

Refuse fees to increase 12%

Written by April Peregoy

Beginning Friday, Dec. 19, refuse fees for residents of the City of Holyoke will increase 12 percent across the board.

For residential customers, the monthly fee will be \$14.44, and for commercial users, \$15.79 per month and up depending on volume. Those outside the city limits must pay an additional \$38.72 per month.

A resolution establishing the new fee schedule was passed by Holyoke City Council at its regular meeting Tuesday, Dec. 2.

However, the first item of business for the council that night was to swear in new member Sara Bohrer. She replaces Terry Meek, who resigned in October. It was noted Bohrer will also take over Meek's former committee appointments.

The reason for the fee increase, according to mayor David Nygaard, is the need to offset the cost of operations for the city. The council had hoped to accomplish this by passing a one percent sales tax increase during the November general election, but it was defeated by voters.

Other options, such as charging extra fees for leaf and branch pick-ups or increasing utility fees, were also considered by the council in the past. The refuse fee increase is thought to be the best option because, even with the hike, the fees are still reasonable.

City's damaged building to be removed

It's been over a month now since the collapse of the city's electric/storage building due to strong winds on Nov. 6. Since then, the city has been unable to clean up the damage due to its insurance company's demands for asbestos testing and the collecting of bids for the removal of the building.

City Supt. Mark Brown said he received five bids from companies wanting to do the job. Two are from Denver businesses, one Sterling and two are local. The lowest bid is from Rick Ensminger for \$9,500.

However, Brown explained, the council does not have to hire out the job; instead, it could collect the \$9,500 from the insurance company and have the city crews do it. This would save the city on labor costs, as the employees could do it during their regular work hours.

The council was ready to agree to having city personnel remove the building, but before the motion was passed, councilman Orville Tonsing voiced his opposition.

"This is not a good move," he said. "I think we need to have someone more experienced." He stated his concern that the council could be putting the safety of the employees in jeopardy, adding, "I don't think this is a place where we want our people to be."

It was also noted by other council members that an employee had already been injured by the building during the collapse on Nov. 6.

Hearing this rationale, council members voted 6-1 to give the job to Ensminger, with Ray Bailey casting the negative vote.

Internet service options discussed

Safety and speed issues with the city's current internet system have led the council to consider other possible options. Currently, Chase3000 is the city's internet provider.

The problem, as explained by mayor Nygaard, is that the city's administrative computers share a server with the Holyoke Police Dept. Not only does this cause their internet speeds to slow down, but it also poses a security threat as the administration and police dept. could

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potentially gain access to each other's information.

Having two separate servers would fix the problem, and Nygaard suggested the council look at keeping Chase3000 as the administration's provider, but going with PC Telcom for the police dept.

It was noted the city is considering installing a new phone system, which was included in the 2009 budget, and if the city does make changes to its internet service, it would be easier to do both switches at once.

Council members were given information from PC Telcom on the bundled packages and costs it could provide if the city chose to go with the business. However, council members admitted some of the details were unclear to them. They felt they did not have enough information to make a good decision that night and tabled the matter until more could be gathered.

Other business

In other business, city council members:

—were notified by Brown that the airport's Jet A Fuel Farm has arrived and is ready to be installed.

—heard a report from Police Chief Phil Biersdorfer that Damon Ellis is expected to graduate from the police academy during the first week of December and can begin working at Holyoke Police Dept. right away.

—held a public hearing on the annual appropriations ordinance. Hearing no objections, the ordinance was passed.

—introduced Ordinance No. 8, an ordinance appropriating additional sums of money to defray expenses in excess of amounts budgeted. The ordinance in its entirety can be found in this week's Enterprise. A public hearing on the ordinance will take place at the council's Tuesday, Dec. 16 meeting.

—approved the certification of the mill levy at 21.8 mills.

—agreed to offer a vacation day as a door prize at the City Employee and Council Christmas Party.