

JUNE 10, 2019

The Special Meeting of the Lake Benton City Council was held on Monday, June 10, 2019 at 5:30 PM in the Heritage Center/City Office. Mayor Bob Worth, Trustees Rosie DeZeeuw, Dave Enke, and Daryl Schlapkohl were present. Trustee Mark Dunn was absent. City Administrator/Clerk Eileen Christensen, Police Officer Dallas Cornell, Roger Rudebusch, Diane and Don Evers, Jim Sorenson, Gerry Rochel, Vern and Mary Pashke, Curtis Rethwisch, Gary Serie, and Rich Riley were also present.

Mayor Bob Worth called the meeting to order.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by all present.

The first item of business was to discuss the open Police Chief position. Mayor Bob Worth informed the audience that Police Chief Tony Sievert resigned his position effective June 16, 2019, and inquired if the City should hire a new Police Chief or consider contracting with the County. Mayor Bob Worth explained there will be a round table discussion with the City Council and then open it to the public for their comments.

The Council each took turns explaining their thoughts. It seems every two to three years we are hiring a new Police Chief. In 2017 prior to hiring Police Chief Tony Sievert, the Council and community talked about contracting with the County. The City's 2020 proposed budget for the Police Department is \$106,456.00; in 2019 the Police Department budget is \$93,854 in which \$84,683.26 has been spent. Although the new squad is part of that amount, the City spends 57% of their budget on the Police Department. Would the Council be open to talking with the County again to confirm their cost to contract? Can a City of 600 people afford a \$100,000.00 budget? In 2017 the County quoted 16 hours per week at \$74,800.00 and 24 hours per week at \$87,000.00. Does the City hire another Police Chief for two years before they leave for a better job?

When the City placed ads for the open position of Police Chief a couple years ago, there were not many applications. One was from a veteran police officer that requested a larger salary than the City could afford. Does the City hire a police officer fresh out of school when they may want to move up in their career and not spend it in a small town? Two years ago, the community spoke very highly about wanting a local police force here. The County is an option yet they are shorthanded with vacancies they can't fill. The County sometimes has only one officer on duty for the entire County which doesn't help with emergency responses. The Council member was not convinced that the City would get the best from the County with only ten hours a week. After conversations with Police Chief Tony Sievert, there are a lot more happenings going on in this City that we don't know about, and we need the presence of a police force here.

What if the County were to decide they no longer want to contract with Lake Benton? The City will have to purchase new equipment, vehicle, officers, etc. and that can cost more than what we have now. Response time is a big issue if we were to go with the County.

This is a tough situation, do we want to place ads and hire again even if it is for two years and hope we get what we had with our current Police Chief? There is also the case where we won't get the service we need if we don't have our own Police Chief. The current Police Chief promotes safety at the School and the Library, and is a supporter of the City's' Archery Hunt. There are a lot of good things to having our own Police Chief, but how are we going to find one if we don't get many applications to fill the position. It was also mentioned that several towns, larger than Lake Benton, contract with Counties due to funding. The City was fortunate they didn't have to pay health insurance on Police Chief Tony Sievert, now we will, plus uniforms and a decent salary.

The floor was then opened for public comment.

No matter which way the City decides, the County finances it either way. The Police Chief will more than likely be inclined to leave for more money – even if it is with Lincoln County. If the City contracts with the County, we don't have to worry about work comp issues, insurance, etc. The City has attempted twice to hire a full-time Police Chief and failed – the City should reevaluate and get a realistic quote from the County. Perhaps the City can negotiate more hours and less money with the County or is the County here to protect the County or drown it.

It was also mentioned that the Police Chief sits at his office all day without driving around and talking with the residents. The Council corrected the public and explained the Police Chief has a lot of paper work due to the four drug busts in town and stopped a substantial ring. Please consider what the local Police force has done for this community.

Having a Police Chief is valuable to this community, not a waste of money. It is worth trying again to hire a Police Chief in town. Make it the City's first priority and if the pool of applicants isn't good, then consider going with the County. Ten hours a week isn't enough time for a County Deputy to get to know the people and the town. It will cost money to hire a new Police Chief and that should be the City's first priority. Saving money is a bad motive when we are trying to save this town.

