

THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2015

TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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CITY AGREES ON A REDUCED TAX HIKE

But commissioners far from consensus on a spending plan

Byron Dobson
Democrat staff writer
@byrondobson on Twitter

Tallahassee city commissioners on a 3-2 vote Wednesday approved an increase in the city property tax rate for next year, but they remain far from reaching a consensus on a spending plan.

The approved property tax rate equates to a 23-percent increase as opposed to the 27-percent increase City Manager Anita Favors Thompson presented to commissioners two weeks ago.

For the owner of a home with an assessed value of \$150,000 and a \$50,000 homestead exemption, the increase means paying an additional \$7.08 a month, said Michelle Bono, assistant to the city manager. The 4.55 property tax rate would generate about \$42.4 million for fiscal year 2016, or about \$9.5 million more than last year's adopted budget.

Heath Beach, the city's budget manager, said the budget was adjusted by \$1.3 million. To get there, departments will have to reduce expenses by \$671,000, some projects will be delayed for a year, saving \$290,000.

The proposed 3 percent merit pay increases for general employees was reduced to 2 percent, saving about \$451,000. No layoffs are expected.

The budget still provides for an additional 16 new police officers, two investigators and other items requested for the Tallahassee Police Department.

Also reduced was the \$660,000 pro-

See TAX » 6A



JOE ROMONDI/DEMOCRAT FILES
Tallahassee budget manager Heath Beach, center, said the budget was adjusted by \$1.3 million.



D.A. ROBIN/DEMOCRAT
Above: Byrd Mashburn grew up in Spring House, the only private home in Florida designed by vaunted architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Top: Spring House is nestled in a woody area on the outskirts of Tallahassee.

SEEING SPRING HOUSE

Walk through history by visiting the only private residence in Florida built by world-famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright during the Second Sunday Tour from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday at Spring House, off Okeechobee Road, which runs off North Monroe Street, just north of Interstate 10. Tickets are \$15 per person, and the tour is limited to 100 people. Children under 12 get in free. Visit www.preservespringhouse.org for reservations.

ONLINE
See a video and photo gallery from Spring House at Tallahassee.com.

Charting the Wright course

It's proving to be a big job to restore an architectural treasure built by Frank Lloyd Wright in Tallahassee

Mark Hinson
Democrat senior writer

It is easy to miss Spring House, the only private home in Florida built by the colossal American architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

The modest-sized, boat-shaped house is nestled in a wooded lot in north Tallahassee and nearly hidden from view thanks to all the oak trees and lush plants. It is not overwhelming like Wright's iconic, rounded Guggenheim Museum in Midtown Manhattan or as dramatic as the famed Fallingwater house in Pennsylvania.

"It's one of two pod-shaped houses that Mr. Wright designed late in his career," Byrd Lewis Mashburn, 70, said on

"Spring House is an inspiring space to visit, whether you know anything about Wright's work or not."

FROST BURKE, Spring House Institute

a recent morning at Spring House, which was built by her parents, George and Clifton Lewis, in 1954. "It was designed at the same time as the Guggenheim. The only other pod-shaped home he designed was for his son, Liewellyn Wright, in Bethesda, Maryland."

See WRIGHT » 8A

Daughter charged in mother's neglect, death

Sean Rossman
Democrat staff writer
@seanrossman on Twitter

A Tallahassee woman who didn't get her ailing mother medical help because of religious beliefs is facing manslaughter and elder neglect charges after the woman died last month.

Marsha Ervin, 61, was booked into jail Tuesday. She told Tallahassee Police Department officers her 86-year-old mother, Gloria Bourgeois, hadn't seen a doctor in 15 years despite having rotting flesh and numerous ulcers, including one the size of a basketball, court documents said.

Ervin explained that she was the pri-



Marsha Ervin

mary caretaker for her mother, but that Bourgeois refused to see a doctor due to her beliefs. "We don't believe in medicine," Ervin told an officer. "Our religion says God will fix it."

It wasn't until Bourgeois started bleeding from her ulcers that Leon County Emergency Medical Services was called June 12. Paramedics found ulcers on the woman's shoulders and lower back. Her skin was discolored and muscle, fat and tissue were visible through wounds, according to court documents.

Bourgeois was confined to a chair. Investigators said the chair was covered in urine, feces, blood and bits of skin. She was taken to Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare for treatment.

"It was readily apparent and evident Bourgeois needed, and had been needing, medicine, medical services, food, nutrition and adequate supervision, that a prudent person would consider essential for her well-being," the report said.

Ervin was charged with elder neglect June 15. Bourgeois died June 25. The State Attorney's Office determined Bourgeois' wounds resulted from Ervin's culpable negligence.

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D.A. ROBINDEMOCRAT
Guests can buy pieces of Ocala limestone blocks used to build Spring House. Tours are available the second Sunday monthly.

Wright

Continued » 1A

Most people in Tallahassee did not know that a rare Wright house existed just outside the city limits until June 2014 when Spring House was put on The National Trust for Historic Preservation's list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. The house, which is on Okseheepke Road, also made the list of Florida's Eleven Most Endangered Historic Sites in May.

