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## City council picks firm for hiring search

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At a recent special meeting, the Sanibel City Council selected an executive search firm to conduct its city manager search after hearing from two of the three companies that were scheduled to present.

On June 15, the council voted unanimously 5-0 to approve a motion to pick Colin Baenziger & Associates as the firm to lead the search. City Manager Judie Zimomra is tentatively set to retire on Sept. 24. The council also voted 5-0 to move to its second pick if an agreement cannot be made.

At the meeting's start, Mayor Holly Smith explained that Slavin Management Consultants — one of the firms invited to present to the council — had withdrawn its proposal due to new workload constraints.

Following the update, the dais heard from the two remaining firms.

Colin Baenziger, owner of Colin Baenziger & Associates, spoke on behalf of the company.

He reported that the firm recently conducted the executive director search for the Island Water Association. In business for about 20 years, it has overseen searches in about 35 states, of which two-thirds in Florida were for cities and counties. He described its approach as a “turnkey search.”

Baenziger outlined the firm's process, from meeting with council and staff to build a packet for potential candidates on what the city is looking for in an applicant, to its candidate recruitment and advertising methods, including tapping an email list that goes out to about 14,000 professionals.

The applicants are then interviewed and vetted. Those still in the running undergo a series of background checks, including criminal, civil, credit, bankruptcy and driving record. They are asked to provide about 20 references, who are contacted, and Internet and news archives are checked.

“It all comes together on my desk and I make a judgement call,” Baenziger said.

He explained that all of the information on six, eight or even 10 candidates will be provided to the council for review. It will then select the finalists — typically about five — that it will interview.

“We like to have the (final) candidates come in for a reception,” he said.

Baenziger explained that it gives them a chance to meet the council, city staff and community.

The firm's proposal has a \$26,500 fixed cost and includes expenses, except costs associated with bringing in the finalists — and their spouses, if desired — for interviews. Work beyond the scope of the proposal is \$150 per hour. If wanted, the firm will help the city negotiate a contract with the pick.

“The bottom line is we have a tremendous ability to find the right people for your job,” he said. “And we’ll do it in a timely and cost-effective manner.”

The council followed up the presentation with some questions for Baenziger.

Next was Dona Higginbotham, consultant and senior vice-president for The Mercer Group in Florida. She also provided an overview of the firm, its process and cost for service, then answered questions.

In the council's discussion following the presentations, all agreed that both firms were qualified and could do the job. However, a majority on the dais expressed interest in Colin Baenziger's in-depth recruitment and vetting process, including tapping its professional email database, and methodology.