

## JANUARY 30, 2017

The Special Meeting of the Lake Benton City Council was held on Monday, January 30, 2017 at 5:30 P.M. in the Heritage Center/City Office. Mayor Bob Worth presided. Trustees Rosie DeZeeuw, Mark Dunn, David Enke and Daryl Schlapkohl were present. City Attorney Mike Cable was absent. City Administrator/Clerk Eileen Christensen, Maintenance Supervisor Todd Draper, Interim Police Chief Tony Sievert, Scott Christensen, Pat McCarthy, Roger Rudebusch, Faye and Gerry Rochel, Don Evers, Dale Rochel, Philip Schmidt, and Shelly Finzen from the Lake Benton Valley Journal were also present.

Mayor Bob Worth called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

Mayor Bob Worth thanked the audience for coming and explained to them the Council will go through the proposal received from the County and additional information before opening the floor up to the audience for questions.

Trustee Daryl Schlapkohl informed the Council that he contacted the County and neighboring towns regarding their police coverage. Daryl stated the City of Lake Benton has gone through a new officer every two to three years. In the past 20 years the City has seen approximately 12 to 15 officers come and go. When a new officer is hired, the City needs to buy the officer(s) armored gear, new uniforms, vests, etc. and it adds up to be quite an expense to the community.

Daryl continued to explain the City of Hendricks contracts with the County for ten (10) hours a week at \$37,400.00 annually. The City of Lake Benton's Police budget is \$90,000.00 which averages \$128.00 per person to have police coverage compared to Hendricks at \$53.00 per person.

Saving money from the Police budget will enable the City to do more with the infrastructure of the streets and City buildings, and save on other budget items without hiring a police officer. The County is in the process of getting a CAD system allowing the officers to write tickets and perform other administrative duties in their squad car. This system will be mandatory state wide in (5) five to (8) eight years and will cost between \$10,000.00 and \$15,000.00. This is something the City of Lake Benton will need to budget for in the future.

It was stated that one check for \$37,000.00 is for fringe benefits alone for the City of Lake Benton's Police Department. The Police budget is also 57% of the City's total budget. Daryl talked with City staff from Elkton, SD, Edgerton, MN, Holland, MN and Brewster, MN and they stated they are all happy with contracting with their County.

Discussion then took place on the County's proposal of \$37,400.00 for ten (10) hours a week versus the City of Lake Benton's budget of \$90,000.00 for someone to work 40 hours a week. Lincoln County also proposed \$74,800.00 for 16 hours a week; \$93,831.78 for 24 hours a week; \$87,192.74 for 32 hours a week; and \$82,213.47 for 40 hours a week for a five year contract. A question was asked why the cost is more for fewer hours. Daryl informed the Council that Chad Meester said he would be willing to answer any questions the Council had and/or attend a future meeting.

Mayor Bob Worth informed the Council the City's 2017 certified budget for the Police Department was \$90,550.75 which was based on the salary of the previous Police Chief at \$21.00 an hour. Former Police Chief Guy Harding left the City making \$19.36 an hour and was here for eight (8) years. Mayor Worth then stated the budget could come down to \$70,432.60 by paying \$17.50 an hour with no part-time officers.

It was questioned if an officer is hired then leaves after a year or two, what will the City do about part-time coverage? This could increase or change the budget due to the fact the officer could work more than \$5,100.00 in a year and making the City pay PERA.

The council then questioned how many years before the City needs to purchase a new squad. The City of Lake Benton's squad is a 2012 and has 68,000 miles on it.

It was then stated that the Council keeps talking about money and should consider public safety and what people think of that. It was the consensus of the Council that the City has questions for the County Sheriff's office (i.e. how much time is spent on administrative duties, training, patrol, etc.).

Mayor Bob Worth then opened the floor for the audience to ask questions, etc.

A member in the audience stated they would like to have a patrol officer in the City. Another member stated their teenage daughter walks home from the Opera House after a show and is out after curfew. She feels safer knowing there is a police officer in town and aware of the situation. A County deputy isn't going to know these people and care why they are out after curfew.

Maintenance Supervisor Todd Draper requested to speak to the Council. Todd worked as a part-time officer in Lake Benton in the early 1980's. He currently lives in Marshall, but commutes to Lake Benton for work. He wanted to express to the Council they need to learn from the past. Lake Benton has always been a stepping stone for police officers. This is a Council decision and if the Council feels that lowering the budget to hire someone they are going to get someone just out of school. If there were someone that decided they would like to retire in Lake Benton, they are not going to work for anything less than \$60,000.00. There are also training costs that need to be included in the budget. The County has always been here for the City of Lake Benton, and there are not many places to cut the budget.

Todd Draper went on to explain to the Council there are pluses to contracting with the County. The City Administrator/Clerk has done a lot of work in the past year and a half in regards to the Police issue. If the Council contracts with the County, the City will not have the issues of insurance, PERA, and workers compensation. It was also stated the City may have a 40-hour police officer, but not 40 hours of service. Several communities are searching to save money and the Council needs to work together with the County and the community.

Some Council members stated their concerns of ten (10) hours of police coverage a week is not enough for the City of Lake Benton. Discussion then took place that the County deputy's travel through the City of Lake Benton and it seems they are in Lake Benton more than our local police officer. The City of Lake Benton is getting coverage from the County anyway due to the fact the Lincoln County residents pay county taxes. If the citizens of Lake Benton already pay taxes, will we be paying additional money? There were also concerns of safety and how important it is, and it was suggested that having a deputy live in town could make a big difference. Having a deputy live in town is greater than having the Sheriff's department travel 15 miles away. However, just because an officer lives in town doesn't mean they go out on every call. If they are not on call, they may not go out. It was then stated that tax dollars is the main issue right now because in four (4) to five (5) years down the road, it will cost the citizens more money.

Pipestone County believes contracting with their County Sheriff's Office is the way to go. Questions arose if anyone has talked to the citizens of those towns? Are they happy or is it just an opinion? It was suggested the City could set up a neighborhood watch with ten (10) hour coverage, and it's good for the citizens to be aware of what is going on.

It was then mentioned the City's Saddle Horse Holiday needs extra police coverage. Ten (10) hours is not enough as they will be needed at least 48 hours. It was asked if the County would charge additional funding for protection during the City's Saddle Horse Holiday, and yes they would.

An audience member then asked what the City is doing about the citizens making illegal U-turns in town. The Council is aware of this and understands the issue.

Trustee Daryl Schlapkohl thanked Acting Police Chief Tony Sievert for talking with the businesses and they really appreciate it.

It was brought to the attention of the Council to contact the County Commissioners before they make any decisions, and confirm the County is willing to talk about this issue. City Administrator/Clerk Eileen Christensen will contact the County Auditor to be put on the County Commissioner's agenda for their February 7, 2017 meeting.

It was also decided the Council needs to set a place of venue for the citizens of the City to meet with Sheriff Chad Meester and get questions answered in regards to the County proposal. Trustee Daryl Schlapkohl will contact Chad Meester to attend the town meetings.

The town hall meetings were set for February 8, 2015 and February 15, 2017 at 7:00 PM at the Lake Benton Community Center. In order to promote the meetings, Shelly Finzen agreed to put something in the paper, add it to the Community calendar and spread the word.

Bob thanked everyone for coming and to remind the Lake Benton citizens to attend the town hall meetings.

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, a **MOTION** was made by Dave Enke, seconded by Mark Dunn and carried, the meeting adjourned.

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MAYOR

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ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK