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## WPD officers get raises



**Williston Police Chief Dennis Strow speaks to the city leaders on Tuesday night (Jan. 24).**

**Story and Photo By Jeff M. Hardison © Jan. 26, 2017 at 3:07 p.m.**

**WILLISTON** -- Williston Police Chief Dennis Strow succeeded in getting \$2,000 more a year as a starting salary for police officers and code enforcement officers, and \$1,000 a year more for dispatchers after speaking with the City Council on Tuesday night (Jan. 24).

Although he is not seeking the increase for himself, Strow succeeded in obtaining the pay increase for everyone from Deputy Chief Clay Connolly down through the ranks.

This need for increasing pay began with discussions during the budget workshops in the summer of 2015, Strow said as he spoke to City Council President Charles Goodman, Vice President Nancy Winger and City Councilman Kori Lamb on Tuesday night.

City Councilman Elihu Ross was absent, and future City Councilman Timothy "Tim" Hass has not yet taken his position as a replacement for former City Councilman Danny Etheridge. Mayor R. Gerald Hethcoat was present, however he does not vote on the budget or amendments to it.

Chief Strow said the pay is so low for starting as a WPD officer that he cannot attract qualified candidates for the position of municipal police officer.

WPD Det. Sgt. James Bond is retiring at the end of February, Chief Strow mentioned.

"Our officers work 2,184 hours a year," Strow said, "and our starting pay is \$30,000."

Out of 15 comparable agencies, the WPD is 14th in annual pay, he said. Added to that, Strow said, most of the officers in those agencies work 104 fewer hours each year.

"I'm not trying to jump to the top," Strow said, "but we've got to get off of the bottom.

Strow's proposal, which was accepted by a 3-0 vote with Winger making the motion and Lamb seconding it, was to increase all WPD officers' salaries by \$2,000 a year.

The chief said the \$32,000-a-year starting salary for WPD would equal the starting pay for a

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Levy County Sheriff's Office deputy – even though the WPD officer will work 104 more hours a year than an LCSO deputy for that pay.

Strow said he understands the Williston is not Ocala or Gainesville, but officers seeking jobs in this market see those cities as possible venues for work as well as Williston.

The reason to give all existing officers a \$2,000 pay raise, he explained, is for equity; so that the future starting officers do not have an advantage over the existing officers.

Communications officers start at \$24,000, Strow said. Of the five area agencies compared, the least above the WPD is \$1,800 more than for the WPD, he said.

In code enforcement, Williston is fifth of five areas for pay, Strow said. Wayne Carson is not only the code enforcement officer for Williston, but he is the animal control officer as well. He is paid only \$29,200 a year, Strow said, and this is after serving the residents and visitors of Williston for nine years.

Gainesville's starting pay of just over \$40,000 is not enough to tempt Carson to leave, Strow said, only because he loves the city that much.

Awesome, dedicated employees are across-the-board in Williston, Chief Strow said.

"They need to let them know that we appreciate them," he said, "and do what we can to compensate them properly for their profession."

Chief Strow met with Williston Finance Officer Stephen Bloom. They completed calculations. The \$2,000 annual increase for sworn law enforcement officers; the \$2,000 annual increase for the animal control (code enforcement) officer; and the \$1,000 annual pay increase for communications officers equal a cost of about \$8,000 if the pay increases start Feb. 1.

This is a \$12,000 increase in the budget for a full fiscal year, starting next year.

This motion included the ability to make the starting annual pay for communications officers \$25,000 and the starting annual pay for law enforcement officers \$32,000 at the WPD.