a program update.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
April 22, 2014

**Shopping campaign funding approved - Foundation board grants request for \$1M to begin media drive**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

City of Muskogee Foundation board members pledged a million dollars to support a public awareness campaign about the importance of shopping locally.

The idea was pitched by Mayor Bob Coburn, who was unable to provide any examples that show a campaign like the one being proposed can produce the desired results. He said he could not “find any other cities that have done this.” “I don’t think we will see a drastic turnaround,” Coburn said. “What we will do is plant seeds” that might make people think before they spend their money “outside our trade area.”

A consulting firm hired more than a year ago by the city estimated Muskogee loses about \$77 million per year primarily because consumers who live within a defined trade area spend money outside Muskogee. They predicted a public awareness campaign could boost annual local retail sales by \$55 million, which would add \$2.1 million per year to the city coffers.

Coburn said the campaign, which has been described as a “citywide media blast,” would be suspended after a year if there is no evidence of success. But he and others said something must be done to reverse the recent trend of flat sales tax revenue that has grown worse during the past year.

Former City Councilor Randy Howard expressed skepticism about Coburn’s proposal, which needs the approval of Muskogee’s governing body. He said consumers in Muskogee “need better selection and cleaner stores,” something that will “give them a reason to shop and spend their money in Muskogee.” “I understand leakage and sales tax dollars, but spending a million dollars is not the answer,” Howard said, noting consumers will go where they need to go if they want to buy something. “I wish Muskogee citizens cared more to promote local stores and I think they try to do better, but I believe spending a million dollars is like throwing money away in this campaign.”

City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.**, however, backed the plan as the only one he has “seen that is focused on increasing sales in Muskogee.” He said the city doesn’t spend enough on that type of promotion and retention of retailers who do business in Muskogee. “I think after one year we will be able to see if this is working,” **Brown** said. “At least this is something we can do to try and correct this.” The city already has launched its search for a company to oversee the public awareness campaign, soliciting proposals that are supposed to be returned by Wednesday for review. **Brown** said city councilors will have a chance May 6 to review the proposals submitted.

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
January 26, 2014

**SUNDAY EXTRA: New city manager gears up - Brown confident he can handle any situation**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

When **Howard W. Brown Jr.** walks into his office Monday morning to take over as Muskogee's next city manager, he will face a few challenges. Although some of those challenges may be unique to Muskogee, **Brown** expressed confidence about his ability to take on just about any issue presented. **Brown** said he has "had some great bosses and mentors who've been instrumental in my professional development." "By working in cities of varying sizes, demographic make-ups, and economies, I've broadened my understanding of what works and what doesn't," **Brown** said. "Having worked in communities that were so very different from one another, I'm confident I know how to find solutions."

**Brown**, 42, succeeds Greg Buckley, who resigned July 30 after overseeing the city's day-to-day operations for about five and a half years. **Brown** will become Muskogee's 27th full-time city manager and the 30th person to fill that position in a full-time, acting or interim capacity since 1920.

**Brown**, a Pensacola, Fla., native, said he became interested in public-sector service when he returned home after he graduated from college. Pensacola, **Brown** said, "is a beautiful city, and the idea of preserving it appealed to me."

**Brown** said he began working in community planning and development for the Escambia County Neighborhood and Environmental Service in Pensacola. During his tenure, which began in 1995, **Brown** "rotated through every section of the department" as planner, safety representative, code enforcement and demolition officer. "I ... was able to learn a tremendous amount about how city government works," **Brown** said about the first five years of his professional career. "I became fascinated with what cities do and how they deliver services. After working in two states and five jurisdictions, it is striking to me how similar some of the challenges are."

From Pensacola, **Brown** moved on to Lauderdale Lakes, Fla., where he worked two years as chief of the Broward County community's code enforcement division. **Brown** subsequently worked five years as the neighborhood improvement manager for the Atlanta suburb of Lilburn, Ga., and three years as the planning and development services director in Albany, Ga., before accepting in 2010 his job as the planning and community development director in Opa-locka, Fla.

**Brown** credits his ability to listen and build a consensus for his professional successes. **Brown** said he understands the importance of winning the support of all stakeholders when setting and accomplishing goals. "I know I'm likely not the smartest person in the room or the one with the most information, so I'm interested in learning from others," **Brown** said. "I try to work and live

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with integrity. I keep my word and expect others to do the same.” **Brown** has described his management style as participatory but “can be autocratic” at times “depending on the nature of the work.” He reiterated the importance of consensus-building among key staffers and stakeholders in any project and emphasized the importance of strategic planning.

