

OCTOBER 20, 1993

## Clearwater keeps secret on Scientology

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CLEARWATER — City commissioners decided Tuesday how they'll handle an ordinance opposed by the Church of Scientology but won't say what their decision was.

Mayor Rita Garvey said attorneys working on behalf of the city have filed an appeal to a federal appellate court ruling that declared parts of the ordinance unconstitutional, but she did not elaborate.

All five city commissioners offered "no comments" about the substance of their secret meeting and referred questions to attorney Alan Zimmet, who did not return telephone calls Tuesday.

Unlike most governmental meetings which are open to the public and press, Tuesday's was exempt from Florida's Government-in-the-Sunshine laws. The state allows governments to discuss pending legal issues in private.

Commissioners adopted the Charitable Solicitations Ordinance 10 years ago following a series of hearings on the Church of Scientology. During the hearings, critics claimed the church was a profit-making scheme, not a religion.

Commissioners maintain the ordinance would have treated all religions equally, requiring them to provide the city information on how the churches spend contributions.

The ordinance was never enforced because Scientologists, and other religions, challenged it in court.

More than 50 Scientologists have written city commissioners in the last two days asking them to

See SECRET, Page 4

## Secret decision made on Scientology battle

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■ From Page 1

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give up the legal fight, which is estimated to have cost the city more than \$200,000 so far.

In addition to having part of the ordinance thrown out by the federal appellate court, the Scientologists also won a major victory this month with the Internal Revenue Service, finally securing the status of tax-exempt religion.

"I have been a property owner and a resident of the city of Clearwater since July of 1989," reads one letter to Garvey. "I am also a member of the Church of Scientology and have been since 1971. I also happen to be your next-door neighbor, Mayor Garvey."

The letter from Paul J. Missonis Jr. noted that five Scientologists

decision from the elected official point of view as to the Scientology organization that calls itself a church."

Churches that keep accurate books aren't worried about making them open to their congregations and the public, Garvey said.

Almost all the letters close with the statement, "stop wasting taxpayers' money on this ordinance."

Scientology spokesman Richard Haworth said the church did not ask members to write city commissioners. But it did offer information on the ordinance and the fax number to the city managers office to church members interested in writing to commissioners.

"As you know, we, as a church, investigate sources of oppression, and expose them," Scientologist Mark DeEulio, of Tampa, wrote, warning commissioners that Scien-