

Council hires Benson for city administrator position

By Jeanne Davant

After nearly two years of being without a city administrator, Manitou Springs has hired Jack Benson to fill the position.

Council approved Benson's employment agreement at its special meeting Tuesday.

Benson will be paid a base salary of \$92,000 a year and will be eligible for annual salary increases of up to 4 percent at Council's discretion. The city is paying half of Benson's moving expenses, up to \$1,000.

Benson, who was chosen from a field of more than 65 applicants, will join the city staff May 2.

Currently manager of Summit County's E-911 Emergency Communications Center, Benson has more than 25 years of public administration experience. He recently served as town manager of Dillon and was county administrator and human services director for Clear Creek County.

Benson earned a bachelor of science degree from Northern Illinois University and a master of business administration from the University of Phoenix.

Finance Director Mike Leslie has been acting city administrator since former City Administrator Verne Witham resigned because of health issues.

Council hired the executive search firm of KRW Associates in October to field candidates for the job. Six finalists were chosen in February. After one candidate dropped out, the five finalists met residents at city personnel at an open house March 11. Council interviewed the finalists March 12.

Ennovate contract dead in the water

The need to immediately replace the boiler at the Aquatics Center has swamped the Ennovate energy performance contract, Council learned Tuesday.

Council in October approved the contract, which called for \$371,000 in energy-saving improvements to city buildings. Ennovate, working with the Governor's Energy Office, guaranteed that energy savings would pay for the projects over the life of the contract. But on March 8, Council failed to authorize a lease-purchase agreement to finance the work. Leslie continued to negotiate with AAIG to extend the closing date for the agreement until Council could get information it requested at the March 8 meeting.

The Aquatics Center accounted for the majority of the improvements in the contract, including replacement of the old and inefficient boiler.

After the boiler failed March 11, Aquatics Center Director Roy Chaney was able to get it started again, but it is not fully functional.

Leslie said Ennovate viewed replacement of the boiler as integral to the contract and asked that the city try to continue to use it until financing could be approved. Ennovate representatives expected that they could have the boiler ready to install by April 18, the earliest date when a finance agreement could be approved by ordinance.

In the meantime, the city had the boiler evaluated by a plumbing technician, who advised that the boiler was running at a dangerously high temperature and was being over-stressed.

Leslie said he told Ennovate and AAIG the boiler would have to be replaced immediately.

"The need to purchase the boiler destroyed Ennovate's interest in the contract," Leslie said.

After reviewing bids from four companies, Council authorized an agreement with Parkey's Refrigeration Co. to replace the boiler at a cost of \$33,470.

Installation will begin today, Public Works Director Bruno Pothier said. The pool will remain open, except for a three-hour period. The installation will be complete within a week, and the old boiler will be , u recycled.

One of the reasons Council members rejected the Ennovate contract was that some thought the city could do the work more cheaply by performing it in-house or bidding it out, avoiding interest rates and Ennovate's commission.

"We had talked about a longer conversation, setting aside the money to pay Ennovate and apply it to many of the projects Ennovate suggested," Councilman Rick Barry said. At this point, the city owes Ennovate only about \$6,000 for the energy audit it performed. He

Coreen Toll, who headed the energy services contract committee, said she would be watching to see that Council moves forward with an alternative plan.

Barry asked that a work session be scheduled to discuss it.

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