

City to seek dismissal of Daytona man's suit

By John Peery
Apopka Chief Staff

The city of Apopka will defend itself and seek a dismissal of a lawsuit brought by a Daytona Beach man over the accessibility of city documents on its website for blind or visually impaired citizens.

Joel Price of Daytona Beach, who said he is legally blind, filed the lawsuit on May 5 in federal court after writing a letter earlier this year complaining that his screen reader software cannot "read" city documents that are on its website, www.apopka.net.

Price's suit stated, "As an active and social Florida resident, plaintiff is interested in the quality of life, economic growth, tourism, preservation of natural environment, housing, and urbanization issues. There-

fore, plaintiff is concerned about becoming informed about quality of water; projects to preserve the natural environments; land use; recreational activities for the community, and use of different resources utilized by the government of city of Apopka dedicated to making Apopka a better place to live and work. Therefore, in February 2019, plaintiff visited defendant's website with the intent of educating himself about the quality of life and governmental functioning in city of Apopka. Plaintiff also wanted to find out more about programs, services, and activities available to visitors and residents."

Because the website's documents have not been made accessible via screen reader software, Price's suit claims that he has "suffered feelings of shame, humilia-

tion, isolation, segregation and has been injured by experiencing emotional suffering, pain and anguish as a result of being segregated and prohibited from enjoying the programs, services and activities offered to the public by city of Apopka. Plaintiff continues to desire to participate in the governmental functioning of city of Apopka and in the programs, services and activities offered to the public by city of Apopka. However, plaintiff is unable to do so, as he is unable to meaningfully access and comprehend the electronic documents provided to the public by city of Apopka."

The city's insurance carrier has hired Roper & Roper, an Apopka law firm, to defend the city in the suit.

City attorney Joe Byrd said that the firm will immediately seek a dismissal of Price's lawsuit, something the law firm was able to do in another suit brought by Price against the city of Longboat Key.

As a result of Price's original complaint letter sent earlier this year, the city has taken down almost all of its PDF and Microsoft Word documents because they cannot be read by screen reader software.

Even if the lawsuit is dismissed, Byrd said the city still has troubles.

"Don't think that even if we walk away winning the suit that means that, 'Oh, we don't have to worry about anything on the website.' We certainly do," Byrd said.

"We take it seriously, but we do think we should be able to defend this suit."



Real estate value up 8.3% in city

By Teresa Sargeant
Apopka Chief Staff

As is the case with all of Orange County's 13 municipalities, the city of Apopka is experiencing market value growth this year thanks to the near-record new construction and historically high property values, according to the Orange County Property Appraiser's Office.

Apopka's market value has increased by 8.3 percent over last year's numbers. Also this year, seven of 13 Orange County municipalities recorded double-digit growth, just as Orange County's market value has topped \$206 billion for the first time ever.

Oakland is seeing as high as an 18-percent increase in market value over 2018. Oakland is a small town just west of downtown Winter Garden on the south side of Lake Apopka.

Orlando's values have increased by 10.4 percent.

"I was surprised there were other cities quite a bit

higher than us," said Apopka Mayor Bryan Nelson. "I thought all the growth would have been a little higher on the 8 percent, but we haven't really dug into the details."

When asked what the city of Apopka would do in terms of boosting its market value, Nelson said that's up to the market.

"The market will dictate as far as the prices," Nelson said. "Even with all the new growth, you still have a huge base, so it's not easy to grow it based on new growth. It's increased property values more so than new growth."

Moreover, while Orange County has steadily recovered from the 2008 economic downturn, new construction values have doubled over the last 10 years.

"Increased market values are a strong indicator of a thriving region and a healthy economy," Orange County Property Appraiser Rick Singh said in a press release. "The Orange County Property appraiser's office is committed to the accurate assess-

ment of property and analysis of data to inform the public on current values. This reporting continues to capture upward trends in values which bodes well for continuing success for Orange County and its taxpayers."

OCA reports \$4.4 billion in new construction this year, an average of over \$12 million every day. This is a reflection of the high influx of businesses and potential residents wanting to move to Orange County.

"Rising market values are great news for residents whose communities will benefit from the additional tax revenue for years to come," Singh said in the press release. "These resources can help fund schools, infrastructure, and parks ... all the amenities that make Orange County a great place to live, work, and play."

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