

# THE DAILY NEWS

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## Island mayoral race down to Rosen, Jaworski

**By Amanda Casanova**  
The Daily News

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Retired businessman Lewis Rosen apparently will face incumbent Joe Jaworski in a runoff election for the mayor's seat next month.

A June 23 runoff election is pending the count of provisional ballots.

According to complete but unofficial results released close to 2 a.m. because of delays caused by county equipment problems, Rosen picked up 2,812 votes, while Jaworski had 2,471.

Of the total 6,268 votes cast, Galveston school board member Beau Rawlins had 721, and Greg Roof, a professor of economics at Alvin Community College, had 264.

The island's mayoral race has been dominated by the Galveston Housing Authority's plan for mixed-income developments to rebuild some of the 569 public housing units damaged in Hurricane Ike.

Opponents — including Roof, Rawlins and Rosen — have argued the additional units would cripple the island's housing market with unnecessary housing stock. Proponents of the plan, including Jaworski, have said the developments would help the city's residents move out of poverty.

About a month before the election, the housing authority amended its plan. Under the changes, 170 families of the original 569 public housing residents who lost their homes and have transferred to a housing choice voucher program will stay in the program and count toward the housing authority's commitment to rebuild the 569 units.

Total, the plan would add 718 units to the island, including 288 market-rate units, 143 tax-credit units, 72 of which would be project-based vouchers and count as public housing, and 287 public housing units.

The housing authority is trying to earn approval for the plan from the state, which is in charge of releasing millions in federal funding earmarked for the rebuild.

But the plan could face more delays.

If elected, Rosen has said he will challenge the Conciliation Agreement, a May 2010 agreement between the state and housing advocacy organizations Texas Appleseed and Texas Low Income Housing Information Service. The agreement dictates how recovery dollars can be spent.

Jaworski has said he supports the plan and will fight alternatives to rebuild barracks-style public housing on the island.

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### Homeowners in Ike program facing liens

**By Amanda Casanova**  
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GALVESTON — Months after moving out of their home, Ramona and her husband, Gary Cammarn, are settling back into their house — a reconstructed home in the city's disaster housing recovery program.

Their front yard doesn't drain properly and some pipes still are exposed, but Ramona Cammarn said she's more worried about the liens on her house and the thousands of dollars in bills she's received from subcontractors.

Documents show about \$22,000 in bills from a construction supply store, about \$4,000 from a window company and another \$8,000 due to an aerobic septic system company.

"It's scary to get these letters," Cammarn said.

For months, the multimillion-dollar disaster housing program, which is meant to rebuild or rehabilitate homes damaged during Hurricane Ike in 2008, has been criticized by residents long displaced from their homes. While homeowners said their houses weren't getting built, contractors and suppliers said they weren't getting paid.

Nearly 200 payouts to contractors and their subcontractors were behind in January, said Mark Howard, senior program manager at URS, which is the new program administrator, and by early March, about half of those outstanding bills had been paid.

Subcontractors mailed out thousands of dollars in bills to homeowners to collect, and some homeowners in the program, mostly low-income residents, who haven't been able to pay the bills have received notice of a lien being placed on their home.

With a new administrator managing the program and an approaching September deadline, city officials said they're working with URS to pay the outstanding bills, release the liens on the homeowners and speed up the program.

### Unmet Expectations

Contractors have until later this week to address complaints from residents and subcontractors in the program.

In February, the city council agreed to give Fresno-based Consolidated Concepts Inc. and Houston-based Compass Pointe Homes 30 days to finish work on homes. Projects that require more than the month's work will be reassigned to other contractors.

But homeowners aren't convinced, Cammarn said. She estimated she called the city and Compass Pointe about 15 times a week.

When she found out about the liens Thursday, she said a URS employee told her they would be removed in the next few days.

"I'm very upset about the liens," she said. "That's serious. It's frustrating."

Like other homeowners in the program, the bills and liens weren't the first worry for her. Employees from her contractor, Compass Pointe Homes, told Cammarn work on her home at 2827 North Sonny Lane was supposed to start in May, with the four-bedroom house completed by September.

About two months passed before the house was razed, and in August, pilings went up. She was told she'd be home before the holidays, but she didn't move back in until Jan. 20, nine months after signing the notice to proceed contract.

"We were paying \$330 in storage, \$545 in rent, plus our house payment and insurance," she said. "We were living in a small apartment, and we only took a few things because we thought it would only be a few months."

"It didn't go as it should."

An official with Compass Pointe declined to comment on the specific case, saying company officials were working with URS to reassign some of the remaining homes back to the administrator. He did say, however, that URS was a "godsend for both the city and the builders in the program."

### System Changes

In January, state-selected program administrator URS stepped into the role of the much-criticized former administrator CDM Smith with planned changes to the program's processes.

Rather than using the city's bidding process, homes will be assigned to a pool of state-approved contractors. And last week, the city and URS started a new two-party check system to pay contractors, vendors and subcontractors who are owed money in the program. The city is paying out house by house for completed work, Alicia Cahill, public information officer, said.

Checks for Compass Pointe were handed over to URS on Friday, and checks for CCI will be

distributed by the city.

“We are working to cure the subcontractors and vendors owed payment on completed work,” she said.

