

# Council says police department needed more than city manager

The failure of a levy for police services and concern about how to fund a police department continued to dominate discussion at the December 14 Banks City Council meeting.

Teri Branstitre spoke for the council when she said that she wanted the audience to understand that this is a very difficult decision for council. Katie Murdoch expressed concern that the city would never be able to get a police levy approved if a department is temporarily supported by the general fund. Pete Edison said that the most important thing that the city can do is to provide police coverage. Mayor-elect Mike Lyons said that the city "can't afford not to have a department."

Banks resident Franklin Smith said that people in the city didn't want to pay any extra tax and Edison commented that raising the levy amount may have been part of the reason for the defeat. When the levy passed five years ago, it was by only 12 votes. It was defeated this fall by 20 votes with an overwhelming voter turn-out.

Part of the difficulty stems from the timing of the receipt of property tax revenues. The city receives small amounts of revenue each month, but the bulk of the property taxes is not received until December, so the city must be able to operate for six-months before receiving most of the budgeted revenue. Mayor Bob Orłowski explained that, historically, the city had "borrowed" money internally from both the Traffic Impact Fund (TIF) and the Water Fund. Such internal transfers must be paid back within the fiscal year in accordance with state law.

Orłowski said that the city could not depend on the availability of large balances in these funds in the future because TIF funds will be used for the Sellers Road realignment, and future water projects may deplete the water fund. Therefore, Orłowski said, the city must budget a large enough cash carry-over in the general fund to cover expenses until revenue is received.

Orłowski talked about several options that could provide renewable revenues, including not hiring a city manager, hiring

a manager with planning skills, and paying the remaining debt on the Kelly property. All of the options discussed had both advantages and disadvantages, but no single option would produce a large enough renewable revenue stream to fund a police chief and an officer. Ryan Birr suggested that Orłowski and Dennis Conner, city auditor, develop financial scenarios for providing a police department from the general fund.

Murdoch expressed concern about the two finalists for the chief's position, and the officer currently in training. Both chief candidates are aware of the failure of the levy. Brandstitre will contact them to determine if either still has an interest in an even smaller department. No decision was made concerning the current officer.

Washington County Sheriff's Deputy Pat Garrett told council that the sheriff's office provides coverage for 9-1-1 emergencies. However, he said, the county is engaged in discussions with the City of Gaston to develop language that will allow county officers to provide community policing through a long-term contractual agreement. Council did not make any decisions about the police department.

## Manager hunt ended

Concurrent with the discussion about the police department and budget limitations, council appeared to reach a

consensus that hiring a city manager was, as Birr put it, "a moot point." Birr said that he had received four responses from a letter of inquiry to a list of potential interim managers and that he would inform them of council's position.

## Measure 37

Following a discussion about potential, or lack of potential Measure 37 claims, City Attorney Jim Lucas was asked to draft appropriate procedures for accepting and evaluating any such claims. A method will need to be in place in order to cover the City's costs for staff time that will be needed for research on any claims.

Kirk Andrews reported that the park committee decided to make repairs to the irrigation system in Greenville Park. They are also recommending adding sprinkler heads and a temperature/water loss control system. According to Andrews, the landscape contractor said the city would use about 30 percent less water with a controller. Andrews said that the gazebo lighting project is moving ahead, and asked for direction concerning park benches. Council agreed the benches could be repaired and evaluat-

ed in terms of long-term use.

## Nuisance Abatement

Mayor Orłowski told council he had received "a flood of calls" thanking the city for abating the nuisance on Wilkes Street. Removing the garbage cost about \$300. The property owner was billed and, if unpaid in thirty days, a lien will be filed against the property. Asked if the owner was fined in any way, Orłowski said that a fine could have been assessed, but the city doesn't have an officer to issue citations.

## Public Works

Lyons expressed concern about money being transferred from the road department "for a building that can't be completed anyway" during public comment time at the beginning of the meeting. Edison reminded council of this comment when the agenda reached Public Works Director Tim Grossnickle's report on the building's progress. Brandstitre said that council decided during the last budget cycle to budget for the construction over two or three budget cycles and never intended the building to be completed within one fiscal year.

Grossnickle said that money

from the Street and Road Fund could be used to cover unanticipated expenses associated with the project. The money was originally budgeted to supplement a grant for improvements on Oak Way. However, the city did not receive the grant and cannot complete the work on Oak Way without additional funds from the state, so funds are available to complete the initial phase of the building during the current fiscal year.

Orłowski will have a largely ceremonial role at council's first meeting of the year, January 11, when mayor-elect Lyons will be sworn in. He thanked both the current and previous councils for their support and confidence.

In other business, council:

• Appointed Lisa Macalister and Deb Hassell to the planning commission.

• Appointed Stephanie Jones to the Library Commission.

• Approved a revised Park Maintenance Agreement to be presented to the Arbor Village Homeowners Association.

• Postponed appointment of council members to several county committees.

• Approved a pay increase for the water clerk at the end of her probationary period.

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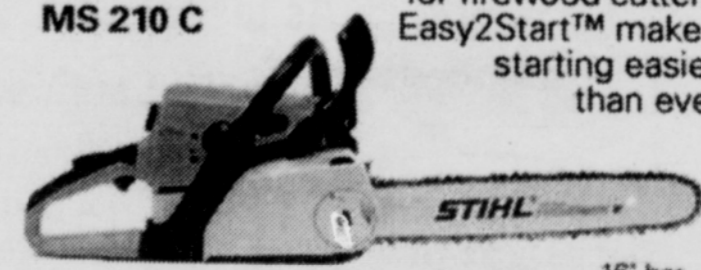
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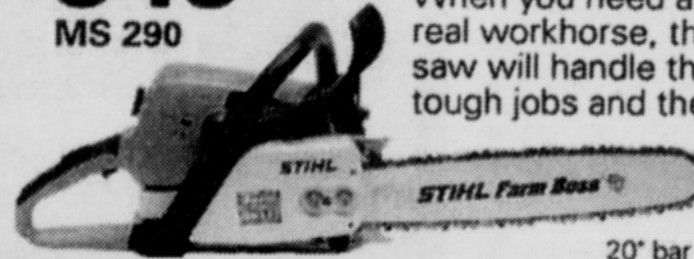


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