

Bouvier becomes full-time employee for civic center

By CRAIG MURPHY
Of the Keizertimes

Limited duration no more. When Kristian Bouvier became Event Center Coordinator for the Keizer Civic Center in January 2014, the future of the job was uncertain.

It was listed as limited duration, in essence needing to prove it was worthy of bringing in more funding in order to become a regular full-time position.

The last two budget cycles, the position stayed as limited duration as revenues continue to hover around the \$90,000 a year mark. Keizer Budget Committee members hotly debated the topic, with several questioning the wisdom of continuing to fund such a position.

Two things happened: budget committee members boosted marketing funding for the civic center from \$1,000

to \$6,000 and the rental arrangements changed in terms of fees, including getting rid of the "Tightwad Tuesday" special deal state agencies were taking advantage of.

The result has been a notable surge in revenue for the civic center. Revenue increased to \$115,844 last fiscal year and was at \$127,029 as of May 2. By the time the fiscal year ends June 30, revenue for the year is projected to be around \$135,000.

Because of that, Bouvier's position is now full-time with benefits.

City Manager Chris Eppley indicated at last month's Keizer Long Range Planning Task Force meeting the change would happen.

"I asked it to be funded as a regular position," Eppley said at the time. "It has been limited duration longer than a limited duration position should



Bouvier

be limited duration."

City Recorder Tracy Davis, who formerly oversaw the civic center and has worked closely with Bouvier, was among those expressing satisfaction at the May 5 budget committee meeting.

"This position has been invaluable," Davis said. "Kristian

Bouvier has done an excellent job bringing events to Keizer. She used the marketing money you generously put in last year's budget. She also did a study of rental rates to provide equality within the local market. I contribute a lot to Kristian and the marketing we have done."

Mayor Cathy Clark noted Bouvier works with Davis as well as front desk receptionist Allison Sebem, who took the position when Paula Collins transferred to the Keizer Police Department.

"Absolute kudos to Kristian Bouvier, you and Paula and now Allison," Clark told Davis.

Davis noted the great relationship extends to the Keizer Heritage Center and JoAnne Beilke as well.

"Kristian and JoAnne work together well," Davis said. "We have worked in tandem with

JoAnne a lot in the last year."

Clark noted the relationship has indeed benefited all.

"The Keizer Heritage Center has seen a significant increase in revenue," the mayor said. "They credit the relationship with Kristian and the staff here."

Councilor Amy Ryan had high praise for the work Bouvier has done.

"I have worked closely with Kristian on several events," Ryan said. "She's truly a rock star. We struggled last year with seeing a return on investment. Now we're in a high growth mode. She's done an amazing job. She's gone above and beyond expectations."

The proposed 2016-17 fiscal year budget, approved by the budget committee and awaiting approval by the Keizer City Council next month, lists a salary of \$37,900 for Bouvier's position – a 19 per-

cent increase from this year – and \$20,600 for insurance, a 329 percent increase. The insurance figure caught the eye of several budget committee members.

"The insurance going up, is that by bringing in the full-time employee?" Ron Bersin asked.

Machell DePina, Human Resources director for Keizer, said that was the case. In the past, the city paid a flat stipend of \$4,800 a year.

Finance director Tim Wood said the figure is correct.

"This is the flat rate of everyone," Wood said. "We are spending quite a bit (on insurance)."

DePina said the city pays either 90 or 95 percent of employee insurance costs, depending on classification.

"The number does continue to go up each year," DePina said.

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Wood said the amount in the reserve fund was right at 15 percent, which the city uses to cover bills in the time between the start of the fiscal year in July and money coming in from the tax rolls in November, while Eppley emphasized the need for sustainability.

"I have said this before to this group, I don't withhold funding just for fun or to hoard cash," Eppley said. "I will never suggest a budget I don't believe we can fully sustain in the future. What would be worse than adding a position is adding one we'd have to terminate next year because we can't afford it. Personnel services are very expensive. Police officers are the most expensive with costs, training, retirement, etc.

I would love to put another officer in this budget. But we would have to dismantle the parks and community development departments to do that.

"I don't agree with Mr. Bersin on his calculations," Eppley added. "If you look at the long-range plan, what we anticipate, we would need to go into the reserves or go into the red. At the point we can add an officer and we can sustain it, I'll be the first person to call for it. I hope at mid-year we'll see I'm too conservative and we can add it then. We will do it when it's fiscally sound to do so."

Councilor Amy Ryan also questioned why no officer position was added.

