

Proposed City Budget Includes 1 Cent Tax Increase

By LAINE GRIFFIN

Daily News-Record

April 11, 2019

HARRISONBURG — The Harrisonburg city budget has been proposed and, if approved, property owners will see a 1 cent increase in the real estate tax.

City Manager Eric Campbell presented City Council with a proposed fiscal year 201920 budget at Tuesday's meeting of \$274.4 million, which is about \$15 million larger than the current spending plan of around \$259.4 million.

Harrisonburg's current real estate tax rate is 85 cents per \$100 of assessed value.

Harrisonburg has the lowest real estate tax compared to Charlottesville and Lynchburg.

Charlottesville, with a population of around 49,000 people, has a tax of 95 cents per \$100 of assessed value. Lynchburg, with around 81,000 residents, has a real estate tax of \$1.11 per \$100 of assessed value.

If passed, Harrisonburg's budget would take effect July 1.

Council did not take action on the budget,

but Mayor Deanna Reed brought up the idea of having a workshop session for the budget, which Campbell said needs to be adopted before May 31.

The majority of the budget, this year accounting for 45 percent, is put toward the general fund. It primarily funds planning, police, fire, parks and recreation services, public works and internal support functions, according to city documents.

Around 32 percent, or around \$83.5 million, of the budget will be put toward the school fund, which supports school administration, instruction, transportation, maintenance and technology.

The Harrisonburg City Public Schools' proposed budget from the city is around \$1.38 million, which is a 4 percent increase from the prior year allocation. The amount includes \$425,000 of additional debt service payments resulting from the \$5 million purchase of land for the new Harrisonburg High School.

The proposed budget calls for a 3% wage increase for city employees. Last fiscal year, the budget called for a 2.5% salary increase. For the second year in a row, there will

be no increase in employee health insurance premiums.

According to city documents, the budget will allow for four new full-time positions, but those wouldn't be funded until Jan. 1.

An additional two positions will be funded jointly with Rockingham County. They call for a criminal justice position and an operations manager for the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Emergency Communications Center.

The city's proposed capital projects budget includes \$11.6 million in funding.

This fund would cover project costs including \$2 million to renovate Fire Station No. 4, about \$1.3 million for the Eastern Raw Water Line, \$225,000 to replace Kids Castle at Purcell Park and \$450,000 to repair Martin Luther King Jr. bridge.

Council will hold a public hearing for the budget at its April 23 meeting and a real estate tax rate budget hearing at the May 14 meeting, at which point the final adoption is expected to take place.

In other news, council unanimously approved the adoption of the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program for the Sunset Heights Neighborhood.

Voting in favor was Councilmen Sal Romero, Richard Baugh, George Hirschmann, Chris Jones and Reed.

Public works planning manager Erin Yancey presented the three- phased approach to cutting down on traffic in a number of areas without excessively restricting movement.

The areas of the project include: South Dogwood Drive, Sunrise Avenue, Elmwood Drive, Chestnut Drive, New York Avenue, West Grace Street, South Willow Street, Ohio Avenue, Maryland Avenue and Dixie Avenue.

The first phase will include making a turn lane reconfiguration at the intersection of West Market Street and South High Street in order to have a dedicated right turn lane. A leading pedestrian phase at the signal of South High Street and Maryland Avenue will also take place, which will show how fast drivers are going and incentivize them to slow down.

Additionally as part of the first phase, a digital speed radar sign will be added on Maryland Avenue, which will show how fast drivers are going and may incentivize them to slow down.

Jones asked Yancey if one speed radar would be enough.

"You all didn't see a need for one on Dogwood at all?," he said.

Yancey said staff felt there was enough already planned for Dogwood Drive, and staff would continue to study to make sure the strategies set in place are working and if not, those would be re- evaluated.

Phase two includes plans to restrict parking to one side on South Dogwood

along Water Street to Maryland Avenue, and narrowing the travel lanes by adding bicycle lanes to both sides.

Along that street, a gradual “S” curve will be constructed by alternating on- street parking to slow drivers down.

The third phase will include a roundabout at Dogwood Drive and Maryland Avenue and at the intersection of Willow Street, Chestnut Drive and West Grace Street. At the next paving schedule, the double yellow lines will be removed from Willow Street except for at the stop or yield signs, which encourages “through traffic use,” according to city documents.

Yancey said after each phase, staff will go collect speeds and traffic volumes to see what change has occurred due to implementation of practices “and if the problem has substantially reduced, we won’t go on to further phases.”

Contact Laine Griffin at 5746286 or lgriffin@dnronline.com