

City employees to receive wage increases in 2009

Written by April Peregoy

By April Peregoy

It's good news for employees of the City of Holyoke, who can now expect to see higher numbers on their paychecks in 2009.

With the increase already accounted for in the 2009 budget, Holyoke City Council approved a 2009 wage proposal for city employees at its Tuesday, Jan. 6 regular meeting. The proposal was a collection of each employee's new, increased wage as recommended by the department heads.

The reason given for the raises granted by the council is to compensate employees for the heightened cost of living. This is with the exception of library and swim pool employees, whose wages were updated to comply with the new minimum wage law that went into effect Jan. 1.

Department heads also received a pay increase. The new annual salaries are as follows: City Clerk Kathy Olofson—\$44,798; City Supt. Mark Brown—\$66,752; and Police Chief Phil Biersdorfer—\$51,531.

There was one change made to the wage proposal after some discussion between council members. One recommendation given by Biersdorfer for the Police Dept. called for a 10 percent hike for a part-time employee, with the other positions receiving three percent each.

Defending his recommendation, the Police Chief pointed out this employee does not get any benefits and is paid less than other part-time city employees. He added this person is a real hard worker who has accomplished many things since starting at the Dept.

However, some of the council members questioned the fairness and lack of uniformity of the one employee's higher percentage increase over the rest at the Police Dept. They also argued the particular position in question was created by the council on a trial basis to be reviewed after one year.

The agreement reached by the board is to grant the employee a three percent increase—the same as the other officers. When the year-long trial for the position comes up for review in May, the council will then reconsider whether to give another pay raise.

Besides the regular wage proposal, city council also agreed to bump up the on-call wage for employees of the electric, water and sewer departments from \$75 to \$100 per week.

In addition, police committee member Barry Winckler requested a new payroll item be included in the Police Dept.'s wages. Making the case the police officers are always on call when they are out of the office—meaning they can be called anytime from anywhere—without any additional compensation, he asked the council to give the officers an on-call wage of \$100 each per month.

Biersdorfer was asked to explain the dept.'s on-call schedule, to which he answered there is none. "Every officer who is not on duty is on call at all times," he said. He added this means even officers who are out of town could be called back to work if a big event required it.

Councilman Orville Tonsing pointed out, if there is no rotating schedule, then the dept. is simply asking for a flat \$100 per month raise. Discussion then turned to the comparison of Holyoke's officer salaries against others in the area. Winckler said Holyoke falls somewhere between the lower one-third and one-half of all similar-sized depts. in the state when it comes to wages.

He also argued that while, yes, it is basically a flat pay increase, including the sum as a separate line item in the payroll will show officers recognition for the extra time worked. And, he added, it could prevent the issue of extra compensation for being on-call from being brought up again in the future.

Council members then voted on adding the on-call payroll item, with the stipulation the

City employees to receive wage increases in 2009

Written by April Peregoy

council review the issue again next year. It passed, 6-1, with Tonsing casting the negative vote.

New phone system

to be installed

Holyoke City Council opted to upgrade the city's phone system at the meeting on Tuesday. As explained by Olofson, the current phone system shut down last summer. PC Telcom was able to put another unit in for it to work, but told the city if it shut down again, it would not be repairable.

The city decided to wait until the expense could be included in the 2009 budget to purchase a new system. PC Telcom gave the council the option to purchase a new system at \$9,198.48 or to lease it for four years at a total of \$9,271.68. The lease includes a buyout option at the end of the four years.

Thinking the lease option is the best deal because of the technical support that comes with it and the ability to upgrade the lease in four years, the council voted to go with that option.

Additionally, the board agreed to the Holyoke Police Dept. installing its own internet server. Biersdorfer presented the council with two possible service packages the Dept. could purchase from PC Telcom, adding he thought the cheaper package of \$611.40 would cover all of the Dept.'s needs.

He recommended the council allow the Dept. to make the switch at the same time the new phone system is put in to save on installation costs. The only problem is the internet service costs were not budgeted for 2009. However, Biersdorfer was confident he could come up with the money needed within his budget.

Cannon plaques ordered

It has been nearly a year since the WWII cannon, formerly located at Holyoke City Park, was refurbished and placed in front of the Holyoke City Office. Tuesday night, the council took the final steps in the project by choosing dedication plaques to order for it.

One plaque will be located near the cannon. An 8"x10" bronze plaque from Sterling Trophy Shops was chosen by the council at a cost of \$304.17. On it will be a message of dedication of the cannon to the veterans and their families.

The other one purchased is a picture plaque that will be located inside the office building. It will feature the men who worked on the refurbishing of the cannon. For this plaque, the council chose an 8"x10" veneer walnut at \$47.85, also from Sterling Trophy Shops.

Other business

In other business, city council members:

—held a public hearing for Ordinance No. 9, which amends the ordinance governing natural gas distribution to comply with SourceGas changes in calculating fees. Hearing no objections, the ordinance was approved.

—approved a travel request for Mark Brown and Lennie Fisbeck to attend Colorado Rural Water Association certification classes in Colorado Springs.

—granted a special events permit to Holyoke Vets Club for Saturday, Feb. 14.

—held a one-hour executive session for the purpose of receiving legal advice from the City Attorney.

—were notified Debra Tomky has replaced Sara Bohrer on Heginbotham Library Board.