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(Neb.)-Chadron Council Reviews Budget, Takes Steps Toward Tax Continuation



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 08/13/2012 09:43 PM

(CHADRON)-At their special meeting Monday night, the Chadron city council decided to move forward toward placing an option for the continuation of the ½ cent city sales tax on a special ballot next spring. Members debated as to whether there was enough time to place the issue on the November 6th ballot this year and finally decided that time was too short to “do it right” this quickly.

The current ½ cent sales tax expires October 2014, and the council is in hopes that the general public will vote to continue the tax in an effort to help fund possible infrastructure and community betterment projects the city is considering. If the item is put on the ballot and voted against, it cannot reappear on another ballot for 23 months, so council members say they want to make sure that members of the community have a thorough understanding of what the money would fund and how it would benefit the city.

Most of the feedback from the public that council members have received up to this point seems to be in agreement with the continuation of the tax, and council members are open to any questions or comments that anyone may have.

Also at the meeting Monday night, council members heard from members of Nebraska Northwest Development Corporation regarding a request for funding for the upcoming year. Executive director Deb Cottier and board member Rob Wahlstrom shared with the council some of the ways NNDC has benefited the community and helped develop and grow businesses in Chadron. Council members Levi Grant and Donny Grantham expressed interest in allowing more involvement in the corporation by all council members. Grant serves on NNDC’s board and says sometimes other council members are out of the loop. Cottier said most of NNDC’s dealings are available for the public, but some things are kept confidential for a reason. Wahlstrom said the idea could be brought before the NNDC board, and both he and Cottier agreed that in specific instances, the members of the council could request more information.

Human resource officer Bev Bartlett addressed the council regarding employee health insurance coverage. She said there did not appear to be any ramifications for ending coverage with CHAMP, the program in which the city is currently enrolled. She said many of the employees are not happy with the current program and are in favor of the city self-insuring employees again as was done previously. The council voted to withdraw from CHAMP and seek self-insurance options for city employees. A resolution to this effect will appear on next Monday’s regularly scheduled meeting agenda.

Finance officer Lois Chisek began a review of the proposed budget for 2012-2013. She said that despite adding in a cost of living increase for employees as well as two new positions, an IT person and a new street department employee, that the adopted budget for the upcoming year is not any higher than last year’s.

Chisek said several items had been largely overstated in last year’s budget, including insurance premiums, which gave wiggle room in this year’s budget for various needed increases and additions. One addition involves the upgrading of aging

computers and the purchasing of new financial software. Bartlett said that one of the desired perks of the new software is the ability for residents to pay their utility bills online. Another addition is needed in the public safety section.

Police chief Tim Lordino said starting this year, the police department will be responsible for costs incurred while trying to arrest and detain individuals, such medications, injuries, or tests needed after an individual is taken into custody. Lordino said the county had picked up these costs before. He said he did not have any idea how much money was needed in the new fund, but recommended that approximately \$3,000 be taken from another public safety line item to cover the new addition. He also said that the police fleet of nine vehicles averages 108,000 miles and their equipment continues to age and need replaced. He also requested additional money for training.

The budget portion of the meeting continued on well into the evening.

(Questions? Comments? E-mail news@chadrad.com.)

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