

2012 city budget accepted by council members

By Norma Martinez

A public hearing preceded the regular Bird City City Council meeting on Aug. 1 in order to hear comments, objections, or suggestions, concerning the published proposed 2012 city budget. No members of the community were present to object to the proposed collection and use of funds therefore, the 2012 Budget was accepted by the Council.

Following the adjournment of the public hearing, Mayor Troy Burr called the regular, council meeting to order.

Mowing Agreement

Continuing with last month's meeting, a great deal of discussion was held on who is responsible for mowing along U.S. 36. Councilman Frank Serrano felt that the verbal agreement between the Kansas Department of Transportation employees and Brad Schneider, city maintenance supervisor, was in the best interest of the city.

The verbal agreement included arrangements for city employees to maintain the ditches within the city limits along U.S. 36, in exchange for free road salt, asphalt and snow removal assistance from department of transportation employees.

DeAnza Ambrosier, city clerk, had located and submitted a copy of a highway maintenance agreement between the city and the department of transportation dated 1978. She discovered the agreement was still in effect, however, the "maintenance" the contract referred to was more specifically related to the road itself, including pothole repairs.

Mr. Schneider reported that he may have spent 29 hours mowing before the 2010 Thresher Show and, in exchange, received four loads of asphalt and two loads of salt.

Mayor Burr was concerned about maintaining a positive working relationship with the state Highway Maintenance Department, however, he wanted to make sure Bird City was not doing anything underhanded or taking advantage of the state.

"I'm in favor of maintaining a working agreement with the city and state," he said.

Councilman Hal Sager agreed with the mayor that a good relationship with the state is important. Mayor Burr instructed Mr. Schneider to continue with the verbal agreement.

Contracts

Ms. Ambrosier submitted contractor bids and contracts for five rehabilitation projects and one handicapped ramp project for the council to approve. Two contractors bid on the projects with Felton Construction, Norton, submitting the lowest bid on five of the rehabs, including the ramp project.

Ms. Ambrosier explained that although Mr. Felton was the lowest bidder, the grant allows the city to consider awarding some of the contracts to the other bidder, Randall Construction, Gove, in order to expedite the projects to meet the timeline.

Two of the projects were bid above the dollar limit of grant funds; therefore the contracts can only be signed if the homeowner is able to contribute the remaining funds needed. Of these projects, the council awarded one to Randall Construction and the other to Felton Construction, contingent upon homeowner contribution. The other four projects were divided between the two contractors.

Committee reports

Equipment

Councilman Shannon Ambrosier, Equipment Committee, submitted an "Equipment Disposal Request Form" he would like to see implemented when city employees feel the need to dispose of or sell city equipment/property and when requesting to replace tools/equipment. This will enable the city to better identify unused property as well as document the sale or disposal of such items. The form would document a description of the item(s), any make/model or identifying numbers associated with the items, where and for how long the property has been stored, the estimated value of the property, and the reason for the request.

The form would also document the date of the sale/disposal, the amount of the sale, contact information of the recipient of the item and relevant signatures of approval.

Mayor Burr stated he was in favor of implementing the form as it would also be beneficial for insurance purposes. After brief discussion, the council approved the utilization of the new form.

Park and Recreation

Councilman Wade Carmichael, Parks and Recreation, reported that the pool season came and went with relatively few concerns.

He was made aware of the water being a bit murky at times, however, that issue has been addressed. He said the Pool Committee had hosted a couple of fundraisers and a new sun shade will be purchased with the resulting proceeds.

Mr. Carmichael also reported that Sherry and Shayla Cherry, Big Ed's Steakhouse, had approached him and stated they would like to do something to help raise money for park/pool improvements. In turn, they made and sold desserts at Big Ed's and plan on donating the proceeds, approximately \$1,000, to a future project.

Mr. Carmichael requested and received permission from the rest of the council to offer a public "thank you" to the Cherry's for their efforts.

Utility

Councilman Serrano, Utility Committee, stated he would have liked to have seen a summer employee hired to assist the maintenance department with their duties.

Discussion led to the need and cost associated with hiring a private backhoe operator to dig the holes for each water leak as well as paying a high hourly wage for his assistance with the actual repairs. Mayor Burr asked what other alternatives may be available.

"We need to have at least three people," added Councilman Sager, "and we need someone to operate a backhoe and the (private contractor) has jumped in and helped. It seems far feasible to keep him helping us."

Streets

Councilman Sager reported the streets have been getting repaired and the remaining sections needing patched are on the list to get done.

