

City Council meeting addresses budgeting costs and public works fixes

Written by By Rick Abasta For the Sun
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Animal ordinances, NCI grant money, legal fees also discussed

The Gallup City Council Regular Meeting on Dec. 12 began with a special work session with Jon DeYoung, the assistant city manager. The session focused on proposed amendments to the utility services ordinance for the city.

After the special session, and a short break, the regular meeting began and the council reviewed amendments to an animal control ordinance.

Most of the revisions passed without discussion, but Mayor Jackie McKinney asked for clarification on language that read: "...allow for animals that disturb the peace to be seized or impounded."

"We are going to have an issue when the neighbor calls and the dog is barking and whether somebody knows that [animal control] will impound their dog the first time out," McKinney said.

Curtis Hayes, city attorney, said the language in question was taken from the existing city ordinance.

"The ordinance, as it is currently written, says, 'It is unlawful for a person to allow an animal to persistently or continuously bark, howl or make noise common to their species or otherwise

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disturb the peace and quiet of inhabitants of the city.' I just borrowed that out of the ordinance," Hayes said.

After additional discussion on consistent and persistent disturbing of the peace from animals, the question was called for.

Councilor Yogash Kumar motioned to approve Ordinance No. C2017-10, and Councilor Linda Garcia seconded the action before it was passed by a vote of 4-0.

Item two on the agenda was the approval of budget adjustments to cover legal fees.

Hayes prefaced discussions by saying, "Mayor, councilors, this is one that I am not particularly happy to be here for, but it's necessary."

He spoke of the \$160,000 budget request to cover legal fees for four legal cases that were contracted out to firms outside of the city.

Of the requested amount, \$115,000 will go toward the four cases.

\$40,000 is to cover higher than budgeted costs for prosecutions in municipal court, and \$5,000 to address a decrease in the current budget from last year's allocation.

"We calculated what our budget shortfall is going to be and it's approximately \$40,000. There are a couple of things that I mentioned in the summary form that we're trying to do to cut costs," Hayes said.

These items included in-house consultation on human resource cases and prosecution of cases related to violations of the fire code, building code and other non-criminal codes.

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McKinney responded to the budget and to Hayes' suggestions. "Two points I'll make: Doing things in-house," he said. "That would be great if we're not paying an outside contractor. That would be a feather in your cap."

Speaking of the sum of money requested, McKinney added, "We're not going to hold you liable for the budget of your predecessor. But next year..."

Councilor Allan Landavazo motioned to accept and Kumar seconded. The action was passed by a vote of 4-0.

Item three on the agenda was for amendments to the Na'Nizhoozhi Center, Inc. agreement for the Indian Health Service Preventing Alcohol Related Deaths Grant.

The fiscal year 2018 allocation to NCI is for \$1,305,890. The request was for an amendment to reduce the grant amount to \$1,129,890.

Debra Martinez, behavioral health investment zone manager, requested a reduction to the contract by \$176,000 to fund positions and provide needed equipment and supplies to the facility.

"We're asking you to reduce the contract by \$176,000 in order to purchase beds, posts for the beds. We're adding six offices to NCI to accommodate additional [personnel]," Martinez said.

She passed out blueprints to the council detailing the proposed renovations to NCI.

Garcia motioned to approve and Kumar seconded. The measure passed by a vote of 4-0.

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Stanley Henderson, public works director, then spoke about proposed block sidewalk projects.

“This is a very subjective process,” he said. “Even with our pavement management plan. We have three elements: the pavement, sidewalk, curb and gutter. This is not your street first.”

He said that the public works made recommendations, but the decisions on projects will be made by the city council.

“We’re not looking for a decision tonight, but we would like a decision by the first of January so we can give direction to our engineers and start coordinating with our utilities,” Henderson said.

The construction is needed throughout city districts.

Kumar had suggestions for where he would like to see change.

“You said that we’re replacing sewer and water. Those are streets where I would like to see curb, gutter, and sidewalk. At least in my district,” the councilor said.

Garcia mentioned needs in her district too, specifically on the streets of Marguerite and Franco, near the Larry Brian Mitchell Recreation Center.

“On McKinley, there [are] no sidewalks on either side. On McKinley, near Pershing, there’s a bus stop,” Garcia said. “When the kids are walking to that bus stop, they’re walking on the street because it’s muddy and there’s no sidewalk.”

Henderson reminded Garcia of her own role in the decision making process.

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“Ma’am, you have that decision. That’s why I said it’s a subjective process and you have my subjective opinion,” he said.

No action was taken and the issue will be discussed in early 2018.

DeYoung returned for a hurried presentation on the quarterly strategic plan before the council adjourned for a closed session.

***By Rick Abasta
For the Sun***