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STATE

Black, White, & Green: Why is the Tennessee Comptroller taking such an interest in the town of Mason?

“We’ve proven that we are capable and able to handle the town’s affairs because we showed them the numbers,” said Virginia Rivers, Vice Mayor of Mason.

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Published: 12:54 PM CDT March 26, 2022

Updated: 12:54 PM CDT March 26, 2022



MEMPHIS, Tenn. — State auditors were in Mason, Tennessee, Friday going over the books for the financially troubled town.

Facing public blowback for threatening the town to surrender its charter or else, the state comptroller met with town leaders earlier this week and came up with what he described as positive plan for moving forward.





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But town leaders told ABC 24 they aren't so sure.

The tall water tower in the tiny Tipton County town of Mason, Tennessee, shows you just how long it's been around. And the size of its city hall shows it's never been a boom town.

Far from it.

Decades of financial problems were only made worse when Mason's private prison, the town's major employer, was told it could no longer house federal inmates.

So comptroller Jason Mumpower recently came in with an ultimatum that's now being walked back. If what state auditors in Mason can confirm, the town claims it's been working to pay down its debt.

"We've proven that we are capable and able to handle the town's affairs because we showed them the numbers," said Virginia Rivers, Vice Mayor of Mason.

Like so much else in this part of the state, so much of what's going on is about black and white.

Blacks make up the majority of Mason, but only recently were voted in power.

Before that, most of the mismanagement was under white leadership. A town clerk embezzled \$100,000 and a public works superintendent was indicted for paying himself \$600,000 over eight years.

"I think it's still racial and it has something to do with the fact who's running the town," said Rivers.

But Rivers also says it's also about green.

With Mason just five minutes from the massive Blue Oval City plant Ford Motors is about to build, suddenly Mason may be on the cusp of being a boomtown.

And while she's hopeful the state will decide to scale back its oversight once it goes over the numbers it got Friday, right now nothing is in writing.

Vice Mayor Rivers said the state could scale back its financial oversight as early as June.

For his part, comptroller Mumpower denies race had anything to do with his decision to take over the town's finances, pointing out the previous two times his office has done this, the towns were majority white.



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