

Citizen queries council about city budget

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

Friday, 21 September 2012 14:54 -



Rarely do Gothenburg citizens show up for hearings when the city budget is reviewed.

But last week, Lois Stanton had questions for the Gothenburg City Council during its budget and tax request hearing.

Before the council's regular meeting on Sept. 11, Stanton wondered—with wholesale power rates poised to rise 3.9%—why the city planned to ask for a 4.2% increase in charges to citizens and businesses.

Stanton was told that the difference allowed for the purchase and maintenance of equipment in the electrical department and to meet personnel costs.

The public works division is supported solely by user fees, and is included in the budget, even though taxes are not used to fund it, officials said.

Additionally, Stanton wanted to know about certain budget increases and contingency funds.

Contingency funds, officials said, allow for the city to pay for such things as weather-related damage, projects, equipment needs, etc. without having to amend the budget.

Revenue-neutral funds, such as KENO and city sales tax, were also discussed.

For example, \$100,000 is budgeted in the electrical department for a power line to Gothenburg Improvement Company's industrial site to make it site-ready for industry.

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Community development grants and sales tax funds, that are revenue neutral, will pay for the project. Such funds must be built into the budget but don't involve taxpayer support, officials said.

Stanton also questioned why credit cards couldn't be used at the airport and was told there's a card-reading machine inside the building.

The Airport Authority board wants to install self-fuel equipment that can be accessed with a credit card when airport personnel is unavailable.

The council thanked Stanton for coming to the meeting and asking questions, noting that "most people don't care."

The public hearing began at 7:20 p.m., instead of 7 p.m., because the council needed a quorum to conduct business.

On another matter, the council decided to table a request from Dan Holbein until the Oct. 2 meeting.

Holbein wants to buy a fire-damaged home from Harvey and Betty Wing, at 218 Ninth St., but would like more than 60 days to tear it down himself.

Wing received notice from the city that the home had been declared unsafe and needed to be repaired or torn down but Holbein said he couldn't afford to have it done commercially if he buys the property.

In other business, the council:

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approved a contract with Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers to inspect two city bridges for \$300 apiece. Inspection data will be entered into a data base for record keeping.

The Dawson County highway superintendent and engineer used to do the inspections but will no longer.

The bridges are First Street and Highway 47, Fourth Street and the Nebraska Public Power District trail race and the closed bridge west of Lake Helen.

amended a contract with the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality that adds \$15,000 more to the cost of rehabilitating Lake Helen and gives the mayor the authority to sign the new document. Clymer said the additional money will end up being cost neutral because of other costs that will be decreased. NDEQ is helping to rehabilitate the lake with funds and expertise.

On a related matter, Clymer said he attended a meeting of the Central Platte Natural Resources District board and thinks the board wants to help monetarily with the Lake Helen project. Local residents Jay Richeson and Brian Keiser are on the board. According to the CPNRD agenda, directors plan to act on the city's request for funding at their Sept. 27 meeting.

voted to introduce and suspend the next two readings of a measure that vacates city right of way a foot on a downtown city block between Ninth and 10th Street.

Troy and Chivonne Daum have bought a building in the block and are remodeling it to house Five-Star Flooring. The store is on the property line and brick and stucco improvements will push it over the line.

named the following financial institutions as depositories for city funds during 2012-13—First State Bank, Gothenburg State Bank, The Investment Service Company, The Hartford (pension), Wells Fargo Bank, Great Western Bank and Equity Bank (Corporate Plan Management).

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agreed to provide a porta-potty for a new after-school soccer program the rest of the Fridays of September on a practice field south of the city swimming pool.

authorized Clymer to advertise that the city is taking sealed bids for surplus bicycles collected by the police department.

Officials hope the bicycles will then be donated by the buyer to local resident Stan Jordan who will repair them for the fire department's Christmas gift giveaway to children in need.

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