

Lewiston workers asked to give up pay raise

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- (0) comments

By **Sandra L. Lee of the Tribune**

Lewiston city employees will be asked to give up their 2 percent cost-of-living raises scheduled to go into effect Oct. 1 to help balance the city budget.

Union contracts that cover about two-thirds of city employees base raises on an annual consumer price index, but guarantee a minimum 2 percent and maximum 4 percent increase.

This year, the CPI is a negative number, but employees still are supposed to get 2 percent, Mayor Pro Tem Garry Bush said in a telephone conference call that allowed him to participate in an afternoon budget workshop.

If employees will agree to give up the increase, savings would be about \$340,000. That's more than a third of the \$821,000 budget shortfall projected Monday.

If employees refuse, a Plan B on where cuts can be made will be prepared by staff, City Manager John C. (Jay) Krauss said.

Bush also suggested a 1 percent property tax increase that would generate about \$143,000, asking department heads to come up with \$250,000 in savings and taking \$250,000 out of reserves.

Bush's proposal wouldn't touch about \$240,000 in raises based on employee longevity, but three union contracts would have to be modified, plus the council would have to change an earlier vote giving non-union employees the same increase.

Councilors agreed 6-0 to ask for the employee concession after Krauss asked for a formal vote as a "political statement."

Krauss didn't directly address a question about whether the city could require employees to take furloughs, or unpaid days off. It can lay off employees, Krauss said. Other options include not filling a couple of vacancies and phasing in the new transit division secretary as a part-time position, he said.

"With all due respect to the council," he said, \$255,000 has been added to the fire department budget without a corresponding increase in revenue. That's Lewiston's share of adding an ambulance and six firefighters, bringing the total on duty each shift to four ambulances and placing one in Clarkston Heights if an agreement with Asotin County is approved.

Councilors also agreed to continue the storm water utility fee at its present \$3 per equivalent residential unit level instead of going to the \$4.50 planned for the coming year. If it had been discontinued completely, there would have been about a \$900,000 hole in the transportation budget, Krauss said.

Among the problem areas are the \$965,000 going into the police retirement fund for officers hired before 1979 and their dependents. It's almost double the 2009 contribution because there are no longer any active

workers contributing to the fund and the stock market plunge wiped out earnings needed to keep it solvent for those receiving payments.

Nez Perce County also dropped its \$68,500 contribution to public transit and isn't willing to pay half the operating costs of the jointly owned airport, which creates additional deficits in the city budget, Krauss said.

Overall, the county agreed to pay \$178,504 for shared budget items, down almost \$110,000 from this year's \$288,154 and considerably less than half the \$407,393 the city outlined.

Those numbers also don't include the \$1.45 million the city has asked for past years' uncompensated administrative expenses and costs related to having a fire truck available at the airport.

A budget work session for 6 p.m. tonight was canceled, but the council will meet again at 6 p.m. Wednesday night at city hall.

In other business, the council voted 5-1 with Matthew Carlson in opposition to advertise for bids for a new irrigation system for Bryden Canyon Golf Course. The 35-year-old system is worn out, said Parks and Recreation Director Lynn C. Moss.

Because it's an enterprise fund, the estimated \$980,000 cost isn't part of the regular budget. It would be funded by an internal loan from the city and repaid, with interest, by the operator, Golf Fun, Inc., at \$50,000 a year over a 20- to 30-year time frame.

Lee may be contacted at slee@lmtribune.com or (208) 848-2266.