

## REPORTED TAB GROWS FOR REFURBISHING OF NITRO'S NEW FIRE BOAT

Publication: THE CHARLESTON GAZETTE  
Published: Saturday, April 10, 2010  
Page: 10A  
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**Nitro city** officials spent almost \$8,000 to paint a new **city** fire boat, not the \$3,500 they originally said.

In November, officials in Charleston gave **Nitro** a fire boat. **Nitro** Mayor Rusty Casto said that Fire Chief Ernie Hedrick then asked one of his firefighters to get bids for the paint job.

Casto initially said that three people bid on painting the boat, but one of them, Greg Chandler of Chandler's Body Shop, said he was never contacted by **city** officials about the job.

Activist Wanda Carney filed a Freedom of Information Act request about the boat after someone within **Nitro city** government told her the paint job had not been properly bid out. In his reply to Carney, Casto said oral bids had been taken on painting the boat.

At a **Nitro City Council** meeting this week, **Nitro City** Treasurer John Young said three bids were taken on painting the boat, but what appears to be a handwritten bid sheet lists only two. **City** officials cut a check to Chris Turley for \$3,475 to paint the boat.

But that isn't the total price tag. In all, **city** officials wrote three separate checks for different aspects of painting the boat, including one to Tim McBurney for \$3,500 for prep work, and one for \$800 to Beam Blasting LLC. The total cost of painting the boat comes to \$7,775.

Last week, Casto said that any **city** purchase over \$3,500 must be formally bid, but that information was incorrect.

Under **Nitro city** law, any purchase of more than \$5,000 must be bid out, and **city** officials must get sealed, written bids. There is no mention of oral bids in the **city** code.

The handwritten bid sheet that Casto sent to Carney lists one bid from Mark Roberts of Rocky Fork Enterprises for \$15,957, one from McBurney for \$3,500 for body work on the boat and one from Turley for \$3,500 to paint the boat. The \$800 charge from Beam Blasting LLC does not appear on the bid sheet at all.

Carney said Hedrick knew it would cost more than \$5,000 to get the boat painted, so split up the invoices to keep from getting formal bids.

Hedrick did not return a telephone call on Friday.

Carney turned over copies of the checks and other information to Kanawha County prosecutors.

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