

SEPTEMBER 26, 2019

The Special Meeting of the City Council was held on Thursday, September 26, 2019 at 6:00 PM in the Heritage Center/City Office. Mayor Bob Worth presided. Trustees Rosie DeZeeuw, Mark Dunn, Dave Enke and Daryl Schlapkohl were present. City Attorney Mike Cable was absent. City Administrator/Clerk Eileen Christensen, Steve Schouviller, Roger Rudebusch, and Shelly Finzen from the Lake Benton Valley Journal were also present.

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

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Lake Benton Police Department. Mayor Bob Worth informed the Council and audience that he, Trustee Dave Enke, Steve Schouviller, and Administrator/Clerk Eileen Christensen interviewed the Police Chief applicants on Monday afternoon and handed the floor over to Trustee Dave Enke – Personnel Committee.

Dave informed the Council and audience the committee interviewed three candidates and one candidate rose above the other two. Candidate number 2 had a lot of corporate security experience, but not enough as a Police Chief; and candidate number 3 has experience as an officer and Police Chief, but the committee did not feel he would be a good fit for the City of Lake Benton. The committee panel was unanimous in their support for candidate number one.

This candidate is interested in part-time work, and currently teaches in Fargo at NDSU with commitments that require attendance in the classroom and advising students. This candidate would break up his time to work two shifts and stay overnight in Lake Benton, and has a wealth of knowledge, experience, mentoring and teaching. He was a Police Chief, is an active Police Officer, and is currently a deputy sheriff in North Dakota. With this candidate's ongoing experience and educational background, the committee felt he will fill the needs of the community. This candidate expressed interest in moving to Lake Benton but there is no set time table when this will happen. This candidate does not want the health insurance benefits and can start soon. Although he has obligations to NDSU, he is not going to resolve his relationship with them at this time.

This candidate also stated he does not have to be in Fargo all the time as he can work from home to take care of a lot needs in Fargo. He would like to have a part-time officer for Lake Benton and he has a lot of contacts to place a number of part-time officers on the City's roster. The part-time officers would cover some of the time and he would be gone two days a week in Fargo. He will be available by phone at all times and is willing to put in the work needed to be available. The candidate mentioned he would be able to put in 30 to 40 hours a week during the summer months and approximately 25 hours a week in the winter.

The Council inquired what the City will be paying this individual. It was discussed to offer him \$25.00 an hour with six-month probation, and possibly give him an increase after that time. This candidate will be paid an hourly wage and not salary.

A Councilmember stated that the past experience with Police Chiefs has not gone well in the City. The City has not had an officer on duty since Father's Day weekend and there doesn't seem to be any real issues in the City. The County and Highway Patrol have been visible. The Councilmember felt the City should contract with the County and not spend money on training, uniforms, insurance, fuel, upkeep on the squad, salary, PERA, etc. The County would still be less expensive. The squad hasn't moved in two months so the City should consider selling it. If the City has problems with enforcing the ordinances, the Administrator/Clerk can send a letter to the citizen and if need be, Legal Counsel can send a second letter. The City should consider contracting with the County.

Another Councilmember doesn't like hiring the Police Chief for \$25.00 an hour and is not sold on the County, but is not in favor of not having someone. They would rather see a full-time Chief if the City were to hire their own. If 25 hours wasn't enough from the County, could we split and get 25 hours with the hired Police Chief and 15 hours with the County.

Another Councilmember talked with several citizens regarding the Sheriff's proposal: the City knows where the County stands on ordinances; it won't be the same deputy to build a relationship with the people of the community; and they want to keep their own Chief. A consultant with 40 years of experience said to go County and forget about your ordinances. The City of Hendricks contracts with Lincoln County and it is not a fool-proof operation but they get their 10 hours a week from the County. From an Administrator's standpoint it works, and he deals with the ordinances, is our Administrator willing to do that? This Councilmember would like to have someone here with boots on the ground. With a part-time Chief and officers, the City will get a better bang for their buck than what we would get from the County. The City has a viable candidate and is in favor of our own department.

Another Councilmember was also in favor of hiring our own Chief. If the City were to contract with the County, and two or three years down the road when the County won't sign another contract with the City, we will have to pay quite a bit to get the department back.

Discussion then took place between the Mayor and Councilmembers on the suggested wage to pay the new Chief. The HR committee should sit down with the current employees and ask what their thoughts that the City is considering to pay more for a new employee than one that has worked several years for the City. The equity and hourly wage with existing employees versus the ramifications of hiring a new Police Chief at \$25.00 an hour is difficult. The City knows the employees are underpaid and the Council is working hard to get them to midrange; however, the starting wage for a County deputy is \$25.00 an hour. Although this may have an impact on an increase in the levy, why are there no citizens voicing their opinions at this meeting. It would be nice if we could have more input from the community.

Steve Schouviller gave his opinion to the Council after having worked on both sides, and couldn't say which way to go. If the City contracts with the County and doesn't like it, the City will need to petition to legislature to get their department back and get approval. The City would need to have a substantial budget set aside for that as well as petitioning to legislature.

Mayor Bob Worth than requested a ballot vote – County or Chief. The ballots were counted as follows: three for Chief, and one for County.

It was recommended the HR committee sit down with the employees and have a conversation before offering the position. If it is fine with the employees, then offer \$24.00 or \$25.00 an hour contingent upon the successful passing of the psychological and background tests. The HR committee (Mayor Bob Worth and Trustee Dave Enke) will meet with the current employees at 7:45 am Friday morning.

Mayor Bob Worth and the Council thanked Steve Schouviller for his assistance in this process and greatly appreciated his time.

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

MAYOR

ADMINISTRATOR/CLERK