

Mayor's supporters turn out at meeting

By Jeff Burlew
Senior government editor

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Tallahassee Mayor John Marks greets supporters Samantha Allen and Anne Allen during a break in the city commission meeting on Wednesday. The Tallahassee City Commission met Wednesday, and one item that came up was the controversy over Mayor John Marks and his relationship with ADE and AT&T. Erwin Jackson urged people to come to the meeting to call for Marks to resign and a special election to replace him. / Mike Ewen/Democrat

Supporters of Tallahassee Mayor John Marks came to City Hall on Wednesday night to give him a morale boost.

Anne Allen, her daughter, Samantha Allen, and a friend, Matt Isbell, held up signs during a break from a City Commission meeting saying, "I trust Mayor Marks" and "Support the Mayor."

"I'm probably not going to change any minds here," said Isbell, a graduate student at Florida State University. "But I want to show the mayor that he has supporters."

Others came to criticize the mayor over his vote last year in favor of a federal grant project involving the nonprofit Alliance for Digital Equality, which paid the mayor \$86,000 over several years as a member of its board of advisers, and other matters. It was the first commission meeting since articles in Sunday's Tallahassee Democrat detailed Marks' relationship with ADE and AT&T, a longtime client of Marks that also bankrolled the nonprofit.

Bob Fulford, a retired teacher and former president of the Council of Neighborhood Associations, said it is time for the mayor to go.

"Resign the office," he said. "Spend more time with your family."

Erwin Jackson, a local businessman who regularly speaks out against the mayor during commission meetings, came to City Hall with a giant blowup of Sunday's front page.

"Mr. Marks' priority as a board member of ADE was to take \$86,000 from this nonprofit organization and simply put it in his pocket," Jackson said.

The mayor's critics, however, were outnumbered by the supporters, some of whom said they didn't know Marks personally.

Anne Allen said Marks has done a great job and served as a positive influence on the city.

"And there's something about the agenda of Erwin Jackson — there's more than meets the eye," she said.

Don Axelrad, also a former CONA president, praised Marks for city efforts to reduce pollutants going into the fragile Wakulla Springs.

"He's admitted to errors of judgment," he said. "If those are serious enough, either the legal or political process will give him his due. But taking the broad view, he's been a very good mayor."

Queen Bruton said if Marks did vote incorrectly, it was out of "excitement." Emily Meyer, a state worker, thanked Marks and commissioners for everything from the city parks system to Local Business Saturdays.

Teri Cariota, chair of the local Democratic Executive Committee, spoke in favor of Marks, though she said she wasn't representing the local party in her comments.

"I know your job is not easy," she said. "There is no such thing as a perfect elected official. We all make mistakes. The ones I respect — we own up to the mistake, and we move forward."

Marks had only a few words at the end of the public-comment part of the meeting.

"I want to thank all of you who came tonight to speak," he said.