

Democrat and Chronicle

DECEMBER 21, 2005

12/21/05

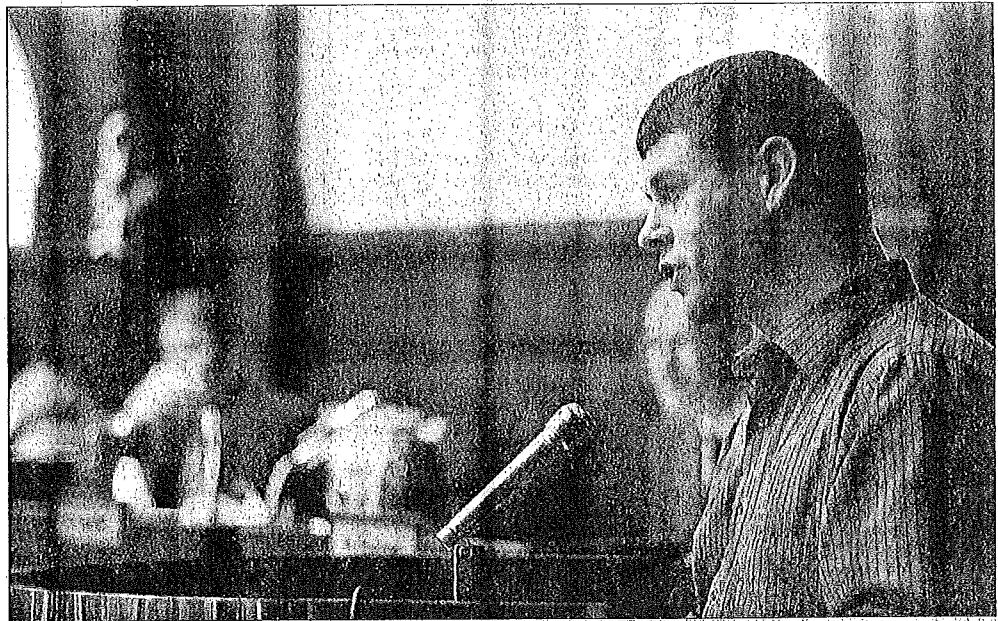
DemocratandChronicle.com

Council OKs ferry loan amid rancor

FERRY Refuses vote delay, but leaves Duffy options

LEAD 9-0 vote calls for dust wipes, affects thousands

PROTEST Some critics call ship 'a ferry bad idea'



KARIN VON VOIGTLANDER staff photographer

Mark Herrick addresses City Council on Tuesday night. He said the vote on the ferry should be delayed, a proposal that was not followed. The council voted 7-2 to approve additional money for the ferry.

JOSEPH SPECTOR

STAFF WRITER

What a way to end an administration.

With a handful of protesters outside City Hall and a crowded chamber inside, City Council on Tuesday night approved two controversial pieces of legislation: a lead abatement plan for thousands of city homes and \$11.5 million to keep solvent the fledgling high-speed ferry.

The meeting came 11 days before Mayor William A. Johnson Jr. retires after 12 years in office and came as

City Council hurried to put its final stamp on two of the more critical issues facing Rochester.

For an outgoing City Council, often criticized for engaging in little public debate, Tuesday's meeting also brought something else; suspense.

And that caused the meeting, according to council members' memory, to be one of the longest, if not the longest, of Johnson's administration.

By about 10 p.m., the council voted 9-0 to approve lead paint legislation

How they voted

- Approved borrowing \$11.5 million to help fund the high-speed ferry to Toronto

- Approved lead paint abatement legislation aimed at making Rochester lead-free by 2010.

- Froze salaries for a year for the mayor at \$120,716 and for City Council at \$28,966.

- Approved spending \$200,000 for the 2006 MusicFest.

re
JAN
STAF
R
tric
nou
tio
me
fig
bas
"
wo
im
che
cer
anc
F
tic
evr
in
m
an
be
w:
ca
te
be
le
ci
a
s
al
a:
ti
a:
rr
E.
K
st
or
fr
co
of

Council

FROM PAGE 1A

that would require lead inspections for new certificates of occupancy. City Council also included a contentious component that will require dust wipe tests of homes in areas most affected by lead paint.

Then at 11:45 p.m., after an extended debate, council voted 7-2 to approve the additional money for the ferry.

The nine-member City Council was torn over what to do with the debt-ridden ship, especially after Mayor-elect Robert Duffy urged them Monday to delay the vote until after he takes office Jan. 1.

So the council compromised. They voted to approve the money but agreed to not make the legislation effective until Jan. 5. They also decided to hold a meeting of the new City Council on Jan. 4 or Jan. 5.

That way, Duffy and the new City Council members can have a say. Also, Duffy would have time to appoint members to the city-run Rochester Ferry Co., which will make the final determination on whether to borrow the \$11.5 million.

That board hopes to meet and vote on Jan. 6, said Councilman Benjamin Douglas, the board's president.

