

Chronicle' to join lawsuit

Watchdog group says city withheld public documents

By **Sandy Hodson** | *Staff Writer*

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The Augusta Chronicle filed court papers Wednesday seeking to join a lawsuit against the city of Augusta.

The lawsuit filed last month by the Association for Fair Government alleges that public records have been unreasonably withheld.

The association filed a petition for mandamus, which seeks a court order to force the city's procurement department to perform its official role in a lawful manner.

The association is a collection of local residents who are concerned about the workings of government and public funds, said the group's attorney, Robert Mullins.

Late Wednesday afternoon, The Chronicle's attorney filed a motion seeking to intervene in the lawsuit.

The Chronicle contends that its requests to view public documents at the city's procurement department have been met with demands for fees and restrictions.

In response to an Open Records request to review four contract files last month, Procurement Director Geri Sams responded that her department could not meet the Open Records Act's three-day deadline, would need to charge The Chronicle at least \$85 and would make files available only after normal business hours.

The Association for Fair Government's petition further seeks a court order to force the procurement department to open files on noncompetitive contracts.

The petition also seeks a restraining order to prevent any alteration of documents.

The association alleges that it has found evidence that records have been electronically deleted from the city commission's documents pertaining to various procurement business.

A hearing date has been set for Tuesday afternoon before Judge Carl C. Brown Jr. in Richmond County Superior Court.

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