

Best boots forward

Doing the people's business as an elected official isn't always popular or easy, especially when money is tight and hard decisions have to be made.

That's why the routine of selecting City Council members for committee assignments — particularly the finance committee — matters more for the next year than most of those past.

Incoming Council President Jack Webb has assembled a strong cast for the Finance Committee with the city facing tough calls on a property tax rate increase and trying to keep services afloat despite a wave of increased costs.

No plum job

Being on the Finance Committee used to be a high-profile plum assignment during the city's better financial years.

Members could have their prickly moments at times, but they were just as likely to be heroes to many groups and constituencies seeking city funds.

But it's a different story when council members must hand out coal rather than candy.

The Finance Committee heads the council's efforts to review the mayor's proposed budget and consider adjustments, and that can make members lightning rods of sorts for public discontent.

By the same token, their expertise was never so needed. It made no sense to keep seasoned members on the sidelines last year during sometimes embarrassing hearings.

Bravo to Webb appointees Daniel Davis, who agreed to be the chairman, Warren Jones, the vice chairman, and members Ronnie Fussell, Michael Corrigan, Kevin Hyde, Denise Lee and Ray Holt.

All of them stepped up to play an important role in the months ahead as the council readies the city's nearly \$1 billion budget that kicks in Oct. 1.

ALL ABOARD

See incoming City Council President Jack Webb's full list of committee leadership and membership posts on Jacksonville City Council at this website: <http://news.jacksonville.com/specials/pdfs/committeelist.pdf>

Webb chose well in putting five seasoned former council presidents on the committee in Davis, Jones, Fussell, Corrigan and Hyde.

The committees — Finance, Land Use and Zoning, Public Health and Safety, Recreation and Community Development, Rules, and Transportation, Energy and Utilities — are where most of the heavy lifting and hashing out of council legislation gets done.

Nothing personal

The bigger story is that Webb could have played those committee appointments in a very different way in retaliation of council members who supported incoming Council Vice President Stephen Joost's last-minute surprise move to derail his presidency.

Eight other council members backed Joost, though Webb believed he had their support.

Those council members were current Council President Richard Clark, Jones, Corrigan, Hyde, Reggie Brown, Johnny Gaffney, Art Shad and Art Graham.

The reversal of support and the failed coup could have fractured the working relationships on the council to the public's detriment.

Webb has clearly tried to take the high road, however, in minimizing that rift in the aftermath of the council drama.

Credit Webb for putting more emphasis on performance for the people than payback for himself.

Now the onus is on an all-star group of experienced council members to make more hard choices in another difficult budget year.