

BUDGET

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Retirement System (PERS), changes in sick leave calculation and a hike in the minimum wage were factors that had to be considered this year.

Nevertheless, the 2016-16 budget includes the addition of staff members that will work to solve specific problems as identified by the City Council and staff. The budget also includes yet another rate increase for the City’s water customers. It includes a line item for a three-percent tax on recreational marijuana, though the tax has not yet been put before voters and it is uncertain what the proceeds from such a potential tax may be.

“I hope you’ll think about how this budget impacts your life,” Meyers told the committee at the end of his budget message. “Each and every hour, somebody is impacted by it.”

Additions

This year’s budget adds funding for a part-time staffer in the City’s planning department who will work to identify and improve “nuisance” properties year-round, especially the various “zombie houses” in the City that are not being maintained because they are lost somewhere in the foreclosure process, Meyers said. Currently, the City mainly conducts nuisance abatement for properties that allow their vegetation to over-grow during the late-spring and early summer. The budget also includes funding for a part-time staff member at the Cottage Grove Police Department whose job it will be to handle tasks such as feeding prisoners, checking for the security of local businesses

at night and parking enforcement. The change aims to free up the officers who would normally complete these tasks for more patrol duties at a fraction of the cost of a full-time officer.

Community promotions

The budget for “Community Promotions” funds projects that are seen as compatible with the goals of City government, and the public hearing for the Budget Committee largely consisted of requests from groups to have their efforts funded. Karol Kuhn Simons spoke on behalf of T.E.A.M. Cottage Grove with a request for a \$1500 appropriation to pay speakers’ fees for an event that aims to offer tools and skills to area non-profits. Bohemia Mining Days Coordinator Cindy Weeldreyer requested a \$3200 contribution from the City to sponsor the BMD Express, a rubber-wheeled train that transports people to the Festival from downtown and other areas. A request was put forward by the Cottage Grove Airport that the City cover fees related to the construction of a pilots’ welcome center there. The Coast Fork Willamette Watershed Council requested a \$2500 increase to conduct education outreach regarding the City’s water systems. Community Promotions also includes the \$50,000 the City has budgeted to fund citizen use of the Warren H. Daugherty Aquatic Center. In previous years, this line item has provoked quite a bit of discussion, and before the committee adjourned, City Councilor Jeff Gowing, elected chair for the meeting, congratulated the group for not spending

two hours talking about the pool contribution as in years past.

On Thursday, the committee hashed out its recommendation for each promotion. It was moved that a recommendation be made to the City Council that fees estimated to total around \$6000 be waived for the Airport welcome center, as the structure could help draw added tourism spending. The committee funded the T.E.A.M. Cottage Grove request at \$500 in an effort not to discourage other organizations from investing in the new event, and it voted for \$1500 in one-time funding to BMD, an amount not tied to the express train or any other particular endeavor, as opposed to signing up for an ongoing contribution to the train. It also voted for the full \$2500 increase for the Watershed Council.

Marijuana tax

The City has budgeted \$15,000 in revenue from a three-percent tax on recreational marijuana, a tax expected to be placed on the November ballot this year. Meyers said that the amount is based on sales of \$500,000, which he said “seems reasonable.”

“It’s a placeholder,” said Finance Director Bert Olsen.

“It’s just a guess,” Meyers continued. “They (retailers) wouldn’t tell us how much they’re selling, but \$500,000 seems about right for how much marijuana may be smoked here in a year.”

“That’s probably only for about four people,” Mayor Tom Munroe joked.

Water

An increase of \$3.04 a month

for the typical water customer was approved in this year’s budget, a hike that aims to build up reserve funds in anticipation of projects including the expansion of the City’s effluent irrigation system. If the system were expanded, Meyers said, more effluent could be applied to City land and parks that would keep the warmer water and the material it contains from being pumped directly into the river. It would also save the City money by not treating water that is applied to these lands for irrigation. The increase follows a plan for the gradual build-up of the reserves that has been occurring each year for almost a decade, though it also adds to an already high base rate of almost \$80 per month that is deemed far too high by many customers.

The City is also building reserves to help meet its requirements to treat its stormwater when the threshold of 10,000 population is reached. Currently, the City has a population of about 9875 persons and is growing about 1.8 percent per year.

Meyers also announced that, starting June 1, water customers will be able to pay their bills online and use a debit or credit card to do so, a long-anticipated development.

See for yourself

Each Budget Committee member was given a large binder containing the 2016-17 budget document, but the City’s new website features an option to view the entirety of the budget in PDF form online. It can be accessed by visiting cottage-grove.org/documents.

KINDER

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Superintendent Krista Parent said the District has budgeted three extra hours of time from educational assistants to aid kindergarteners and their teachers with their new full-day schedule at the larger elementary schools and two hours of assistance in classrooms at smaller schools. Parent said the increase in EA time, which is expected to cost about \$120,000, should give each classroom assistance for about six hours of its day. In addition, many incoming kindergarteners will hone their skills before school starts during the summer as part of the KITS, or Kids in Transition to School, program.

And the extra help will be most welcome, according to Harrison kindergarten teacher Sarah Parsons, who told parents about the plan for a staggered start at Harrison’s Kindergarten Round-up event on Wednesday.

“There were some things that didn’t go wonderfully last year,” Parsons said. “We feel that the afternoon was a hard time for everybody, and we weren’t able to build the relationships with students that were necessary because we were dealing with a lot of discipline issues. Basi-

cally, the kids were just tired, and in the afternoon, we saw behaviors that we hadn’t dealt with before.”

Parsons said kindergarten teachers asked for extra help from educational assistants to deal with those issues, but the help was not given, which Parent has called a “huge oversight.”

“Our number one recommendation was for more support in class; that was a huge piece for us,” Parsons said. She said teachers recommended not starting a full day until mid-October but added that they’re thankful for the staggered start that they’re getting.

“September through November is going to be rough, but then it’s hard every year,” she said.

This year, kindergarten students will begin school with other students; they’ll be welcome for breakfast at 7:55 a.m., eat lunch and be dismissed at noon, a schedule that will begin the Monday after a “Family Day” scheduled for Sept. 9. Teachers will conduct student assessments the first full week of school, and a full-day schedule for kindergarteners will begin Oct. 3.

KWIKEE

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“The Kwikiee building could be the biggest return on our investment in terms of time and resources,” former Community Development Corporation Director Sarah Mizejewski (now Sarah Means) said in 2012. “I refer to it as plug-and-play. It’s set up for a manufacturing-type business that can employ people in Cottage Grove and provide higher-wage jobs.”

Wells Fargo Bank foreclosed on the Kwikiee building in 2014, which led the City to hope that progress toward finding a new occupant could gain momentum. Its former owner, a company owned by Douglas Mergenthaler of the Seattle area, owed nearly \$4 million in principal and interest on the building, which was built in 1995.

Schesser said the potential buyer of the building would be a “perfect” fit for the building in terms of its zoning and the

type of business that would be brought to town. He declined to name the business or elaborate too much on what type of business it is, however.

“It’s a manufacturing company,” he said. “But until we have official word of new ownership, I can’t say too much more. I wouldn’t want to spoil the deal.”

Schesser did say the new business could potentially bring “around 100 jobs” to Cottage Grove. The company has indicated that it would require the high ceilings, loading dock and broadband access that the building boasts.

“They seem truly interested; it’s the most promising lead we’ve had on the building for some time,” he said. “I hope we will know within the next two to four weeks; it appears to be moving quickly.”



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