With regard to city finances, **Brown** said he believes “an effective budget program is critical in the overall effective management of the organization.” Fiscal health, **Brown** said, is conducive to effective management and advocates the use of state and federal grants to supplement the general fund. An example includes **Brown**’s ability to secure for Opa-locka a \$1 million planning grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. **Brown** was able to accomplish the feat by developing partnerships with several nonprofit and government organizations.

“There are many factors that influence a city’s growth and prosperity,” **Brown** said, citing quality-of-life factors and the local economy among the top of that list. “If we build a strong core, we will be ready to capitalize on every opportunity be it private development or government programs. While not a silver bullet, government programs, if managed properly, can assist us.”

Some of the issues **Brown** said he looks forward to addressing once he settles in to the job include what some perceive as a shortage of middle-class housing and a stagnant revenue stream from retail sales. Such issues, **Brown** said, are the kinds of challenges he looks “forward to tackling with the support of Muskogee’s municipal staff and elected officials.” “This is an important issue that will require a great deal of my attention,” **Brown** said about flat sales tax collections during the past several years. “Digesting the data and studies on matters such as this will be among my top priorities.”

With regard to his philosophy regarding the workings of municipal government, **Brown** said everyone ultimately “is working toward the same goal.” That goal is “to provide order, safety and quality services to our community.” “If we listen to and develop our employees — our greatest asset — and focus on the things that we can agree on — jobs and attractive neighborhoods — we’ll be successful,” **Brown** said.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Howard W. Brown, Jr** is listed below.]

Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
March 4, 2014

**Outgoing councilors honored**

Author/Byline: D.E. Smoot

Howard, who will be succeeded by Ivory Vann, said he looks forward to his continued work with various committees to which he was appointed while serving his first term in office. Howard also expressed his appreciation of City Manager **Howard Brown Jr.** “for all that you are going to do for the city — I appreciate you.”

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat (OK)  
January 8, 2014

**Council appoints new city manager**  
**Howard Brown Jr. to start job on Jan. 27**  
Author: D.E. Smoot

City councilors appointed Muskogee’s next city manager Tuesday during a special meeting, tapping a man whose background includes planning and community development. **Howard Brown Jr.**, who presently serves as planning and community development director for the city of Opa-locka, Fla., in the Miami-Dade metropolitan area, will begin his tenure Jan. 27. The contract approved Tuesday provides for an annual salary of \$117,000 plus benefits, a monthly car and technology allowance, and moving and lodging expenses worth up to \$10,500.

**Brown**, 42, will succeed Greg Buckley, who resigned July 30 after about five and a half years working as Muskogee’s city manager. Roy Tucker will continue to serve as interim city manager until **Brown** arrives and will return then to his regular duties as city attorney.

Muskogee’s next city manager said he sees “great opportunities” here with regard to the city’s prospects as an economic competitor on a global scale. **Brown** said he was impressed with the enthusiasm of Muskogee’s elected leaders and their “ability to articulate a long-range plan.” “I look at it from this standpoint: All of the things I saw while I was there and everything that is there — the port, the airport — it occurred to me they may not be aware of all the opportunities that are out there,” **Brown** said. “The same thing happened in Georgia: When I got there they didn’t think they could do really big things, but we did big things, and we can do big things in Muskogee.”

Mayor Bob Coburn said he is excited about **Brown’s** appointment, describing it as a positive move he hopes will propel Muskogee toward the future. Ward III Councilor Derrick Reed said he and his colleagues are impressed with what **Brown** will be able to bring to the table. “I was very impressed by his interview and his credentials — we felt he was well qualified,” Reed said. “I feel he will be a great asset to the city of Muskogee — he will be a great vehicle for a city that is on the move.”

**Brown** served earlier this year as assistant city manager for the city of Opa-locka, a city of 16,000 residents tucked within a metropolitan area with a population of more than 2.5 million people. Before he began working in Opa-locka in 2010, **Brown** served three years as planning and development services director in Albany, Ga., and five years as neighborhood improvement manager for the city of Lilburn, Ga., within the Atlanta metropolitan area.