"Spring House is an inspiring space to visit, whether you know anything about Wright's work or not," Spring House Institute board member Frost Burke said. "The goal of the Spring House Institute is to preserve Spring House not just as a museum, but as a vibrant community resource that will host classes, musical events, poetry readings, seminars and other creative activities."

All the National Trust attention helped attract 1,500 paying Wright fans to Spring House, which is only open to the public once a month, for \$15 per head. But the drive to raise enough money to fully renovate the home and turn it into a public facility is proving to be a very tough job.

"We need some big donors," Mashburn said. "We are very thankful for all the pledges and donations but we need a big donor."

The first step is for the nonprofit Spring House Institute to buy the property and the home from the Lewis family. The house and land have been valued by two averaged appraisals to be worth nearly \$500,000. The Institute raised \$130,000 last year with hopes to reach \$250,000 and qualify for a matching special category grant from the Florida Department of State.

The fund-raising drive hit a snag when the starting date for the 2016 Florida Legislature was pushed forward to early January. The deadline for the matching grant suddenly shifted from October 2015 to June 2015.

"That gave us a month and two weeks to raise the rest of the money, four months less at that time than we were counting on," Mashburn said.

The Spring House Institute did not make the rushed deadline and will have to wait until next year to start the matching-grant process over again.

"We are not totally dependent on the state grants, but they have looked like the best options for us," Mashburn said.

In the meantime, Mashburn said she is grateful for the steady stream of visitors, but they are putting a strain on the 2,282-square-foot home. It needs repairs to

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AT A GLANCE

- **1867:** Born in Wisconsin.
- **1889:** Designs his home in Oak Park, Ill., where he built 25 houses.
- **1911:** Builds his famed Taliesin home and studio in Spring Green, Wis.
- **1914:** A Taliesin servant goes on a murder spree and burns the building to the ground. Wright survives and quickly rebuilds.
- **1923:** His Imperial Hotel is one of the few structures left standing after an earthquake in Tokyo.
- **1934:** Designs Fallingwater in Bear Run, Pa.
- **1943:** Ayn Rand publishes "The Fountainhead" with a leading character based on Wright.
- **1954:** Work on Spring House in Tallahassee is completed.
- **1956:** Finishes plans for the Guggenheim Museum in New York City.
- **1959:** Dies in Arizona.

its roof, plumbing and wiring systems.

"Most of Frank Lloyd Wright's homes are high-maintenance homes," Mashburn said. "Wright has admirers all over the country and around the world and many plan their trips around locations of Wright-designed houses and other buildings," Burke said. "Even with the current limited hours and little promotion, visitors come from across America and from foreign countries to visit this rare and special place, demonstrating the great potential for bringing money from other places into the Tallahassee region and boosting the local economy."

Clifton and George Lewis first met Wright in Lakeland at Florida Southern College, where Wright-designed structures dominate the campus. It was 1950 and Wright was on hand for the dedication of his new Administration Building. During a reception for Wright, the Lewises got in the long receiving line to meet the great architect and decided to pitch their idea for a new house.

"His wife (Olgivanna Milanov Hinzberg Wright) was there, and she was protecting him. She wouldn't let anyone shake hands with him," Clifton said during an interview at Spring House in 1998 when director Ken Burns made a documentary about Wright. "So we got in the back of the line and waited our turn."

When Clifton met Wright she said: "Mr. Wright, we're the Lewises, and we are from Tallahassee. We have a lot of children and not much money, and we hope you will do a house for us."

It helped that the free-thinking, progressive Lewises were World Federalists, a political organization with an inclusive global philosophy that Wright followed.



D.A. ROBINDEMOCRAT
This is the Spring House's southeastern side. It is the only private home in Florida designed by vaunted architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Nestled in a woody area on the outskirts of Tallahassee, Spring House is one of only two homes build in Wright's pod style. Spring House Institute hopes to preserve the home for future use.



D.A. ROBINDEMOCRAT
This long seated area in Spring House was designed for social gatherings and meetings, says Byrd Mashburn, who grew up there. Her mother, Clifton Lewis, hired famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright to design this home, which is unique in Florida.

George, who worked for his family's bank, the Lewis State Bank, finally bought five wooded acres south of Lake Jackson that included a stream and a spring. They sent topographic maps and photos off to Wright. The house and the land cost \$48,000.

The house was added to the National Register of Historic Place in 1979. Members of the Lewis family lived there until 2010.

The colorful and iconoclastic Clifton Lewis, who was also one of the founders of the LeMoyne Center for the Visual Arts, The Tallahassee Museum and a foot soldier in Tallahassee's civil rights movement of the early '60s, died in February 2014. She was 94.

"We still have the opportunity for it to be saved for public use," Mashburn said. "That's what our parents wanted. They wanted other people to have this amazing experience - not as a museum - but as a place where you can come and have your graduation party. Later on, it will be a wonderful place for a honeymoon. And occasional weekends and overnight visits for people... It's just a wonderful place."

To learn more, visit www.preservingspringhouse.org.



D.A. ROBINDEMOCRAT
This is a portion of the upstairs of Spring House. The Spring House Institute hopes to preserve the home on the outskirts of Tallahassee for future use.

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