

No consultant in chief search

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

Venice City Council this week decided to conduct its own search for a new police chief, instead of hiring a consultant to guide the process.

Former chief Julie Williams was pressured out of office last month amid reports of internal strife and for violating a direct order of the city manager.

Staff estimated that a search conducted in-house will take 18 weeks and save the city between \$15,000 and \$25,000. Council members have pledged to reduce the use of consultants. The decision to conduct an in-house search is in line with that stated goal.

Council members haven't determined yet what they are looking for in a new chief. Draft criteria were submitted by staff to council members and should be finalized in the next week or two, at which time the position will be advertised.

The position pay range is from \$81,000 to \$134,000.

There's no shortage of interested candidates. Already the city has received five resumes, all unsolicited, even before a job description has been developed or the position officially posted.

David Gustafson, a candidate for Sarasota County sheriff in 2008 currently patrolling New College of Florida in Sarasota, submitted his resume. He's attended every council meeting, sitting front and center, since the November election.

Pressed by media, North Port Interim City Manager Terry Lewis, who moved to Venice in April, recently announced his interest in the position.

Resumes were also received by unnamed candidates from New York, Michigan and another unnamed state.

There's at least one qualified prospect from within the Venice Police Department.

Mayor John Holic confirmed this week there is no "short list" at this time.

Council Member Bob Daniels said he'd like to see the city contact Florida municipalities that have undergone recent searches for a police chief to see any of their finalists would be a match.

"This is a very critical position. We need to get it right this time," Daniels said.

"I don't think we're going to have any trouble" with the search, Holic said. "I'm very confident in the present council and their decision-making. The direction we give (City Manager) Isaac (Turner) will be plenty clear and we'll get a good candidate."

After staff requested council members return their feedback on criteria by e-mail, Assistant City Attorney Wayne Hall cautioned council members about communicating among themselves on the topic. He advised they coordinate the search through City Attorney Bob Anderson, who wasn't at Tuesday's council meeting. "This area is ripe for Sunshine violations," Hall said