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Thursday, May 3, 2018

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Council passes budget, implements \$9 monthly dispatch fee

In a 5-1 vote, Hoopeston City Council approved the 2018-19 general budget which adds a \$9-per-month fee to pay for local police and fire dispatching.

Ald. Carl Ankenbrand voted no on the budget, saying after the meeting that the council's once-a-year budget meeting is not sufficient to plan. "It's not proactive," he said. Also, he said, the dispatch issue should be placed on the ballot.

Aldermen Ryan Anderson and Chad Yaden were absent. Mayor Bill Crusinberry was also absent.

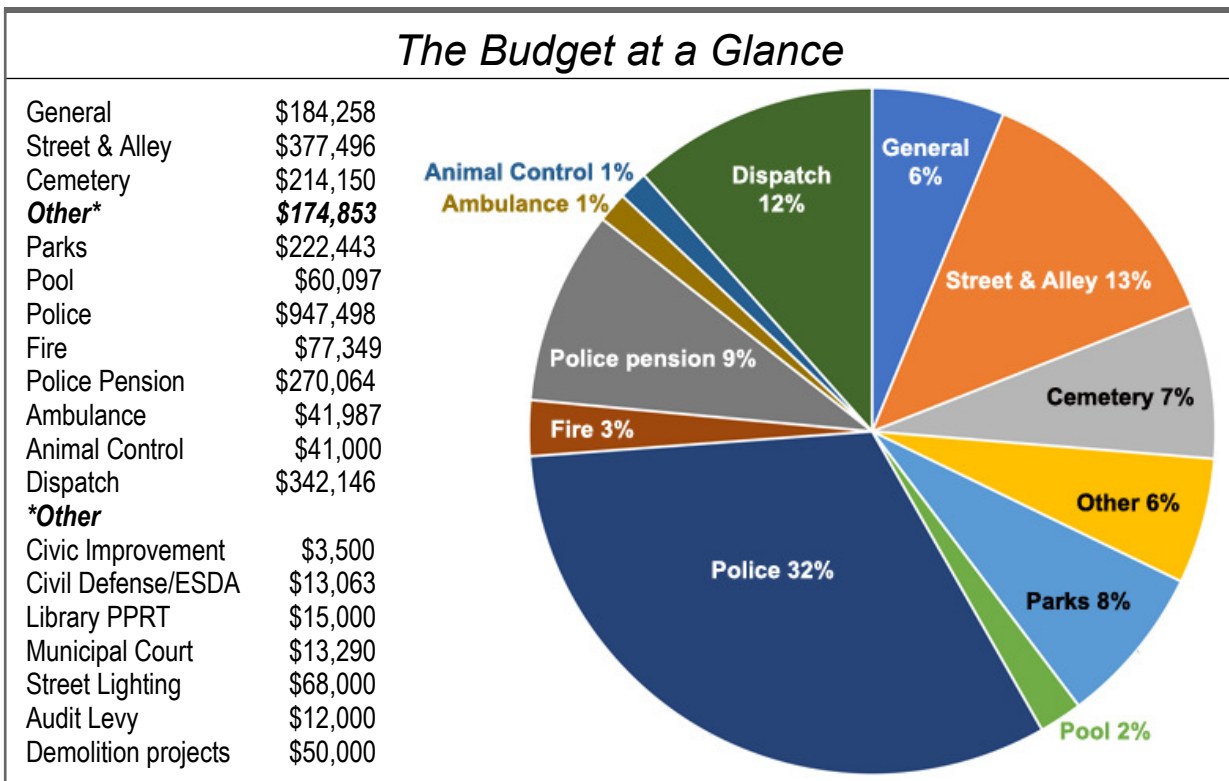
The dispatch fee will appear on residents' water bills

but money from the fee will go to the city's general budget. The council is looking to expand the scope of who pays to include those who live in multi-family buildings that have only one water bill, such as Centennial Manor.

