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Audit finds no problems with two previous audits of impact fee mistake

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ST. PETERSBURG — An external auditor has found no improprieties in two city audits completed after a 2004 fee break cost the public \$219,000.

The Clearwater-based firm Mayer Hoffman McCann P.C. told the City Council on Thursday that it also did a limited review of how city staffers calculated transportation impact fees on 100 projects between 2004 and 2011.

The firm found less than \$1,000 in miscalculations.

"There weren't any improprieties," said Laura Brock, an auditing manager. She added: "I think you are doing everything correctly."

The audit, which cost taxpayers \$50,000, came after the council learned last November about the mysterious \$219,000 break. That's what the Hilton at Carillon Park project should have paid in impact fees eight years ago before a still-unknown city official gave them an unexplained break.

The county discovered the error three years later. St. Petersburg sued the developers to get back the money. But in November 2011 the council agreed to a settlement of just \$60,000. Council members later blamed staff for not keeping them better informed about the deal.

The 2004 break came about because city plans examiner Don Tyre said a superior ordered him to undercharge the fee by more than \$219,000. The public should have gotten \$313,000.

Two city audits never revealed the identity of the superior. Neither did the external audit, which only examined the methodology used in the city audits and a random sampling of cases.

Council member Jeff Danner asked Mayor Bill Foster to write a letter saying Tyre has been cleared by three audits. Others disagreed.

"This did take place," said Wengay Newton. "Somebody crossed out the right number and wrote in the wrong number. Just because they have selective amnesia ... it doesn't clear them."

The group voted 6-2 to kill a motion saying no wrongdoing was found by three audits. Danner and Jim Kennedy voted yes.

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