

# Level Plains bills unpaid, but town clerk reinstated

Basic services could be affected soon

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LEVEL PLAINS — The town's gasoline storage tank is empty, leaving the police department to fill up its cruisers with a credit card.

It's another bill the town cannot pay, with the town council refusing to pay the bills for the last two months.

That's just one service that has been impaired by the council's gridlock.

The water is next.

The electricity supporting the water system is scheduled to be cut off Thursday, since the town is behind on the payment.

Eventually, some 2,000 customers will be unable to drink the water, Mayor Tim Jackson said at the well-attended Tuesday meeting.

That didn't seem to matter to a few in the crowd who countered Jackson's comment by saying they had "no voice," referring to the mayor's stance on public input at council meetings.

The three council members who voted against paying the bills — Debra Ainsworth, Dot Brown and Willie Reynolds — said they would not agree to pay the bills until they investigate the expenses.

"Some (bills) go back to June and we need to take care of this tonight," Jackson said to the council.

Town attorney Chad Tindol urged the council to go through the expenses one at a time, thus keeping the more necessary services functioning.

"That's in the town's best interest," he said to the council. "I wish someone would speak up to at least do that."

A motion to go over each item failed 3 to 2, with Ainsworth, Brown and Reynolds voting against it.

Melanie Sanders made a separate motion to pay the fire truck bill.



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**Level Plains Mayor Tim Jackson calls for a vote on whether to pay the town's bills Tuesday. The council voted against paying the bills for the second straight month.**

"Our fire chief shouldn't have to suffer just because our council doesn't get along," Sanders said.

This one bill passed with a 3 to 2 vote, with Brown and Reynolds voting against it.

Sanders' attempts to present more separate motions failed.

Also at this meeting, Jackson announced that town clerk Pat Wambles, whom he dismissed last month, would be back to work Wednesday morning. Jackson has not issued a reason for Wambles' dismissal.

Another town clerk has already been hired and sat in the clerk's chair Tuesday.

The 26-year employee had planned to address the council Tuesday, but recent information has contradicted earlier information, the mayor said. The situation is still being investigated, he said.

And even though the council did not agree to hire a new police chief, a new chief will report to duty this morning.

Lanice Bonds Sr., a former military police officer, was the mayor's pick for the job, but the appointment's vote was a tie.

"Mr. Bonds, I apologize to you that you, being the professional that you are, have to be a part of something like this," councilman Reynolds said before shaking the can-

didate's hand during the meeting and thus generating applause from the crowd.

"Your approval or disapproval is not why we're here," Jackson said to the audience after the applause subsided.

After the measure ended with a tie, Jackson told Bonds he would see him in the morning.

Also at the meeting, a motion to hire a special judge and prosecutor to handle Jackson and councilman Joe Bruer's pending misdemeanor cases failed, with the council voting instead to appoint District Attorney Kirke Adams and Probate Judge Eunice Hagler.

The measure, however, is useless, Adams said.

"All they have to do, and I've told them from the beginning, is make a written request to the district court and ask them to take jurisdiction of the case," Adams said.

The municipal judge must submit a written request to one of the county's district judges.

"It's not very common, but it does happen," Adams said about municipal officials recusing themselves from handling a case.

Adams said his office would prosecute the case if it were transferred to the district level. The cases are scheduled to be heard on Nov. 22.