Water rates

Mayor Burr reported that he had spoke with Chris Miller, Miller and Associates, regarding his report of the profit/loss of the city's Water and Sewer Fund. Mayor Burr noted the rapidly declining reserves from year to year and suggested the council consider raising the amount of the city charges for water. (See article on raising water rates)

Administration

Ms. Ambrosier submitted a "Purchase/Service Request Form" for the council's consideration of implementing. Mayor Burr explained that approximately a month ago he had implemented a rule for

employees that any purchase over \$100 must pre-approved by two council members or the mayor. Because of this rule and to eliminate any confusion, the form would serve as a means of documenting the request to include the item or service, the estimated amount of funds needed, the reason for the purchase, and whether the purchase would be subject to bid letting, per city policy.

Ms. Ambrosier explained that the form would then be signed by two council members and/or the mayor. She reiterated that the form would serve the council by being better informed of purchases and

it would also serve the employees by having documentation of prior approval.

Councilman Sager suggested allowing verbal permission for purchases between \$100 and \$500 and then implementing the form for purchases over \$500. Councilman Carmichael stated that he trusts the employees to use good judgment when making purchases and that it would be inconvenient that it would be inconvenient that it be tracked down just to sign a form.

Discussion led to routine purchases such as chemicals which cost over \$100 and whether the form should be used in those situa-

tions. The council determined that utilization of the form may prove to be beneficial for documentation purposes; therefore, they agreed to implement the process for a one month trial. Mr. Schneider was instructed to complete the form on each purchases/service that exceeds \$100, with the exception of routine city purchases.

Ms. Ambrosier was approved to attend a training in Oakley, Aug. 26, and another in Hays on Sept. 9.

Due to the Labor day holiday on Sept. 5, the next city council meeting will be held on Tuesday, Sept. 6, at 7 p.m.

Declining revenue/increased cost affecting water rates

During the Aug. 1, Bird City City Council meeting, discussion was held on the declining revenue and increased production costs affecting the water and sewer fund.

One area of concern is the hiring of a private contractor to assist with water leak repairs, which includes backhoe operations and labor charges. The cost associated with the additional help has ranged from \$365 to \$2,000 per line repair. This expense has been necessary, said maintenance supervisor, Brad Schneider, because the backhoe owned by the city is not large enough to reach the water lines.

"What are our alternatives in saving this expense?" asked Troy Burr, mayor

Councilman Hal Sager said the cost of purchasing a back hoe could be as much as \$30,000. Plus, (purchasing a new backhoe) would require hiring another person to operate it.

Phyllis Carson, city treasurer, reminded them that right now they did not have the funds to consider purchasing new equipment.

"I have never seen the fund this low in all the years I've been here," she said.

"We are depleting our water

funds," said Mayor Burr. "What we are running into is—we are going to run out of funds."

In an attempt to determine whether the current water rates are adequate to continue to supply water to Bird City residents, the council has turned to Miller and Associates to calculate past, current and projected costs associated with the city's water production, which includes costs associated with water leak repairs, supplies, energy costs, employee wages, etc.

According to the preliminary report submitted to the council, the average expenditures for the water department for the last 5 years has been approximately \$119,900 and the 5-year average water department revenue has been \$91,800, creating a 5-year average deficit of approximately \$28,100.

However, considering the average income and expenses for only the last two years, the city has been operating on a budget deficit of around \$44,400. The report also suggests that rates are not sustainable at the current level and should be raised in order to provide for the deficit amount.

Miller and Associates is also assigned with the task of deter-

mining a plan of action for the city to replace its aging water lines. The cost of a distribution upgrade will be determined by many factors, but may cost up to \$500,000. Should this be the case, the city may need to consider a loan as a funding source for the system replacement and an estimated repayment schedule should be considered when calculating any water rate increases.

Currently, residents are charged \$14 for up to 2,000 gallons of water used and an additional \$1.40 is charged for each additional 1,000 gallons. The last water rate increase was implemented by the city in August 2006.

The city currently has approximately 295 active water meters. Therefore, in order to generate enough revenue to provide for the current deficit amount and possible future loan payments, the city must consider raising the current water rates by as much as 40 to 60 percent.

Kevin Berens, city attorney, said he will draft a proposed ordinance to have available at the next meeting.

Further discussion on the issue was tabled until the Sept. 6 meeting.

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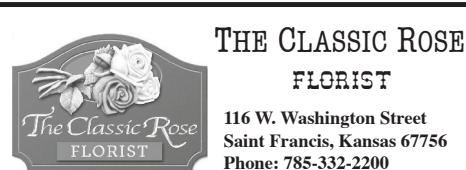
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