

Council's first act a symbolic gesture

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

The first item listed for action on Tuesday's city council meeting agenda, led by new Mayor John Holic and newly elected Council Members Bob Daniels and Jeanette Gates, will be to undo a previous council decision.

Interestingly, it's not one of the newly elected members pushing the issue, but Council Member Kit McKeon, elected in 2008.

Two weeks ago the council agreed to accept SCAT-designed bus shelters at five locations, with the exception of two stops at the downtown Venice Public Library on Nokomis Avenue, which were to be constructed in a Venetian theme.

Debate ensued over the cost of the enhanced shelters. The city estimated the cost at around \$40,000 plus \$5,000 in annual maintenance.

McKeon suggests rescinding the previous council action and accepting the original county offer to build and maintain all five of the proposed bus stop shelters, and possibly more, at no cost to the city.

As a compromise, McKeon will also make a motion to direct staff to develop a value-added bus shelter in a Venetian theme that is more cost-effective, with the goal not to exceed Sarasota County Area Transit's standard costs.

McKeon also wants a better-designed Venetian shelter than the \$40,000 version displayed on the Bypass near Bird Bay, which has no sides, leaving riders exposed to rain and wind.

McKeon said his plan is similar to a motion made two weeks ago by Council Member Emilio Carlesimo.

Carlesimo suggested installing the standard SCAT shelters now, and upgrading to a Venetian-theme design at a later date.

"This seems to be a reasonable approach and the upgrade would depend on funding availability," McKeon said.

The total savings, if McKeon's motion is adopted Tuesday, would amount to about \$100,000 over the next few years. The city's general fund budget is \$27 million.

More important may be the message it sends to the public, and especially to the rest of council — that McKeon, who has been relatively quiet, feels he can do business with the new council members, especially when it comes to saving tax dollars.

Another sign of cohesion among the existing and incoming council members can be seen in Holic's proposed ex-officio appointments.

Holic is recommending current council members keep their current positions.

Thus, McKeon will retain his seat on the Venice Planning Commission and serve on the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council.

John Moore will retain his seat on the Sarasota County Tourist Development Council and Tourism and Economic Development Board.

Jim Bennett will retain his seat on the Sarasota-Manatee Metropolitan Planning Organization.

Holic will serve as ex-officio member on the city Public Art Task Force, county Council of Governments and Manasota League of Cities.

Daniels will serve on the Economic Development Task Force, Municipal Code Enforcement Board and county Criminal Justice Commission.

Gates will serve on the Venice Housing Authority Commission, city Environmental Task Force and county Economic Development Corporation.

The recommendations require approval by council.