"I'm confused," Ryan said. "This is my second year on the budget committee and adding an officer has been the top priority both years. We're

at \$156,000 in overtime for the same number of officers. This (request) isn't new; we approved it last year."

Eppley said this year's newsworthy crimes – a fatal shooting in February, a shooting in March and a fatal stabbing in April – don't necessarily reveal an ongoing trend that could justify a new officer.

"We can't look at them and project there will be every year more and more," he said.

Ryan then asked why the budget is status quo in light of more revenue coming in with new housing.

"Revenues don't support adding more positions," Eppley said. "The county will send us tax dollars, but they are coming in at a slower rate than would support (a new officer). The general fund, which is property tax supported, supports police which is 80 percent of the fund, plus community

development and parks. They are all competing for the same dollars. Any additions to police have to impact those other functions, since it's the same pool of money. They compete with one another."

Ryan stated adding the officer had already been approved.

"We approved it based on having enough revenue to support it, but it didn't occur," Eppley said.

Ryan continued to press the issue.

"The numbers are there, but we're not moving forward," she said.

"Show me how the numbers support that," Eppley retorted.

Councilor Marlene Parsons, chair of the budget committee, attempted to stop the discussion, but co-chair Joseph Gillis continued the line of questioning.

"I share the concern," Gillis said. "We talk about police being a priority, but we don't take action on that. You say the budget doesn't support it. I'm not sure I buy that there are not the funding mechanisms. When and how do we explore other ways?"

Eppley said there are indeed other ways to try and fund the position.

"There are communities that have passed public safety assessments," the city manager said. "For example, they agree to charge a certain amount on the water bill, for a specific thing like an officer. We tried it six or seven years ago. It went to a vote of the people, but it was soundly defeated by the people to add to water bill, by a margin of something like eight to one. That was after a fair amount of public outreach. We did a bunch of open houses, campaigned and it was still soundly defeated. I'm not

saying we can't do it again, but we don't want to do it every year. Maybe it is time to do it again."

Eppley said the number of homes added wouldn't be enough to overturn the past results.

"I really want to provide a budget that gives this group and this community the level of service it wants and demands," Eppley said. "That's tough to do with limited resources."

Committee member Allen Barker wanted to know how quickly an officer could be added once there is the funding. Eppley said getting an officer that has to go through the necessary training would be an 18-month process, while a lateral officer (trained elsewhere) would be quicker.

Teague said his department has all the tools a new officer would need, minus the cost of a uniform.

"Those costs don't keep me from doing this," Teague said of adding a position.

Clark said the issue goes back to the city's low tax rate of \$2.08 per \$1,000 of assessed value, which has been a source of pride for nearly 25 years but limits the funds coming in.

"We brag about having the lowest tax rate in Oregon," the mayor said. "I see our staff work hard each year. We've stretched, matched, leveraged, granted and volunteered tremendously. But at some point the elastic wears out. I'm hearing we might have finally hit that point. We keep pulling, but the elastic wears out. From 1992 to now we've been at the \$2.08. Cities in our (comparables) are at a much higher rate. We are frozen unless we find another funding mechanism."

"It's time for this community to have an honest conversation about how to have the community we want to live in," Clark added. "I'm not still living on a 1992 budget. We've made changes in our income. But we're asking Keizer to operate a 2016 city on a 1992

tax base. We have taken those dollars and stretched them out. But is it time to have that honest conversation? Have we stretched that elastic as much as we can? We've got to be realistic what those dollars can buy. We've gotten a whale of a deal, with city staff and volunteers. But we have to face financial reality."

Clark wants to see what citizens want.

"I'm willing to have that conversation," she said. "People in parks are willing to have it. We need to have that conversation about police as well. Trying to pick apart our budget to eek out another half of a position is not a good use of time. We need to have a deeper community conversation."

As was pointed out in a series of Keizertimes stories in 2014, the tax rate can't be raised due to the state Measure 50.

"The cheapest way to (add revenue) is on the utility bill," Eppley said. "Others have used that method. We can cost that out."

After more discussion followed, Parsons once again paused things by calling for a seven-minute break.

Bersin brought the issue up again later.

"I've been on this committee nine years," Bersin said. "Every year we've asked for more police officers. Again we're not going to do that. We find funding where we want, but not for this. The city continues to grow. We have more households coming in and a large retirement center. It all requires more resources, but we're not adding more resources. People ask for safety as their number one priority. Until we can support that, I'll be a no vote (on the budget)."

Bersin indeed voted against the budget.

"To Mr. Bersin and to Amy, I truly hear what you're saying," Eppley said following the vote. "The moment we're able to add an officer, I will bring it back for your approval."

puzzle answers

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