But Cammarn said it might be too late and the recovery process has turned people away from Galveston. While she has insurance, she wouldn’t hesitate to move off the island if another storm slams her house. Recovery is too complicated, she said.

“I would leave the island,” she said. “I love Galveston and I’ve been here 30 years, but I would have to leave.”

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### Traffic division racks up major OT

**By Amanda Casanova**

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GALVESTON — The city’s former supervisor of traffic operations was paid more than \$390,000 on top of his salary during the past four years, according to time sheets obtained from an Open Records Request and a W-2 earnings sheet.

While Mike Dricks’ salary was set at \$48,279, the former supervisor of traffic operations, claimed overtime that amounted to an annual payout almost as much as the former city manager’s annual earnings, records from 2009 through 2011 show.

A city spokeswoman declined to comment, citing an ongoing police investigation. In February, the Galveston Police Department launched an investigation into the traffic division, which provides service to traffic signals and street signs.

No charges have been filed, Alicia Cahill, the city’s public information officer, said. The results of the investigation will be turned over to the District Attorney’s office, she said.

According to the records, two crew leaders and a traffic signal technician also claimed thousands in overtime pay each year.

In January, all 12 employees in the traffic division were placed on paid administrative leave. Soon after, two employees, including Dricks, resigned.

According to records, Dricks, an hourly worker because he did not meet requirements to be

classified as salaried employee, was paid more than \$149,500 in 2009, more than \$157,600 in 2010 and about \$145,500 in 2011. Another city document of W-2 earnings showed Dricks was paid about \$133,700 in 2008.

Dricks did not return messages.

A chief crew leader in the division was paid about \$10,000 more in overtime in 2009 and about \$8,600 in 2010 on top of his \$36,000 annual salary. Another crew leader was paid about \$11,000 more in 2009 and 2010 and a little more than \$1,000 in 2011.

The traffic signal technician, whose salary was about \$40,000, was paid about \$14,000 more in 2009, \$16,000 in 2010 and about \$6,000 in 2011.

The traffic division has an annual budget of about \$1.3 million, but most of the extra pay came from claims of hundreds of overtime hours in each fiscal year.

How the time sheets in the traffic division, which is under the city's department of public works, are processed and who approved the payments to the employees isn't clear, but the city's spokeswoman said the city already has implemented new "personnel policies and procedures."

Prompted by the police investigation and other concerns about the city's finances, the city council will meet Wednesday in a special meeting to discuss the council's use of investigative powers.

Under the city charter, the city council can "inquire into the official conduct of any department, agency, office, officer or employee of the city."

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### Will trolleys return to the island?

**By Amanda Casanova**  
The Daily News

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GALVESTON — Before Hurricane Ike, the city's oak trolley cars — when they were in working condition — rattled down the streets mostly empty.

Mechanical problems complicated the trolley ride schedule and affected ridership.

But the passing trolleys were a charming fixture on the island, city officials said. If interest rallies for their return, the iconic cars could come back with improvements.

The city has about \$4 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency funds, Federal Transit Administration grants and some insurance money to replace the tracks and rebuild the trolleys.

But trolley service before the storm was expensive to operate and maintain. The cars, which are nearly 30 years old, needed mechanical repairs, and the steel tracks the cars cruised on needed work.

“As the years went on, they became less dependable,” David Smith, the city’s fleet manager, said. “Since they weren’t dependable, people couldn’t use them.”

‘More Dependable’

When Hurricane Ike flooded the island, the storm’s surge poured into the garage where the four trolleys were stored, destroying the engines. In their absence since the storm, the city and Island Transit, which operated the trolleys, has fielded questions from residents about the return of the cars.

If the cars are rebuilt, city officials said the machines will get upgrades under the hood, meaning more consistent ride schedules and, officials hope, increased ridership.

“We can go back with mechanisms that are more dependable and cleaner than what we had before the storm,” Alicia Cahill, public information officer for the city, said. “They will become a more dependable enhancement to public mobility.”

The 40-ton trolleys have to be shipped off to be rebuilt, Smith said. Restoration of the trolley service could take up to two years.

“A lot of trolleys like ones in San Francisco are pulled by a cable,” he said. “These have their own engines. If we move forward on this, we want a clean, dependable machine.”

Cahill said if the trolleys do not return to the island, the city will consider options to address the tracks, such as filling them.

Falling Ridership

In 2007, about 31,000 people rode the trolley for \$1.25 a trip, bringing in only about \$39,000 for the system’s operation. Two years earlier, trolley ridership topped 43,000.

In 2008, the fare jumped to \$1.50 a trip.

Between 2001 and 2006, the trolley cost the city an annual average of \$270,991 to operate.

Rides were available from The Strand to Harborside and to the seawall. Another route ferried passengers from downtown to the University of Texas Medical Branch.

“It’s charming,” Cahill said. “It’s an icon that was associated with our city. People chartered special events, such as weddings. They liked the feel of the trolley.”

The trolley system was introduced to the island in 1984 for about \$10.5 million. During the last 20 years, the federal government has contributed about \$16 million in capital improvements to the system.

The city contributes about \$600,000 annually to Island Transit operations. The rest of Island Transit's budget, about \$3.8 million, is subsidized by the federal government.

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