Based on 2,275 water customers, the fee will generate \$245,700 towards the city's total expected income of \$2,918,965. The new budget has \$2,916,869 in expenses, leaving a cushion of \$2,096.

Ald. Bill Goodwine, finance committee chairman, explained why the fee is necessary, including a \$78,000

See BUDGET on other side



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McFerren Park

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Budget continued from other side

decrease in sales and other taxes; a mistake that resulted in \$2.5 million shortfall in the police pension fund, along with decreased interest on investments; and the expectation that the city will tear down dangerous buildings.

With the \$78,000 loss of state taxes, the council approved a \$78,000 payment towards the pension deficit plus increased the pension levy, and \$50,000 for building demolition, all of which added \$242,000 to expenses.

Aldermen faced two options: cut costs or create a new revenue stream. “We knew we couldn’t find (the \$242,000) in postage and supplies, Goodwine said, “so

we decided to make an income stream.”

Cutting local dispatch was discussed at the council’s April 18 budget meeting, because the budgeted \$342,146 would cover the extra amount and then some. Handling of police and fire calls could have been transferred to Vermilion County, a service residents already fund through property taxes, Goodwine said.

However, when dispatch was transferred to Vermilion County in 2016, residents were unhappy with the change and lobbied the council to bring it back, which was done last year.

The rationale for the fee did not sit well with resident Stan Steiner. “My investments went down,” he said. “My retirement went to hell, too.”

Steiner asked if the city is still providing insurance for employee spouses. Goodwine responded that insurance is only offered to spouses who are not working or whose employers do not offer insurance. “It’s something we have to do if we want to attract good employees,” he said.

Steiner suggested the city should “do what everybody else does: do without. Asked what he would do if he needed to call 911 if he were sick, Steiner said if the situation was like his experience over the winter “I’ll proba-

bly croak.”

In other business, the council:

- Approved a 2.75 percent pay increase for employees.
- Heard from water Supt. Steve Baker that the city’s 2017 water quality report is on the city website, www.cityofhoopeston.com, under City Departments and then Water/Sewer tabs. He also reported roof work is done and a pump sent off for repair is back in service.
- Heard from Joshua Clifton, a Market St. resident, who complained about the lack of action on a burned building near him.

Ald. Bill McElhaney said owners are making improvements and are in compliance right now. Clifton, unhappy with the response, said “I’m so tired of you all sitting there saying ‘they’re working on it.’ One hour a day, two days a week they’re working on it.”

Next Clifton complained about officials saying they don’t know who owns a property in the city. “Talk to Grant Township,” he said. “They know who the owner is.”

● Heard from Ald. Alex Houmes that 15 new trees will be planted at Cheese Park, the Veterans Memorial at McFerren Park is being refurbished and LED lights installed and that all administration and lifeguards have been hired for the pool.

● Listened as Clerk Gail Lane read a letter from Carolyn Eyrich-Mastin, of Hoopeston American Legion Auxiliary, asking for clarification on city guidelines for street collections, which is mandated by statute.

The council is expected to act on the request at its May 15 meeting, just days before the Legion’s May 19 Poppy Day.

Obituaries

BAUER - Rosella S. (Schupbach) Bauer, 91, of Cissna Park died Monday, April 30, 2018 at Heritage Health, Hoopeston. Visitation will be 10 a.m. until the noon funeral Thursday at Christian Bible Church, Cissna Park. Burial will be in Cissna Park Cemetery. Memorials are suggested to the church or donor’s choice. Knapp Funeral Home, Cissna Park, is handling arrangements.

Weather

Thunderstorms likely today. High 77. Tonight, chance of storms, then showers likely. Low 63. Tomorrow, chance of showers, mostly clear late. High 76, low 51.

Classifieds

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Flea market Saturday, May 5. McFerren Park Jaycee Pavilion 7 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Local vendors. Something for everyone!

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