While in Opa-locka, **Brown** was able to secure a \$1 million planning grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. **Brown** was able to accomplish the feat by developing partnerships with several nonprofit and government organizations. **Brown** said he was impressed with the long-range vision that sprang from the Action in Muskogee initiative. He

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was equally impressed with Muskogee City-County Port Authority’s economic development efforts and city councilors’ enthusiasm. “I really want to get there and see where the councilors want to go and work with the staff to position Muskogee as a global and international competitor,” **Brown** said. “My goal is to recommend these options and hopefully we can get everybody on board — you can make all the recommendations in the world but won’t go anywhere without the support of the elected officials and the community.”



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*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Miami Herald, The (FL)  
November 19, 2012

**Opa-locka may give businesses four years to eliminate pole signs**  
**An Opa-locka commissioner wants to revise the sign ordinance as part of an effort to spruce up the city.**

Author: Margarita Sweeting

Opa-locka businesses may soon have to replace giant pole signs with discreet, ground-hugging “monument” signs if the city passes a new law as part of an effort to make the community look better. According to **Howard Brown**, the city’s community development director, the ordinance would mainly affect pole signs, wall signs and window signs. “We’re trying to bring about a uniform standard that takes into consideration the aesthetics of it all,” **Brown** said.

Commissioner Dottie Johnson has been exploring the option for two years and was able to bring it before the commission and community at a town hall meeting last week. “I believe that citizen input is crucial, especially the businesses because this is going to have a big impact on them,” Johnson said. As a result of the meeting, the draft ordinance is going into further review before it is presented to the community again. So far however, Opa-locka is proposing to give local businesses two years to submit a plan for their new signs and four years to comply with the new rules.

Additionally, businesses will have the option to choose a selected vendor in order to create the new signs. Businesses said at the meeting that they want to have a choice of vendors. Owners are also concerned about the cost. “I want to know if there’s been any type of evaluation as it relates to the total cost for the businesses,” said Marc Caputo, vice president of operations for Instant Storage.

According to the initial draft, the ordinance is designed to “promote the public health, safety, comfort, good order, appearance, morals and general welfare.” Under Florida law, cities can pass regulations purely to make the community look more attractive. Following other cities such as Miami Gardens and North Miami Beach, Commissioner Johnson’s idea is that regulating signs will change the city’s image.

“Our image is important because we want to attract more businesses and make the area more appealing, a place where your kids want to come back home to, a safe, clean community,” said Johnson. Although originally set to go for a vote in December, Johnson has postponed voting on the ordinance pending further review and another town hall meeting.

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**HOWARD W. BROWN, JR.**  
*(Articles are in reverse chronological order)*

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Albany Herald, The (GA)  
June 14, 2010

**Planning head leaving for south Florida**

Author/Byline: J.D. Sumner

The director of Albany and Dougherty County's shared Planning and Zoning Department has taken a new job in south Florida, he confirmed Monday. **Howard Brown**, who has headed the city-county department, tendered his resignation to City Manager Alfred Lott and to county officials Monday.

**Brown** has been hired as the community planning director for a city in south Florida, he said. The name of the city was not immediately revealed. "It's been a bit emotional for me," he said from his office Monday as he was typing an e-mail to his subordinates. "The city and county have been a good home for me and my co-workers have been great to work with."

**Brown** helped lead the city's recent state-mandated recodification of its ordinances and vital documents, which was an exhaustive, multi-week ordeal involving commissioners and city staff reviewing the City Code of Ordinances line-by-line to ensure they were up-to-date. He was also involved with a recent update of the city and county's flood maps, the development of a flood plain management ordinance and the implementation of an advanced GIS mapping program that allows the public access to certain public information through the city and county's website.

**Brown** was also at the center of a controversial sign ordinance which initially angered several local business owners before he and other city officials set up a sign ordinance task force -- which included local business owners -- to work out kinks in the measure.

Before submitting his letter, **Brown** had also co-chaired the Albany-Dougherty Complete Count Committee -- an organization created to promote and increase the county's participation in the 2010 census -- and was named as one of Albany and Dougherty County's 40-under-40 by The Albany Herald.

Originally from Pensacola, Fla., **Brown** came to the city from a job in Lilburn three years ago. He worked in southern Florida, as well as in the Panhandle, before moving to Georgia.

