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Page: A12

ATTORNEY THINKS CHAIRMAN SHOULD DISQUALIFY HIMSELF

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A Gulfport attorney thinks the chairman of the city's Civil Service Commission should have disqualified himself from a series of controversial hearings that upheld the firings of two city employees.

Attorney James K. Wetzel claims that Commission Chairman Frank Roskopf should not have participated in the hearings because he does business with the city through his Gulfport-based electrical supply company. Roskopf, though, denies he has any conflict of interest.

Wetzel told the Civil Service Commission on Monday night that Roskopf's business dealings with the city is one of three reasons why it should reconsider its decision to uphold the firings of Deborah Jefferson and Wanda Harris, who previously worked in the Community Development Department.

"The appearance of impropriety is such that it would appear to the general public that those who are having to be judged may not be able to be judged by somebody who is doing business with the city," Wetzel said.

Harris and Jefferson were fired last year by former Urban Development Director Glenn Robinson. At the time, the women were accused of mishandling federal Housing and Urban Development loan money. The women have appealed their much-publicized firings to the Civil Service Commission.

Meanwhile, Roskopf will make the call about whether to disqualify himself, though he's hired Gulfport Attorney **Wayne Woodall** for advice. **Woodall** said he knows of no legal reason for Roskopf to disqualify himself.

Roskopf said he'll make a final decision within 10 days.

Roskopf notes he isn't paid for his time on the Civil Service Commission. "If I was a paid employee with the city, I would not do business with the city," he said. "I know it is a conflict of interest; I'm well aware of that. But I have not received one red cent."

Wetzel's two other two reasons why the commission should reconsider the firings:

The commission should not have considered an audit report from HUD, and at least two commissioners said Monday that did play a part in their decisions.

One of the board's commissioner's, John Atherton, was not present for all of the hearings.

It was unclear Monday when the commission might respond to those claims. Atherton did not attend Monday's meeting.

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