Council members said they couldn't grant Duffy's request to hold off on a vote altogether, saying that an extended delay could jeopardize the ferry's future. Loan payments are coming due, and contracts with vendors need to be finalized. The ship of fers service to Toronto, service stopped last week for the season and is expected to resume

March 31
Douglas said the two-week delay on getting final approval for the loan is worth it in order to build consensus. The two dissenting votes on the loan were Councilmen Wade Norwood and Brian Curran.

Douglas said, "it's worth (the delay) to try to take this additional risk because I think a project of this nature needs not only community support, but it also needs support of council, it needs support of the ferry board, it needs support of the mayor."

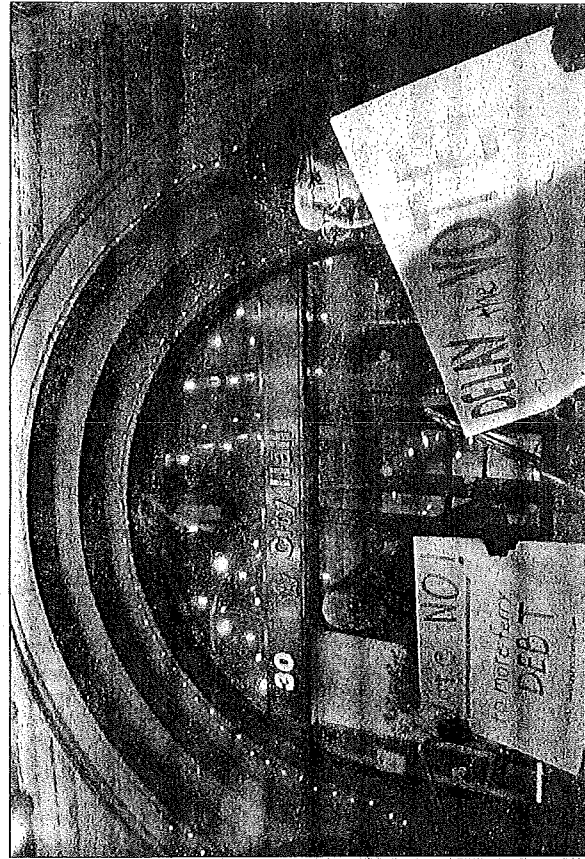
Rough waters

While the ferry loan would keep it stable for the time being, Duffy will be saddled with the ship's long-term viability. But until this week, he hasn't participated in the debate, except for saying he wants the ferry to succeed. And he still hasn't said whether he supports the \$11.5 million loan.

But others were more opinionated. A small group of protesters standing in the cold and snow outside City Hall Tuesday condemned city leaders for wanting to spend more on the ferry.

The group of protesters, which called itself Rochester-Watch.com, carried signs with messages such as "11.5 million More? Sounds Like a Ferry Bad Idea," and "Vote No! to More Ferry Debt."

"Let's not saddle our children and grandchildren with additional debt," said Darrell Brundage, 34, of Webster. "We have too many needs that need to be addressed rather than spending money on an \$11.5 million bond." Tuesday's vote was the latest in a ferry saga marred with setbacks and financial dilemmas.



KARIN VON VOIGHTLANDER staff photographer
Kevin Hermey, left, and Darrell Brundage join people protesting the ferry Tuesday outside Council chambers. "Let's not saddle our children and grandchildren with additional debt," said Brundage.

After the original private owners shut down ferry service after a few months of operation in September 2004, the city bought the ship out of foreclosure last February.

The city backed a \$40 million loan to buy it and set up the separate ferry board to oversee operations. The board then hired the private company, Bay Ferries Great Lakes, to manage the ship. But despite Johnson's assurances that the ship wouldn't lean on taxpayers, officials this year struggled to build ridership after a limited marketing campaign and a delayed start in June.

Johnson capitulated last week, announcing that the ship had plowed through its reserves, lost paint remains in thousands of

Online Extra

► For an interactive map of the ferry, archived stories, documents and photos.

More than 30 speakers addressed the council, with a majority pleading that dust wipes be included.

City Council members Adam McFadden, Tim Mains and Curran added late amendments to the legislation and swayed colleagues to agree to require dust wipes in the most impoverished areas of the city, where 90 percent of lead-based paint is found.

Mains, a city school principal, got choked up during the debate, saying he has seen children suffer from lead-paint poisoning. Lead paint poisoning affects about 1,000 children a year in Monroe County.

For Mains, Norwood and Curran, a vote Tuesday was important. It was their last council meeting because they did not seek re-election.

"This was the most important thing on the agenda tonight," Mains said after the vote. "We put something in place that will make a difference."

The change gives the lead effort an even greater focus in the area known as The Crescent, a 7.5-mile swath of neighborhoods circling downtown with high rates of unemployment, crime and poverty. The goal is to make the city lead-free by 2010.

The legislation will become law July 1.

JSP/PTDR@democratandchronicle.com

Includes reporting by staff writer Alan Morrell.