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City officials, residents talk about state of motel property

That a former hotel in Hoopeston is not really in the city limits is not a sleeping issue for city officials or residents.

Baer's Motel, which was included in Hoopeston's original tax increment financing (TIF) district, was never annexed to the city. Mayor Chalmers Flint has suggested the city purchase the property in hopes of building a new motel on the site.

City attorney William Nelson, who also represents the guardians of motel owner Ora Baer, is working with guardians to annex the property but what will happen to it then is up in the air.

Nelson said one person from Kankakee has approached him about purchasing part of the hotel property and renovating it as transient housing. "The guy told me everybody is crazy if they think someone's going to come in here and tear it down and build a new motel," Nelson said. The interested person also said no one would buy it and run it as is. "So there it is," Nelson said. "It sits."

Alderman Mike Eckersley said residents should think about what the city should do about gaining control of the property. "We don't need transient housing," he said, adding residents should express their opinion since their tax dollars would be used if the city buys the site.

Since the motel is not in the city, Alderman John Haughee said the nearly \$50,000 in back water bills owed by the motel should have been billed at the out-of-city rate, twice the normal amount.

Attorney Nelson disagreed. "Everybody thought, including, I assume, Mr. Baer, that it was in the city," he said. "There's isn't any money to pay it anyway."

Resident Gene Beckner, saying the issue was "a can of worms," opened "another can of worms." If the motel is not in the city, property owners south of the motel have been illegally taxed for years since property annexed

must be contiguous, he said.

No action was taken on the issue.

Neither was action taken on Flint's proposal to increase aldermen's salaries from \$100 per month and \$50 per special meeting to \$400 monthly and \$100 to committee chairmen for committee meetings.

The council must pass an ordinance setting aldermanic salaries at least 180 days before the April 1 election. Increases would only be paid to aldermen chosen in that election.

Flint said the raise is necessary because of the time aldermen devote to their duties and that increases could be done in increments.

Whether the council votes to increase pay or not, it must make an ordinance with some level of pay in it. "If there's no vote, there will be no pay so you do have to put something in the ordinance," he said.

Alderman John Haughee took exception to the notion that aldermen receive free water during their tenure. "I don't consider it free water," he said. "It's earned."

In other business, the council:

- heard from Robert Davis of CDA Marketing, who withdrew his proposal for web design and marketing. Davis' original proposal was for \$22,500 and later cut to \$14,500.

The council did not act on the proposal Tuesday because aldermen Bill Goodwine and Don York were absent. They, with Eckersley, form a committee to look into a city web page.

Davis said he had "dissatisfaction with the lack of leadership" shown and "little or no interest" in the project, then he left the meeting.

- learned Eckersley will resign at the Aug. 20 meeting because he is moving out of the city.

- learned the hospital received a \$4,000 grant from Western Illinois University to map health needs.

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Teens charged with auto theft

Four Indiana teens were arrested at 2:29 a.m. Tuesday after they allegedly stole a car from Danville and burglarized vehicles in Hoopeston and Milford.

Arrested were Zachary S. Swanson, 18, of 6965 N. Indep PV Road, Pine Village; Matthew T. Knouff, 508 S 600 West, Fowler; a 16-year-old girl of West Lafayette; and a 15-year-old boy from Williamsport.

All face preliminary charges of theft of a motor vehicle and burglary from a motor vehicle.

Police said officers saw a dark-colored vehicle pull into an alley on East Wyman with the vehicle lights turned off. After driving around the block, the officer saw three people trying to get into a parked vehicle. When spotted, the people ran to their vehicle.

Police said received four reports from Hoopeston residents and several complaints from the Milford area about cars being broken into and papers scattered into the street.

Swanson and Knouff were taken to the Public Safety Building, Danville. The juveniles were released to their parents on notices to appear.

Maggie, newest member of Hoopeston Police Department, expected to take bite out of crime

You might say the newest member of the Hoopeston Police Department really sinks her teeth into her work.

Maggie, a nearly year old German shepherd, and her owner, Officer Ephriam Bolin, gave a presentation at Monday's Hoopeston Neighborhood Watch meeting.

The pair have been training together twice weekly at the Diamond Brook K-9 Academy in Potomac. There, Deputy Chuck Leverich of the Vermilion County Sheriff's Department works with Bolin and Maggie on sniffing out marijuana, cocaine and heroin in people, in rooms and in vehicles. In order to become certified, Maggie must make nine building finds in five minutes and them make nine finds in autos.

Maggie is also learning to track people based on scent from personal items. "She's not real good at (tracking) yet but we're working on it," Bolin said. "She knows where (the trainer) goes and doesn't want to go look for him."

To become certified in tracking, Maggie must traverse a 1.5 mile course in one hour and find the target of her search.

Maggie has been in training longer than some dogs. She and Bolin have attended classes for nine months, while some dogs are certified after five. "She's high-strung," Bolin said. "She's full of energy. It's hard to control her."

Maggie is not above upstaging dogs further along in their training. "She showed up one of the dogs up at school the other day" despite hot weather conditions, Bolin said. "I was so proud."

Maggie's high-spiritedness didn't deter her Monday when she demonstrated her skills. Despite the scent from nearby plates of cookies, she found drugs hidden under chairs and doors at Country Terrace.

Police Chief Mark Drollinger said the team will be an asset, allowing officers to have vehicles searched more quickly. Currently, a sheriff's department canine team must be called when needed. "It's going to be very handy to have her," he said.

Bolin purchased the dog himself and is paying for training and upkeep. The city will lease Maggie's services for \$1 per year so she will be covered by

city insurance, Drollinger said. Although considered an "employee" for insurance purposes, "I don't think she'll be able to get workman's comp," Drollinger joked.

When not working, Maggie is like any other dog. "She's my second child," Bolin said. At home, Bolin's son pulls Maggie's ears and tail "and she just looks at him," he said.

Officer Jeremy Welch, who assisted Bolin Monday, said he enjoys playing with Maggie. "(Bolin) makes her work all the time," he said. "She and I can just have fun."



Hoopeston Police Officer Ephriam Bolin and his partner, Maggie, meet guests at Monday's Neighborhood Watch meeting.

Weather



Sunny today. High 82. Tonight, clear. Low 55. Tomorrow, mostly sunny. High 85, low 60.

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