



Presque Isle City Council Meeting

Monday, October 26, 2015

5:00 PM

Presque Isle Council Chambers

Call to Order - Roll Call

Present: Chairwoman Emily Smith, Vice-Chairman Michael Chasse, Councilors Richard Engels, Craig Green, Peter Hallowell, Leigh Smith and Randy Smith

City Manager Martin Puckett and City Clerk Beverly A Labbe were also present.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairwoman Emily Smith called the meeting to order at 5:05 PM and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

WORKSHOP

Lewis Cousins, Tax Assessor, gave a synopsis of the tax assessing budget. Cousins stated the department has changed very little from 2015. Cousins noted the department has a reserve account (Appraisal Services) that is utilized for appraisals when abatement requests are made. Any funds that are left in that account at the end of the year are "rolled over". Currently, there is \$11,450 in that account.

There is a part-time employee who was hired earlier this year to assist the department with digitizing tax records. To date, 47% of the cards and 70% of all the sketches have been scanned. Cousins believes in January of 2016, the public will have access to tax cards and maps on the City's website for free.

In the future, Puckett stated he is hoping to add multiple layers to the GIS program, such as zoning maps, water/sewer lines, culverts and drainage lines. Cousins stated there is an initial cost of \$3,000 to set up the GIS system, with an annual fee of \$1,800 thereafter.

Ken Arndt, Planning and Development Director, addressed the Council regarding his budget. Arndt began by stating it had been a long term goal of the City to implement a GIS system. The aspiration was for the City to have its own printers and a dedicated staff person. Arndt now believes it would be more advantageous for the City to contract with an outside vendor and continue to receive assistance from the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

Arndt stated the department is responsible for site plan review, administering Presque Isle Development Fund, subdivision review, and the newly approved First Homebuyers Program.

Pat Webb, City Treasurer, presented her budget to the Council. Webb stated she is responsible for IT and the Finance Department. Webb stated excise tax revenue has been increased 3.5% over 2015. A new auditor was selected in 2015, therefore audit fees have been reduced.

Until union negotiations are completed, Webb stated the overall budget includes a 1.2% wage increase.

Webb stated if the City borrows \$9,000,000 for the community center, the debt service payment will be \$675,000 in 2016.

City Manager Puckett stated that revenue sharing has been increased by \$80,000. The contract with Crown Ambulance will expire in June of 2016, and Puckett believes when the City renegotiates the contract, fees can be increased.

Darrell White, Fire Chief, presented his budget to the Council. White stated the department is responsible for fire suppression, Code Enforcement and the Echo Lake Sewer system. White stated the budget being presented this evening mirrors 2015, and depending on union negotiations, some modest adjustments may be needed. Due to most training classes being held in Augusta, the Code Enforcement Officer has not been able to attend. Therefore, White noted there has been an increase to the travel and training account.

White believes when the contract with Crown Ambulance ends, the City should renegotiate the next contract to include actual costs. Currently, TAMC pays the City \$30/hour for calls outside Presque Isle. When there is a call, often times the department has to callback a firefighter, with a mandatory three hours at \$50/hour, to cover the vacancy. Councilor Green reminded the Council that union contracts were approved after the agreement with TAMC was finalized, which resulted in callbacks costing more than what TAMC pays.

Councilor Chasse asked if the department should consider expanding the ambulance service to include transports. Chief White stated the department would have to be licensed for transports, and those individuals who are licensed as EMTs would have to "upgrade" their license to paramedics. That process would take two years and is expensive.

Councilor Engels asked if there was a possibility since the Fire and Police Departments share a building, if employees could be cross-trained. Chief White believes it takes two very different disciplines and if a police officer is out on a complaint and a fire tone is received, a police officer cannot stop what they are doing to respond to a fire call.

Councilor Green asked if the City started their own ambulance service, if that model would include other communities. Chief White envisions the service being open for any community who wants to participate, but cautioned against placing a service in a community that cannot sustain the service.

Councilor Emily Smith asked about billing for the expanded services. Chief White stated Caribou does their own billing, and believes the City could contract with them.

In regards to capital reserves, Chief White stated there are two pieces of equipment that need replacement. The first is a tanker truck that is thirty years old, which will need to be replaced within the next two years. White stated this piece of equipment serves as an engine as well. Currently the City receives an ISO rating of 3, but if the City removes the tanker truck out of circulation, it will affect the City's rating. The second piece of equipment is a car the Code Enforcement Officer is currently driving. It has 180,000 miles and the transmission is slipping. White believes the car is too old, and is not worth repairing.

Councilor Engels asked if either of these vehicles could be replaced with military surplus equipment. Chief White stated the car could possibly be replaced, but not the tanker. White stated since 2007, the department has applied for a grant to replace the tanker, but have not been successful. White believes a grant is more likely to be approved if the City is setting money aside.

Councilor Hallowell believes the Fire Department's budget should include allocations for repair of equipment. In the past few years, the Council has had to approve additional funding for repairs because no money had been earmarked.