With his final day scheduled for June 28, **Brown** said that he has enjoyed working in Albany and possibly would like to come back if there were any upper-level management openings. Although no interim director has officially been named, Mary Teeter, who served as the interim director before **Brown** was hired, will likely re-assume that role until a full-time replacement is found.

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[CB&A Note: Only the information relevant to **Howard W. Brown, Jr** is listed below.]

Albany Herald, The (GA)  
February 25, 2010

**Marietta: More watch programs needed**  
Author/Byline: Pete Skiba

Speaking for the city of Albany-Dougherty County Complete Count Committee, **Howard Brown**, organization chairman, encouraged everyone to fill out the 2010 U.S. Census forms when received. "For each return that is not mailed back," **Brown** said, "the city loses \$1,700 in grant money from the government."

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Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)  
March 6, 2007

**Run-down retail center now easy on the eyes**

Author/Byline: Rick Badie

What a difference a year makes. And in the case of Lilburn Square, a strip mall on Lawrenceville Highway, it's distinct. If you shopped at or drove by the retail center last year, here's what you saw: A complex that hadn't had a paint job in, oh say, one or two decades. A weathered parking lot with faded stripping. Dilapidated store signs. Junk vehicles. In essence, the Square was a mess, and it was right in the heart of Lilburn. Drive by today. It's like night and day. The parking lot's been resurfaced and restriped. The building has a new paint job. There's new, illuminated signage. A total make-over. "It makes me proud," said Eddie Price, a Lilburn city councilman. "We're seeing improvements. The property owners and city came to an agreement."

You may remember Lilburn Square. It was the first strip mall I wrote about in a series of columns devoted to unkempt retail centers in Gwinnett. With your help, we compiled a "List of Shame" in which I cherry-picked centers and described their shortcomings in AJC Gwinnett News. I pass by Lilburn Square several times a week, and had noticed the cosmetic changes. It was a call from **Howard W. Brown Jr.**, though, that prompted me to write a column that notes the turnaround. He's the city's neighborhood improvement manager.

As a follow-up to our conversation, he e-mailed me before and after photographs of the property. They show what it was and what it's become. Startling makeover. **Brown** says the building hadn't been painted in 15 or 20 years. "The owner tried pressure-washing it, but we told him that wasn't going to cut it," he said. "He's taken down nonconforming signage and put up signs in line with our current code. He restriped the parking lot area and repainted the building."

The square, according to city records, belongs to a corporation -- Podber Limited Partnership of Atlanta. It consists of Abe and Morris Podber. Back in February 2006, I tried to interview Abe Podber, the manager, about the site's condition, but he ended the telephone conversation abruptly. **Brown** suspects that the Podbers thought the city was harassing them for the sake of harassment. While they may not realize it, the partners just may benefit from City Hall's diligence. "This helps everybody," Price, the councilman, told me. "It gives the town better street appeal, and he'll be able to attract better tenants. That's what it's all about. It's just a shame it took this long."

Because the Podbers cooperated with the city, the city suspended the fees of several citations issued for noncompliance. They didn't want to be punitive. They simply wanted the property cleaned up, and maintained. "I've been watching that site for quit some time," said **Brown**, noting that the city file on Lilburn Square dates to January 2006. "It's one of our older strip centers, and was one of the most challenging because of its age. Now he's in compliance. He just needs to make sure that he maintains his property."

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**CB&A Note: We generally do not include information from blogs and social media as they are notoriously slanted and unreliable. That said, listed below are links that we found in case you'd like to review them.**

<https://talkaboutmartin.com/2021/04/05/time-for-action-indiantown/>

<https://talkaboutmartin.com/2021/04/27/howard-brown-the-fbi-opa-locka-florida/>

[https://www.facebook.com/Martin-County-Currents-688370614605895/photos/2516503765125895/?locale=hi\\_IN&paipv=0&eav=AfaSGk8wCGaVuIHj9RSVeiGxteZo0M5KQIZQ\\_g5j1FrvkYw0Oxi-HfIHK2lUXphUB94&\\_rdr](https://www.facebook.com/Martin-County-Currents-688370614605895/photos/2516503765125895/?locale=hi_IN&paipv=0&eav=AfaSGk8wCGaVuIHj9RSVeiGxteZo0M5KQIZQ_g5j1FrvkYw0Oxi-HfIHK2lUXphUB94&_rdr)

<https://friendsandneighborsofmartincounty.com/indiantown/>

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