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(Neb.)-Chadron Council Discusses Project Funding, Employee Benefits



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 03/19/2013 12:05 PM

Photo: City building/zoning official Janet Johnson discusses the city's blight survey with the Chadron city council and city manager Wayne Anderson at their meeting Monday night. (Photo by KCSR-Roxie Graham-Marski)

(CHADRON)-The Chadron city council went for a record last night at their meeting with an extensive agenda and plenty of discussion. A subject that proved to be contentious was the discontinuation of the education incentive benefit that is currently offered to city employees and the approval of education assistance in its stead. The council voted to begin hiring new employees with education or experience at a higher rate as opposed to having everyone start at the same rate and then providing an additional one- to four-percent educational benefit. Despite assurances from city manager Wayne Anderson and human resources director Bev Bartlett that the education benefits are not being taken away from current employees, but rather are being rolled over into their salaries, numerous employees voiced concerns. The council also voiced concerns on how the new education assistance idea would be handled to ensure fair availability to all employees. The matter was tabled and sent back to committee in hopes of developing more perimeters.

After some discussion, the council agreed to forgive the Chadron Housing Authority of a loan that was awarded to them in 1995 from community development block grant (CDBG) funds to be used in the construction of the Heritage Apartments. Due to increasing maintenance and other costs, the Heritage has had difficulty in keeping up with their loan payments. A spokesperson with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED) had previously said if paying back the loan "would hurt the housing authority's financial viability," the department was willing to allow the city to forgive the loan. The council voted to forgive the loan. Since the money was governmental dollars, the city will not experience a financial loss of any kind. Vicky Elder, executive director of the Housing Authority, explained that the loan forgiveness will allow them to refinance and consolidate the remainder of money owed on the property into a lower interest loan spread out over another 20 years.

The council approved resolutions regarding final plats for an alley of right-of-way in the Victory Heights addition near the Kenwood Elementary School and in the West Hills Addition on West Sixth Street. A portion of the L-shaped alley in the 400 block between North Mears and North Lake Streets has been being graveled and maintained by the city for some time and yet is land owned by Chadron Public Schools. The Chadron school

board recently decided to dedicate 20 feet of land to the city to be officially maintained as an alley right-of-way. The plat on West Sixth Street includes plans for the tract of land where Bomgaar's formerly resided. The property owner is in the process of developing the property and subdividing it into two parcels. Morford's Decorating will be using the former Bomgaar's building as a carpet store, and a new 5,000-square-foot building will be constructed on the west parcel of land, to house a Hibbett sporting goods store. City zoning/building official Janet Johnson says construction may commence quickly as the new store is hoping to obtain a building permit within 30 days, begin construction in April, and potentially have the store open by July.

Council members approved and accepted an updated city map highlighting new areas of town on a substandard/blight survey. The survey will help prepare the way for the application of possibly more federal and state funding that can be used locally. Along the same vein, the council held a public hearing regarding an application to the Nebraska DED for more CDBG funds for the planning of a proposed downtown revitalization project. The grant would provide \$23,500 of funding to the city, while a \$5,000 cash match, \$10,500 of in-kind donations, and administrative costs estimated at \$1,700 bring the program's total costs to \$35,700. The council voted in favor of applying for the grant 4-1, with council member John Gamby expressing concerns regarding the rules and regulations tied into the grant application and wanting to keep growth ideas and plans local.

The council did not decide to go ahead yet with another application for DED grant assistance in the amount of up to \$250,000 in connection with the proposed swimming pool project. City manager Wayne Anderson shared with members that the grant is specifically for civic and community center financing, and that if a community room is included in the pool project, it would qualify. Anderson mentioned that a caveat is that the funds would only be available to the city if the pool project were voted through to fruition. Council member Gamby said he would like to see the Chadron Public Library also listed on the application as a possible recipient of funds if the pool project does not become a reality. Mayor Karin Fischer said she would like to see the application filled out as it will be sent before making a decision as well. The council decided to table the matter and reconvene next Monday, March 25th at 5:00 p.m. to further discuss the matter.

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

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