Regarding the Echo Lake Sewer system, Chief White stated the system needs to be repaired. The water pipe is broken, which is allowing ground water to seep into the system. The remedy would be to insert a new pipe inside the broken one. Chief White stated Nick Archer of DEP has some funding available to help repair the system. The City received an engineering report that estimated the repair cost at \$80,000. Since that time, they have received an estimate from a local contractor who can do the repair for \$26,000. The City has \$17,000 in a dedicated reserve account.

City Manager Puckett stated he will be meeting with the users of the system during the winter. Currently, the fees assessed are tied to the Utilities District, and he does not believe they should be.

Police Chief Matt Irwin started with the Public Safety Building. Irwin noted that the phone/fax charges have been moved from the Fire and Police Department budgets to the public safety building budget.

A few years ago, all building maintenance accounts were moved to its own department. When the department head retired, the responsibility fell to Dana Fowler. Starting in 2016, Irwin stated the Police Department will be assuming responsibility for maintenance of the public safety building. The public safety building has metal siding. Because of the design of the building, in the winter time, salt is pushed up against the building, which has caused the siding to rust. The repair estimate is approximately \$15,000. There is also some deterioration in the Police Department bays and the drywall in the front entrance is falling. The estimated cost for those repairs are \$55,000.

Chief Irwin stated for the past few years, the capital reserve account has funded 1.5 cars instead of two, creating the problem of an aged fleet. Irwin asked the Council to increase this line item by \$15,000, which will allow funding for two vehicles per year.

Irwin stated he has a few ideas to increase revenues. The City could adopt an ordinance that would allow the department to write tickets for those who park in fire zones. Currently, the department cannot write tickets unless the store owner gives authorization. The ordinance could set the fee at \$250/violation, and would allow the department to fine someone anywhere in the City.

Irwin stated a lot of money is spent on training officers. Irwin is recommending additional fees be assessed when a vehicle is towed (ex. for OUI charges, etc.) to help recover some of those training costs. Chief Irwin noted the City does not receive revenue from traffic violations.

In regards to the operational budget, the Sheriff's Department has stopped transporting prisoners for Presque Isle. Consequently, prisoners are staying in Caribou longer, resulting in additional costs for meals and lodging. The other option is to transport prisoners to Houlton, but that requires overtime. According to the law, Irwin stated prisoners have the right to go to court within 24 hours of their arrest.

Chief Irwin stated in 2016, he requested another dog, but the City Manager denied the request. Irwin stated if enough drug forfeiture funds are received, he would like to utilize those funds for another dog. Currently, Wal-Mart donates food, which saves the City approximately \$1,000/year. Irwin acknowledged there are on-going costs associated with the dogs, such as overtime for the handler and training once a month. Irwin stated the department has \$4,000 in drug forfeiture funds now, but does not know when additional funds will be received. The initial cost of the dog is \$6,000 and \$2,000 for training. Irwin stated 70-80% of crimes committed are drug or alcohol related.

Chief Irwin stated there has been a request from the Council to increase police presence within the City. Irwin stated with only two officers/shift that is difficult to do. Irwin stated the department has experienced a problem in retaining officers because of the 24 hour shifts.

The department currently has ten vehicles, and believes if the cars are more visible to the public, that might heighten the sense of police presence in the community. In order to accomplish that, Irwin would like the City to enact a policy that would allow officers to take vehicles home, if the officer resides in Presque Isle. Irwin believes a lot of time and money is lost when officers have to transfer their work items from their personal car to the work car. Irwin believes City vehicles would be better taken care of because they would be treated like a home office.

Chief Irwin stated a few years ago, a detective position was eliminated. When he first started, there were two detectives, now there are none. Irwin stated there has been \$313,000 reported in stolen property, but there are no officers to investigate the crimes. Irwin believes this does not represent the City well.

Councilor Hallowell asked about overtime at the Police Department. Chief Irwin stated most of the officers are close to vacation and sick time maximums. Officers have to take extended vacations to draw down their time. While the officer is out on vacation and/or sick leave, another officer is filling the shift at time and a half. Councilor Hallowell asked to see the overtime hours at the Police Department before Matthew Irwin became the chief. Chief Irwin stated the City pays approximately \$250,000 in overtime, but a lot of that overtime is airport coverage.

Executive Session

BE IT RESOLVED by Councilor Chasse, seconded by Councilor Randy Smith to enter into Executive Session at 8:05 PM pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (C) for discussion of Economic Development. **Vote 7-0.**

Councilors came out of Executive Session, with no action taken at 8:35 PM.

BE IT RESOLVED by Councilor Leigh Smith, seconded by Councilor Green to enter into Executive Session at 8:36 PM pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405 (6) (D) for discussion of Labor Negotiations. **Vote 7-0.**

Councilors came out of Executive Session, with no action taken at 8:45 PM.

Adjournment

BE IT RESOLVED by Councilor Hallowell, seconded by Councilor Randy Smith to adjourn the meeting at 8:45 PM. **Vote 7-0.**

Attested by: _____
Beverly A Labbe, City Clerk