A community member expressed it would be better to have our own Police Chief, but if they don't live in town, the response time has changed. Please don't look strictly on cost, if the City is budgeting \$106,000.00 for next year's Police department, consider negotiating 30 hours for \$75,000.00 with the County. However, one call can take up to five hours which includes the paperwork to complete the report and that leaves only 25 hours or approximately five calls for the week.

It was commented that it is hard to believe the County will get cheaper than what was quoted to the City two years ago. Wages are a big issue as well as the mandated training to do their job. It costs money.

Police Officer Dallas Cornell spoke to the Council and the audience and informed them he started with the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office in 2012. He worked with the County for five years before transferring to the Environmental Office. Dallas worked with the contract the County had with Hendricks which consisted of three Deputies on at various times and each Deputy put 30 minutes in at Hendricks. Right now the City of Lake Benton gets 56 hours a week of protection with only Tony Sievert and Dallas Cornell. Dallas informed the Council and the audience that he will lose his job with the City if they contract with the County. The Lake Benton Police Department does their best to be seen, but emergencies do come up. A lot of this job is police presence. Dallas then reminded the Council and audience, that if the City contracts with the County, you get rid of the new squad that was just purchased. If you decide to go back, you have to purchase another car, new Police Chief, training, uniforms, salary, insurance, etc. and these costs can be more overwhelming than the City's current budget.

Incentive to stay in a small community is hard. People consider this a bed and breakfast community but there are still active investigations within the City. Is the City willing to lose the coverage and get drugs back in the City?

A citizen stated they don't live in Lake Benton, but has an investment in Lake Benton and believes the City should keep their own police force. The costs will not go down with the County and when police protection is needed, the response time is not good. The time involved with being on a police force includes interviewing, court, paperwork, etc. and the County can't give the time the City needs. The City is always looking for opportunities to grow, so look at the quality of the individual – a more experienced officer. The City needs someone

with experience or the City will face a lot of self-induced problems. When people know your City doesn't have a Police Chief, they'll know they can come here and cause problems. The City of Lake Benton wants to draw new families to their growing community so they feel safe in raising their families, not taking the risk of having a meth lab next door. Prove to the citizens of Lake Benton and check the contract costs with the County. As a reminder, it is costly to overcome and reestablish a new police force from scratch.

It was recommended that the City investigate both sides. The City is currently getting 56 hours of coverage which will not be affordable if that many hours are contracted with the County. The current police force has cleaned up this town and would hope to continue moving forward.

Mayor Bob Worth thanked everyone for expressing their opinions and participating.

The next item of business was to appoint an Acting Police Chief. The City is in need of an Acting Police Chief after June 16, 2019. It was the recommendation for the Council to consider placing someone as the Acting Police Chief before the City hires new or contracts with the County.

Police Officer Dallas Cornell is currently working 12 to 16 hours a week for the City. Should the Council hire him, Dallas reminded them that with the extra work load and administrative duties, he will need to work 18 to 24 hours a week to accomplish what he can for the City. Dallas requested the Council take into consideration that he has a full-time job with the Environmental Office and works part-time as a Police Officer for the City of Lake Benton which is taking time away from his family. Police Officer Dallas Cornell currently makes \$15.91 an hour for the City and is requesting \$25.00 an hour as Acting Police Chief with no benefits.

MOTION by Dave Enke, seconded by Daryl Schlapkohl to appoint Dallas Cornell Acting Police Chief effective June 17, 2019 at \$25.00 an hour. Motion carried.

The next item of business was to review/act on the convection oven at the Event Center. The City purchased a new convection oven because the one in the Event Center was breaking down too often and was not dependable for the tenant that leases the kitchen and the appliances.

The Fire Department requested to use the old convection oven for their street dance on Saturday, June 15, 2019 to cook pizzas. Instead of storing the old convection oven and letting people use it, it was brought to the Council to vote on selling it or giving it away since the City has a more dependable oven from the school.

MOTION by Daryl Schlapkohl, seconded by Dave Enke to give the convection oven, as is, to the Fire Department effective June 11, 2019. Motion carried.

There being no further business to come before the Council at this time, a **MOTION** was made by Rosie DeZeeuw, seconded by Daryl Schlapkohl and carried, the meeting adjourned.

MAYOR

ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK