

Council Briefly discusses City's lagging salary rates

By Anthony Welch

Manitou Springs City Administrator Jack Benson doesn't want the city to be a stepping stone where employees gain experience and then move on to better-paying communities.

Current Finance Director Mike Leslie is leaving in January, and Benson has examined City employee wages as the search for a new director begins. The matter was discussed at City Council's work session Tuesday night.

"Do you want people to commit to your community," Benson said. "Do you want high-quality people?"

While past Councils have made attempts to stay competitive by making Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA), salary levels are lagging behind by five to 10 percent, according to a memo Benson gave Council members earlier in the month. The City's compensation plan has not had a market adjustment since 1991.

"Clearly, we're not keeping up," Benson said.

Benson examined salaries in other communities with populations of 3,000 to 7,000. He also looked at the Colorado Municipal League's (CML) salary survey to compare pay rates. Benson has looked at both the lower end of salaries and the higher end. He'd like the City to strike a balance and offer salaries somewhere in the middle, he said.

Benson suggests the City create two classifications for employees - Management Level 1 and Management Level 2. Level 1 defines positions such as city clerk, librarian and pool director. The two classifications would have minimum, entry-level salaries of \$52,895 and \$71,923, respectively.

Regarding the finance director position, Benson recommended going with \$74,613 a year, as listed in the CML survey.

Councilwoman Aimee Cox said she likes Benson's idea of the two classifications. She also expressed concern over the current salaries of the City's police officers, who make roughly \$17 an hour, she said.

"I think this works as long we identify in our organization which managers fit those categories," Cox said. "We should be able to compensate our police and dispatchers more fairly."

Councilwoman Coreen Toll asked what turnover was like for City employees. Benson said that turnover is the highest with the police department and has been anywhere from 15 to 50 percent. He added that public safety salaries are the furthest behind averages.

Councilman Michael Gerbig said when Council does seriously take a look at increasing salaries, it should be based on what exactly people do and their performance. Benson agreed, saying he'd like to see performance evaluations.

"I don't think anyone here wants to not pay people," Councilman Matt Carpenter said. "The other component is what we can afford."

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