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Forensic audit a go in Salem

Council hopes to get to bottom of missing cash

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SALEM – After months of deliberation, the Salem Town Council voted to go ahead with a forensic audit Tuesday night.

During the 2007-08 fiscal year, the council, with the help of CPA Jason White, learned that roughly $100,000 was missing from the town's records when Mayor Thurmond Coward was in office.

Last month, Bob Kinard, a forensic auditor and certified CPA, addressed the council and gave members a better idea of what phase one of a forensic audit would entail.

With a price tag of $150 per hour, Kinard said it would take roughly 30 to 40 hours to determine whether the ethics committee and/or the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division (SLED) would need to take further action. Thorough interviews and investigations of bank records and bills will be included in Kinard's work.

All four council members in attendance, including Myrtle Coward, voted for the continuation of phase one of the forensic audit. It was the first time Coward voted for anything related to the forensic audit.

It is unknown when Kinard and Associates will begin the audit, but Mayor Diane Head said the sooner the better if council members decided to proceed, during last month's town meeting.

Former Salem Mayor Thurmond Coward was in attendance and, following the adjournment, stood up and asked attorney Brad Norton what the original SLED investigation was all about. Norton said he had "no idea," while a member of the audience said Thurmond Coward held a private meeting behind closed doors.

"There was no private meeting going on when that detective came up here, I was simply signing checks," Thurmond Coward said. "As far as I'm concerned, I'd like to see this whole thing go away."

Head listened to Thurmond Coward and, at the end of his announcement, said, "Let's just let this lie" and that she "understood his concerns."

A special meeting and public hearing for Salem's budget has been scheduled for June 29. Residents are encouraged to attend.