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Finance Workshop Reality Check: Expenses are up, revenue is down

By Cathy Tyson

"Cost savings alone are not sufficient to meet all the City's needs," said Dan Deitrick, Chairperson of the Finance Review Committee addressing a City Council Public Workshop. Dietrick is a member independent committee that had been meeting since April to go through the city budget looking for expenditure and revenue trends and to make recommendations.

The evening kicked off with Dietrick presenting a recap of the challenges facing the city: \$18M of unfunded road repair, steeply increasing police services costs, a gap in downtown maintenance expense and four failed tax measures.

After months of analyzing information, the Committee made a number of recommendations. First on the list was that it's better to own than rent the city offices. Acquiring and redeveloping what will soon be the vacant original library building would save approximately \$50,000 per year in rent. Investigate opportunities for a more cost effective police force; a 10% reduction in cost would save \$400,000 per year. Reclassify the Youth Diversion Officer to a non-sworn position could produce a \$100,000 annual savings.

Other recommendations include: transferring the current balance in the Parking fund to the pavement management program, fund future downtown maintenance with assessment districts, and finally increase revenue using one or more of the following - property transfer tax, increase the sales tax, institute a business license fee.

The Council heard a substantial amount of public comment on these suggestions. Seniors stepped forward to lobby for the original library to become a senior center. Police Chief Hubbard clarified that the Youth Diversion Officer is responsible for a number of tasks that require a sworn officer. For example if a non-sworn Youth Diversion Officer were tasked with investigation work, the department would have to contract that out at \$95 per hour, quickly eating up any cost savings.

Gabriel Froymovich, a member of the Lafayette Taxpayers' Association (LTA), had this input, "The LTA applauds the LFRC's thorough report. We would urge the City Council to strongly consider and approve most of the suggested budget cuts before considering new and burdensome taxes in today's depressed economy."

Finally late in the night, after much spirited discussion the Council adopted the following recommendations, to be overseen by the City Manager:

- Launch a study to evaluate opportunities for a most cost effective Police Services structure
- Fund additional parking through the RDA or assessment districts, use surplus parking revenue to fund downtown maintenance until an alternate source of funding is identified
- Fund future downtown maintenance with assessment districts
- Ask residents to increase revenue using one or more of the following to fund infrastructure repair, public safety and downtown vitality - property transfer tax, sales tax, business license fee, parcel tax
- Develop a communications plan for the City

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