

# LOCAL

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## State to settle fire-rescue bill dispute

### Highland Beach claims Delray overcharged it

**Mike Diamond**  
Palm Beach Post  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The Florida Auditor General will settle the contentious dispute between Highland Beach and Delray Beach over fire-rescue billings.

Highland Beach is in the process of creating its own fire-rescue department, a move it says will save it as much as \$2 million a year.

For more than 30 years, Delray Beach has been providing fire-rescue services to Highland Beach.

In recent years, the cities have been

accusing each other of failing to adhere to contracts they signed.

Highland Beach claims Delray Beach overcharged it by \$237,000; Delray Beach claims Highland Beach still owes it \$540,000.

And those numbers only cover two fiscal years, 2021 and 2022.

The Joint Legislative Auditing Committee recently instructed the Auditor General to review the billings and determine the proper amounts.

State Rep. Peggy Gossett-Seidman, a former Highland Beach commissioner whose district includes the town, recently appeared before the legislative committee to call for the audit.

“We are in dire need of an audit,” she said.

Derrick Noonan, audit manager for

the Auditor General, said his agency wants to move quickly to resolve the dispute.

He said a preliminary report could be issued as soon as October.

Gossett-Seidman and state Rep. Mike Caruso, R-Delray Beach, were strongly critical of Delray Beach.

Gossett-Seidman said Delray Beach has failed to provide financial records to Highland Beach, charging it more than \$12,000 for public-records requests.

Highland Beach Town Manager Marshall Labadie told the committee that once his town decided to create its own department, Delray Beach forced the town to submit public-records requests to obtain information.

“Highland Beach residents deserve

answers,” Gossett-Seidman told members of the committee. “It is unfair for a larger town to prey upon a smaller town. I’m asking for Delray Beach to show us the money.”

Caruso blasted Delray Beach for charging taxpayers in Highland Beach to get records they are entitled to receive.

Delray Beach City Manager Terrence Moore said the city was only given one day’s notice of the legislative hearing. That prevented it from providing a detailed response to the legislative committee, which conducted its hearing in Tallahassee.

Still, Moore said the city welcomes the audit, noting that it will be helpful to

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## March Madness lives on during FAU’s celebration

**ABOVE:** Florida Atlantic guard Johnell Davis, right, smiles while taking a ceremonial key to Boca Raton from teammate Michael Forrest at the Mizner Park Amphitheater on Wednesday in Boca Raton. Hundreds of Florida Atlantic fans gathered in Mizner Park to celebrate the FAU men’s basketball team’s accomplishments during the 2022-2023 season, including an appearance in the NCAA Tournament Final Four.

**RIGHT:** Javier Garcia, owner of Ola Feroz Swimwear in Boca Raton, takes a selfie with his family and the Florida Atlantic mascot, Owsley, on Wednesday at the Mizner Park Amphitheater in Boca Raton.

PHOTOS BY ANDRES LEIVA/PALM BEACH POST



## Student arrested after gun is spotted

### Weapon confiscated at Boynton middle school

**Julius Whigham II**  
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BOYNTON BEACH – A student at Congress Middle School in Boynton Beach was arrested Tuesday after bringing a loaded gun to campus, the Palm Beach County School District reports.

School district police confiscated the weapon without incident after another student reported seeing it, Principal Denise O’Connor said in a message to parents. The gun was not used in a threatening manner, she said.

The incident marked the seventh time that a weapon has been confiscated from a Palm Beach County School District campus during the current academic year, one fewer than the total recovered during the previous year, according to school district records.

O’Connor said the student involved in Tuesday’s incident may be subject to disciplinary action under the school district’s zero-tolerance weapons policy in addition to criminal charges.

The school district did not release any identifying information about the student, including gender, grade or age.

“I want to commend the individual who brought this matter to our immediate attention,” O’Connor said. “We all play a role in school safety.”

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## Boynton Beach man pulls woman from burning car

### As others record wreck, he jumps in to save her

**Giuseppe Sabella**  
Palm Beach Post  
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Leo Zupo is a longtime Boynton Beach resident and a jack-of-all-trades. As the owner of a local home improvement business, he takes on new jobs every day: painting, pressure washing, plumbing, flooring and remodeling.

Now, he can add lifesaving to the list.

Zupo, 39, had just picked up a load of sand for a paving job on the morning of April 1 when he saw a wreck unfold in the distance, near the intersection of Gateway Boulevard and Lawrence Road. An Oldsmobile sedan and a Volvo SUV

came into focus as he drove closer to the scene.

The Volvo sat with its bumper crushed and its front-right tire bent at an angle, but the driver was safe, so Zupo directed his attention to the Oldsmobile.

Its hood was peeled back and Zupo could see small flames beginning to form in the engine. Smoke poured into the car while a woman sat motionless in the driver’s seat — apparently unconscious after the crash.

“Everybody is jumping out of their cars to record or take pictures with their phone and I’m thinking, ‘This is crazy,’” said Zupo, the owner of Super Zupo Home Improvement.

He embodied his superhero alter ego and jumped into action, blocking oncoming traffic with his truck, running to

the Oldsmobile and assessing the situation.

The wreck had created a gap in the door jamb, so Zupo used his fingers to grasp the inside of the door and pull as hard as he could. To his surprise, the door popped open and startled the woman.

“She woke up and I told her we gotta move pretty quick,” he said.

But she couldn’t walk, Zupo said, so he yanked her from the burning vehicle and pulled her to a nearby sidewalk. It wasn’t long before the fire completely engulfed the front of her car.

With both drivers safe, Zupo joined the other onlookers as the sound of a fire truck grew closer.

“I was just hoping nothing happens to me,” Zupo said, reflecting on the moment he decided to help. “I have my son

that’s 3 years old, and I just lost my own dad three months ago.”

He said the woman later called to offer her thanks, along with a gift card to Longhorn Steakhouse, but her gratitude was plenty.

Zupo’s only hope is that more people offer a helping hand when given the chance, whether that means jumping into action or calling 911.

“I just know I was there at the right time, and it’s crazy that nobody else wanted to help,” he said. “Everybody is quick to grab their phones and record.”

*Giuseppe Sabella is a reporter covering Boynton Beach and Lake Worth Beach at The Palm Beach Post, part of the USA TODAY Network – Florida. You can reach him at [gsabella@pbpost.com](mailto:gsabella@pbpost.com). Help support our journalism and subscribe today.*