

City Council chambers lively during September meeting

Written by

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City Hall's council chamber was a lively place during the city council's monthly meeting on September 10. Mayor David Bower and the council updated those in attendance on some of the major projects Salem city departments are currently working on, while also beginning to look ahead to what challenges may await the city in 2013.

Bower announced that contracting bids for the Shelby Street project were closing as of Wednesday, September 12, and the city hopes to be moving forward on construction as soon as possible. The Mayor also announced that work is going well on the Lake John Hay project. He said that Engineer Mike Goering anticipates the process of raising the lake's water level should be completed in a year or two. Goering also reported to Bower that the State has allowed Salem to bypass most of the impending mitigation requirements due to how well Lake John Hay was designed.

The council also took a second look into the request for a tax abatement made by Domino's owner Scott Williams. Williams is wanting to expand his current Domino's franchise. City Attorney Andrew Wright explained that the next few steps in the process will involve taking the request before the County Council and a committee that will look into approving the expansion plans. Councilman Warren Jones volunteered to be a part of this committee.

Salem High School's Lady Lions golf team stopped by the meeting to be recognized for their championship win at the Mid-Southern Conference on Saturday, September 8. "They worked hard for this," Coach Jean Brown proudly stated about her team.

The Council also discussed several amendments being made to some of the city's internal policies, one of which was fine tuning what Bower called a "liberal sick policy", referring to the city's vacation and sick leave accrual rate. Under the new ordinance, city employees will receive their first week of vacation days and sick days after a year of employment and their second week of vacation days and sick days after five years of employment.

Employees had been acquiring their second week of leaves after just two years of work, which the council and Salem's department heads decided was too much too soon. "Its still a very good package," remarked Salem Fire Chief Tom Day, "its just getting pushed back." Bower pointed to overlapping requests for time off resulting in a potential shortage of workers at times as one of the reasons for the new legislation. "We can't have four people working a two person job anymore," he said, reflecting on the nation's current economic climate. The new vacation and leave policy, approved by the council, will not affect employees who were hired under the old policy.

Clerk-Treasurer Patricia Persinger was happy to announce that the city's projected budget for 2013 is \$4,883,182 – a \$17,520 decrease from 2012's estimated budget of \$4,900,702.

The biggest issue of the night was the topic of approving two extra holidays during election years, an idea that spurned much conversation. The two days off would be taken during the primary and general elections. It was also proposed that an extra holiday would take place on non-election years as well on a day that would be determined by the Mayor's office. Employees would receive 24 hours of holiday pay during these new holidays.

The idea was proposed due to the lack of activity that already occurs at City Hall during an

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election day. Fire Chief Day proposed that the extra day during non-election years be changed to two days as well, explaining that it would be less of a financial burden for Parsinger and the city's accounting staff if each year held the same number of holidays.

If approved, the new ordinance would not have gone into effect until January 1 of the new year, however, Councilman Wally Terkhorn proposed moving up the process, which would allowing the city to take advantage of this new holiday during the upcoming general election in November. The council approved of that suggestion.

The motion passed, but did so with a vote of 4 -1, which makes the ordinance ineligible of becoming law just yet. The lone holdout was Councilman Danny Libka, who questioned whether creating new holidays was a wise use of the city's money during tough economic times. "If you use this money this year, how will you reward your employees next year?", he asked the rest of the council. This first pass will be considered a first reading and the council will discuss the ordinance further when they reconvene in October.

Everyone is welcome and encouraged to attend the Salem City Council's monthly meetings, which take place at 7:30 pm in City Hall's council chamber on the second Monday of every month. Their next public meeting will be held on October 8, 2012.