

Clock ticking as Council fine-tunes 2012 budget

By Anthony Welch

It's getting down to the wire and much like Santa, Manitou Springs City Council is checking its list twice - and a whole lot more times than that.

City Administrator Jack Benson presented a "wish list" of sorts from various departments that detailed expenses from the Capital Improvements Fund at the Council's work session Tuesday night. Final revisions are being made, as Council must approve a first reading of the budget at its regular meeting on Tuesday. To make sure that happens, an extra work session is scheduled for Monday.

"I got to make sure you're getting what you need for this budget," Benson said. "I know it's been a seesaw back and forth."

The City's lease purchases are some of the bigger expenses, according to Benson. Those purchases for 2012 include a patrol vehicle for the police department's code enforcement officer, mobile data terminals for police vehicles, a patrol car for the police department, a cardiac monitor for the fire department, two four-wheel drive trucks for public services and new radios for the fire department.

The price tag for all of the above totals \$372,750.

Benson said he dropped all 10-year lease purchases from the budget. That included a plan to buy a used front end loader and a used motor grader. Instead, The City will purchase a used front end loader for \$80,000 and hold off on buying a motor grader until 2016, Benson said.

Among the Capital Improvements requests were a few items from the Manitou Pool, which stirred discussion amongst Council. One request is to rust proof the ceiling beams at the pool for \$25,000, and another request asks to replace failing lighting at the pool for \$15,000.

Mayor Marc Snyder questioned whether the beams needed maintenance. Benson informed him it was preventative maintenance of sorts, which he supports. Fixing the lighting was a safety issue that needed to be done, Benson added.

"Obviously, these things will rust through in about 700,000 years," Snyder said. "If it's a question of failure of these beams, you've seen these beams. They're not failing in this lifetime."

Benson reminded Council that he had yet to filter requests and hadn't nixed anyone's yet. He was only presenting them to Council.

Another pool requested was for \$60,000 to fund new aerobic and weightlifting equipment for the not-yet-built weight room addition. Benson said Pool Director Roy Chaney's original business plan was contingent on receiving donated used equipment from the fire department. However, the equipment is junk according to Benson, thus the need to buy equipment.

"These prices just blow my mind," Councilman Ed Klingman said.

"There's \$72,000 of pool improvements alone in this," Councilwoman Aimee Cox added. "I'm glad to see the \$1,900 there for a fan at the library."

Benson said the City is still messing around with the idea of the pool expansion. It has to decide if it wants to pursue a variance for the flood plain, so construction can commence, Benson said. The company originally contracted to do the work, Champion, is sitting on a \$40,000 down payment from the City.

Benson wrote a letter to the company explaining the situation, but it won't likely return the money, as it doesn't have to per the contract. Benson said he could pursue legal action against the company, but it would be tough to win.

"Part of the issue is do we want to go that route or get the expansion built," he said.

Snyder mentioned that two years ago when Council was facing tough financial times, it decided it wanted to put money into revenue-generating things. Cox wasn't so sure that the pool should be that particular thing.

"We know that most pools are losers. It's just how much can we endorse such a loss when we have police officers that make \$17.35 an hour," Cox said. "It's about what we want to make our priority."

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