

The Huntsville Item, Huntsville, TX

October 5, 2010

Judge OKs venue change in Chamber suit

By *Matthew Jackson*
Staff Reporter

HUNTSVILLE — A change of venue motion in the City of Huntsville's lawsuit against the Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce was granted Monday by 278th Judicial District Judge Kenneth H. Keeling, setting the stage for a trial to begin next week at the Leon County Courthouse in Centerville.

Attorneys for the Chamber filed the motion early Monday ahead of scheduled jury selection at the Walker County Courthouse. Keeling granted the motion shortly after it was filed.

Jury selection in the trial — in which the city is seeking damages in excess of \$750,000 from the Chamber, all tied to allegedly misapplied hotel occupancy tax (HOT) funds — was scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. Monday. Keeling's ruling now places the start of jury selection to Tuesday, Oct. 12, in Leon County. Centerville is about 50 miles northwest of Huntsville.

Keeling spoke in open court last week about his intention to try the case even if a change of venue was necessary.

Huntsville City Attorney Leonard Schneider was not immediately available for comment Monday, and phone messages left for Chamber attorneys Levi McCathern and Jeff Wright of Dallas were not returned Monday.

The Huntsville City Council again convened in special session Monday night and adjourned to executive session for half an hour to further discuss negotiations with the Chamber.

Following the executive session, council member Mac Woodward made a motion to direct the city's attorneys to pursue a potential agreement on the table with the Chamber. Council member Wayne Barrett seconded the motion.

Shortly before the council voted on the motion, council member Lanny Ray briefly commented on the agreement, which was not discussed in detail outside of the executive session.

"This falls under the category of taking the hard right over the easy wrong," Ray said. "That's all I have to say."

Ray was the only council member to comment on the motion in open session prior to the vote.

Council denied the motion by a vote of 7-2, with Woodward and Barrett voting in favor of the motion.

It was the second time in three days the council has denied a motion to pursue an agreement with the

Chamber.

The council is slated to again discuss the issue in executive session during its regular meeting tonight at 6 at City Hall, 1212 Ave. M, Huntsville.