

City budget talks begin Monday

By ERIC A. HOWALD
Of the Keizertimes

Despite the ongoing pandemic, government agencies still have budgets to balance. The City of Keizer's budget talks will kick off next week with two online meetings.

The Keizer budget committee will meet via teleconference May 11 and 12 at 6 p.m. It will be streamed live on the KeizerTV Youtube channel.

Until a few weeks ago, the city's budget was stable if not rosy in comparison to some recent years, the COVID-19 crisis has changed the math — at least slightly.

"The city is experiencing an immediate drop in discretionary revenues associated with the Event Center as well as municipal court as residents are being encouraged to stay home and not gather in large groups," said City Manager

Chris Eppley, in a statement attached to the proposed budget. "The immediate impact is expected to last through the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2020-21 however long term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is yet to be determined."

Overall operating revenues are expected to remain relatively stable, but annual increases in property taxes might only cover continuing declines in franchise fees collected for telephone and cable television services.

Water and stormwater rates are intentionally being held at the current rates to ease the burden on residents during the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic. Sewer rates, which are controlled by Salem, are expected to increase by roughly 2 percent.

Personnel costs, including wages, insurance and pensions, will increase by approximately

2 percent. Capital improvement projects are expected to increase by 11 percent, the result of needed ADA improvements along River Road North and a major Public Works project involving realignment of a drainage pipe in west Keizer.

Those interested in funding for special projects or efforts that provide for the community are invited to offer testimony or submit it in writing to City Record Tracy Davis, DavisT@keizer.org.

Two areas that might prove contentious are the parks and police fees attached to the monthly city services bill. Both fees are currently set at \$4, but are reviewed annually.

In a March meeting, City Finance Director Tim Wood presented members of the budget committee with a proposal to begin increasing the police fee at a rate that would make it more of a "sustainability" fee than one used to pay for the police officers the fee was originally designed to hire.

City staff floated the idea of raising the police services fee from \$4 per month to \$5.33 a month in the 2020-21 fiscal year. The increase would generate an additional \$226,000. However, the fee growth would not stop there. In 2021, the fee would climb to \$7.39 per month and, by 2025, the fee might nearly triple to \$11.93 per month. City officials were aware that the fee would likely need to increase

over time when it was put in place, but some at the meeting appeared caught off guard by the exponential fee growth projections.

Keizer Police Chief John Teague said residents should expect more from the higher fee.

"I don't think people should just acquiesce to the higher fees," Teague said. "We should prove that we are deserving."

Keizer Police Department recently instituted a citizens academy and was discussing adding fingerprinting service as one way to add value to the community.

The parks fee is projected to remain at \$4 per for the foreseeable future. That fee has paid for widened pathways throughout Keizer's 19 parks, a new playground at Meadows Park, a portion of the bathrooms at Keizer Rapids Park, the rehabilitation of Carlson Skate Park, a new sports court at Willamette Manor Park, two new employees and new equipment among thousands of other dollars in improvements.

At the March meeting, Councilor Kim Freeman asked that both police and parks officials prepare a one-sheet report showing what the fees have accomplished so far.

"I would also like to see a report on what would happen if the parks fee was decreased to make up for the increase in the police fee," Freeman said.



Submitted photo
Bob and Colleen Busch took their Keizertimes on a visit to Philadelphia, Penn., to visit family in February 2020. Daughter Trina snapped the picture and grandson Miles was along for the ride. You too can have your photo in the Keizertimes. Simply take the paper to your destination, snap a picture with you and your group holding it, and send the photo along with everyone's first and last names to kt@keizertimes.com.

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DAY

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Broker

Bob Shackelford is a licensed real estate broker in Oregon.

crossword

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CREATORS NEWS SERVICE By Charles Preston

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46 Like snails

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51 Bathe

52 Tony's kin

54 Marble

55 Hard ___ rock

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