

NORTH PORT

Retiring clerk may stay as consultant

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After 24 years working for North Port and more than a decade as city clerk, Helen Raimbeau will retire this July. But the city is moving toward keep her on the payroll as a consultant for at least six months after that, even though she will be receiving retirement benefits.



Helen Raimbeau

Until a majority of city commissioners appoint a successor, Deputy City Clerk Patsy Adkins will carry out Raimbeau's duties after her retirement, including overseeing city records and elections and keeping minutes of public meetings.

Raimbeau, 72, will offer assistance and advice.

"The deputy city clerk, or whoever the appointed city clerk is, (will be) free to accept the consultant's advice or not," City Attorney Mark Moriarty said. "We're not contracting out the city clerk services. Helen Raimbeau will be a resource. She will no longer be the city clerk."

At Tuesday's regular city commission meeting, commissioners voted 4-to-1 to accept Raimbeau's resignation date of July 5 and work on a consulting agreement with her. Commissioner Linda Yates dissented.

In a written statement, Raimbeau said hoped to continue serving North Port in a new way.

"I believe that the plans for growth for the city requires stability in the city clerk's position(.) and it is time for me to evaluate how to spend the next quarter of my life." She wrote. "I offer my services to the city to ensure a smooth transition and to ensure that all the knowledge I've obtained over the past 24 years is shared with a new city clerk."

As it is currently proposed, the consulting agreement calls for up to six months of services after Raimbeau's last day. The contract can be extended.

Raimbeau would be paid a monthly consultant's fee of \$8,606 for the first four months, and a fee of \$4,303 per month for the last two months. Her current salary at City Clerk is \$111,879.87, or approximately \$9,323.32 a month.

There is no minimum time or amount of consulting Raimbeau would have to provide the city each month to the city to earn the consultant's fee, Moriarty said. North Port could end the contract for any reason after 20 days written notice to Raimbeau.

Raimbeau would also receive benefits she has accumulated from the Florida Retirement System.

The city would pay up to \$3,500 of Raimbeau's legal fees for drafting the consulting

contract and related negotiations.

Raimbeau would be issued a city-owned laptop, which she has to return no later than a week after she finishes being a consultant.

“Keep in mind this is a draft,” Moriarty said. “We're going to work out the details and the commission will finalize the draft.”

The consultant agreement is being written by the city attorney and Raimbeau's attorney, Christine Sensenig of the Hultman Sensenig + Joshi law firm in Sarasota. It will be brought back before commissioners for final approval at a future city commission meeting, likely in May.

At Tuesday's meeting, Commissioner Yates motioned to reject the consulting agreement and only accept Raimbeau's resignation. Her motion was not seconded and therefore failed.

In an interview Wednesday, Yates said she was not comfortable with a current charter officer proposing the creation of their own future, taxpayer-funded job. She said Raimbeau's proposal was unsolicited by the city commission and that Deputy City Clerk Adkins was “highly qualified” to serve in Raimbeau's absence.

“To propose some type of a compensation for other services in a different capacity is concerning,” Yates said.

FROM POLAND TO NORTH PORT

Born in Poland in 1943 and having spent her early years in a concentration camp, Helen Raimbeau immigrated to America with her parents and three siblings in 1947.

She spent the rest of her childhood and many of her adult years in Connecticut, where she worked as a data processor for General Electric.

“It was so clean and beautiful,” she recalled of the area. “No noise. No bombs... It was serene.”

In 1990, after the death of her father, Raimbeau came to Southwest Florida to live near her mother.

Since arriving in North Port, Raimbeau has seen the city's population grow from about 12,000 residents to more than 60,000 today.

Soon after arriving in Florida, she worked for North Port as a temporary receptionist for a year. It was her first government job.

Raimbeau came on to city staff full-time in April 1993 as a records technician. By 1999 she had moved up the ranks to deputy city clerk, and she became city clerk in October 2002.

Raimbeau said one of the things she will miss most about her job is being a steward to North Port and its history.

“The exciting part is to meet people who come from out of town, and I show them our landmarks and all the progress we've made,” she said. “Twenty-four years ago there was nothing here. It was just a Winn-Dixie.”

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