

# Cobb's Landing going to a month-to-month lease extension

Officials say they're attempting to 'do it right' in future

By Kathy Jessup

For Hometown News

FORT PIERCE – Cobb's Landing, a popular downtown bar/restaurant, is now the third local eatery renting its location from the City of Fort Pierce to need special lease accommodations from city officials.

A five-year lease with the city for the location at 200 North Indian River Dr. ends June 30 and a new competitive request for proposals (RFP) from interested bidders has not been issued yet by the city's purchasing department.

Now the Fort Pierce City Commission is expected to give initial approval July 6 to extending a temporary, month-to-month lease extension with Salty4Eleven LLC, Cobb's current operator, with final action not coming until later next month.

The same operators manage Little Jim Bait and Tackle, a popular food and beverage establishment on North Hutchinson Island, in another lease agreement with the city that had its lease extended on a month-to-month basis over a year ago after new lease bidding became mired in controversy.

Initially, potential bidders had complained that the terms of the RFPs issued by the city for the Little Jim property were incomplete and inaccurate. Then the bid was awarded to a Michigan firm when the current Little Jim operator failed to specify in their bid how



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much they would pay the city for use of the site.

The city subsequently withdrew the bidding process and agreed to continue the existing lease on a month-to-month basis until a new RFP could be issued. That still has not been done.

In addition, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection found Little Jim's current operator had constructed unpermitted docks on submerged, state-owned land, threat-

ening fines and penalties against the city.

In a third lease issue, the city said it learned on social media in mid-February that Crabby's Dockside – another downtown food establishment that rented its city-owned location – was suddenly closing, leaving the city with \$280,000 of unpaid back rent, property taxes and a vacant waterfront building.

City commissioners have given Crabby's parent group until July 5 to find someone acceptable to take over the remainder of the

40-year lease or face legal action. The city has not responded to questions about the status of those talks.

Documents recently provided to the Fort Pierce Redevelopment Agency (FPRA) show Donna Qvarnstrom, manager of both Cobb's Landing and Little Jim, has already signed a month-to-month lease extension for Cobb's ahead of city commission action in July.

Shyanne Harnage, city community and economic development director, said the city has drafted RFP language for competitive bidding on Cobb's next lease, but has delayed releasing it until after a new purchasing code is adopted in hopes of avoiding some of the recent pitfalls.

Commissioner Arnold Gaines asked if the Cobb's deal could be done by year's end.

"I don't want to be sitting here and we're three years in and we're still on month-to-month," Gaines said. "I know you say no, but we've got a history that gives us headaches... We're trying to change the way Fort Pierce is doing business and we're trying to do it right."

Commissioner Chris Dzadovsky said Cobb's Landing also had done unpermitted renovations, including a tiki hut that was added adjacent to the sidewalk. According to Harnage, all but one of those violations had been cured at the time of the meeting. Dzadovsky said the city "can't let these things happen and try to deal with it years later."