

Council approves using website to post ordinances

By Anthony Welch

In the age of the Internet, the City of Manitou Springs is looking to get away from, what's becoming, the old-fashioned way of publishing its ordinances in the newspaper and will post them on the City website instead.

Manitou Springs City Council approved an ordinance establishing that ordinance publication requirements be satisfied by posting them on the website during Council's regular meeting Tuesday night.

The idea is/the brainchild of City Clerk Donna Kast who said she was trying to find ways to use the City's money in the best way possible. Kast researched and found other cities implementing the web to post ordinances.

"It seems like an old way to get information out," Kast said.

The City pays an average of \$2,000 a year to publish ordinances in the Pikes Peak Bulletin. That amount hit the \$3,000 mark in 2010 because of lengthy medical marijuana ordinances, Kast said. She mentioned, that the average distribution of the Bulletin each week is around 953.

"When you think about how we have 2,200 residences, that doesn't even represent half of the households we have in Manitou Springs," Kast said.

City Attorney Jeff Parker said while there are state statutes requiring publishing ordinances in newspapers, being that Manitou is a home-ruled municipality, the statutes don't apply to the City. However, some provisions in city code require things like zoning and planning items be published in the paper.

Kast also cited the cost of publishing the City's quarterly newsletter as an expense the City could save by using its website. The Bulletin bills the City \$100 a page, with a minimum of four pages, for the newsletter. That price is \$155 a page less than the Bulletin's normal rate for a full-page ad.

Nonetheless, depending on how big City department heads' stories are, the newsletter runs close to \$3,000 a year.

City Administrator Jack Benson encouraged the Council to still print ordinance titles and reference points to where they can be found in the newspaper.

"The issue I have is even though

people are moving more toward digital media, there are still people who like to feel a piece of paper in their hand," he said.

The consensus of Council was to continue having the newsletter published, however maybe trying to limit or edit how large of stories employees write, in order to save money on printing.

"I find that I delete e-mail newsletters. It's laborious," Council-woman Aimee Cox said.

"The newspaper is very organic. I'll sit down with coffee. I'm still a little nostalgic with that. We have this really great relationship with the Bulletin."

Mayor Marc Snyder agreed, saying he likes the feel of a newspaper and thinks the Bulletin has been a great asset to the community. However, he's not sure the newspaper's budget should affect City decisions.

Presentation of proposed 2012 budget

Benson's PowerPoint presentation on the proposed 2012 budget said it all. A dramatic photo showing the sun breaking through dark clouds bearing the title, "Looking for the break in the storm," tells of the tough task Benson and City staff face with the budget.

The budget process Benson is looking at is to break it down into services rather than departments and putting an amount with those services, he said.

"As budgets get tighter, we're going to have to make some tough decisions," Benson said.

Other cities are struggling with certain revenues. Some are looking at 20 percent decline in property tax, according to Benson. Manitou Springs' property tax has gone down just two percent. Benson also cited the Gunderson Report, a financial health report conducted months back, which said the City has been spending within its needs.

In his draft summary, Benson notes that the City's expenses are up 7.02 percent from the previous year. Projected capital improvement fund expenses are up 23.38 percent, however Benson said most of those expenses are "wish list" items from staff rather than what's immediately needed.

The projected ending balance of the reserved fund is right near \$500,000. Snyder was thrilled by this number, saying that many a Council has strived to reach that number in the past.

"Keep in mind it's a preliminary balance," Benson said. "There are going to be people getting in line to take that balance down."

Benson also mentioned Council will no longer be tasked with meeting with department heads to discuss the budget. He plans on tackling that himself.

"You're bringing a fresh perspective on all our city operations," Snyder said. "I admire you for taking on the heavy lifting of talking to all the department heads and the budget."

A budget work session is scheduled for Tuesday at 7 p.m.

In other business, Council...

- Learned that Police Chief Mary Jo Smith announced her retirement, after serving for 26 years. Her last day will be Dec. 31.

- Heard a presentation from Business of Art Center artist Laura BenAmots and BAC Director Linda Boedeker on a new exhibit and book, "Battle Portraits: Wounded Lions Wounded Lambs." The exhibit, which begins in January, will feature BenAmots' drawings and paintings of soldiers, some of which suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Works will be included in a book. A portion of the book sales will go to Art Therapy, which works with soldiers suffering from PTSD.

- Approved a special event request for the Emma Crawford Coffin Races and Festival to be held Oct. 29.

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