

Morrow City Manager Jeff Eady resigns to become Forest Park public works director

Soon to be ex-city manager will become Forest Park's public works director

MORROW — Jeff Eady is expected to resign this week after a 30-year career with the City of Morrow.

The long-time Morrow fixture is leaving to become Forest Park's new public works director. It's a return to Eady's roots, in a way, because he spent more than a quarter of a century in Morrow's public works department and worked his way up to the city's public works director before he become city manager.

Eady said that was a factor in his decision to apply for the Forest Park public works director position.

"It's nothing against the city of Morrow," said Eady. "I worked for the city for 30 years and I spent 26 of those years in public works and four as city manager. This gives me an opportunity to get back to what I love doing, which is working on infrastructure, maintaining parks and that sort of thing."

Eady was expected to tender his letter of resignation Tuesday, after the Forest Park City Council voted 3-1 a day earlier to hire him. An exact resignation date isn't known, but Eady is expected to stay with Morrow for several weeks to comply with the terms of his employment contract with the city.

Mayor Joseph J.B. Burke said he had not received a resignation letter by press time Tuesday. Regardless, Eady had already committed to go to Forest Park if his hiring was approved so a letter is expected.

"I'm going to accept the position," he said last Friday.

Forest Park City manager Frank Brandon said he chose Eady from a field of 30 applicants because of his extensive 26 years of experience in public works. Eady was Morrow's public works director for 20 years before he became city manager.

"He was the most qualified candidate for the position," said Brandon.

Eady's past work included an active role in the renovation of an old Clayton County Water Authority building purchased by Morrow in the 1990s to house the city's public works and police departments. He also oversaw the gradual expansion of the department from less than a handful of employees to nearly a dozen workers.

However, the move created a domino effect where the Morrow City Council must now begin a city manager search. Eady will remain with Morrow for at least another month, which gives council members time to pick an interim city manager.

Burke said he wished Eady well in Forest Park. The mayor also expressed hope that, even with several weeks left before Eady's departure, an interim city manager will be appointed to give council members more time to search for a replacement.

The search should be similar to the months-long one used in late 2011 and early 2012 to find a city police chief, said Burke. Eady conducted that search and convened a small panel of police chiefs from around the state to review applications and nominate finalists for the council's consideration. It resulted in the hiring of Chief Chris Leighty.

"I'm not going to jump into this haphazardly, said Burke. "I want us to do a good, thorough interview process like we did when we hired Chief Leighty because that search yielded great results for the city."

Burke said he will contact council members individually this week to gauge their desires on how to replace Eady.

A surprising departure after 30 years

#His departure comes as a surprise since he just celebrated his 30th anniversary as a Morrow employee. Eady told *Clayton News Daily* Aug. 15, "There's too much work left to be done" to consider leaving the city. Although he was answering a question about the possibility of retirement, the implication was he intended to stay in Morrow for awhile.

Eady said Brandon extended the job offer Oct. 15. However, the offer came just as he was leaving to go on vacation, so he hasn't submit a letter of resignation or meet with Morrow staff and city council members until this week.

Eady's tenure as city manager can be summed up as a period where Morrow's priorities shifted away from the ambitious projects of his predecessor, John Lampl. Instead, the focus moved toward doing more to provide what Eady often called "core services" to citizens, such as police and fire protection.

He was also a prominent participant in the announcement of the TriCity opportunity zone project involving Morrow, Lake City and Forest Park Oct. 9.

Of the three city managers who began developing the project a year ago, Lake City City Manager Joel Lanken will be the only one still in his position by the time it really gets off the ground. In addition to Eady's move, former Forest Park City Manager John Parker resigned over the summer.

Brandon said Eady will be involved in Forest Park's efforts to participate in the TriCity opportunity zone, although its not clear in what role he will serve in the three-city economic development project.

The news of Eady's plans took some community officials by surprise. Clayton County Chamber of Commerce President Yulonda Beauford was among the community figures shocked by the decision. Eady was instrumental in rebuilding the chamber's relationship with Morrow after he became city manager in 2009.

"When he became city manager, the chamber's relationship with the City of Morrow strengthened exponentially," said Beauford.

Beauford said Eady was always someone the chamber could turn to when it needed Morrow's help because he ensured the city helped address and resolve the need. One example, she said, was that he helped the chamber get access to the Morrow Center when it needed it for events.

"I will be saddened that he'll no longer be Morrow's city manager, but I'm happy for him if this is what he wants to do," said Beauford.