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## Williston city employees to receive raises as of Oct. 1



City Finance Director Stephen Bloom answers questions Tuesday night (Sept. 11).

### Story and Photos

By Jeff M. Hardison © Sept. 12, 2018 at 4:38 p.m.

**WILLISTON** – Deciding about possible raises for city employees cause the first part of a budget hearing in Williston on Tuesday night (Sept. 11) to last an hour.



(from left) Williston City Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson, Williston City Councilman Justin Head and Williston Mayor Jerry Robinson perform their duties as municipal leaders Tuesday night.

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**Williston City Council President Nancy Wininger and Williston City Councilman Elihu Ross listen to City Manager Scott Lippmann.**



**Williston City Council President Nancy Wininger shares why she feels some level of discomfort with giving people raises they deserve and need. Her stance to vote 'No' for those raises at the start of the meeting changed to a 'Yes' vote after about an hour of discussing the matter. Nevertheless, having no way to know what the future holds, and knowing there is a likelihood to need to keep employees at least at this pay rate in the future, the city leader shared some concerns she felt as she thought about the matter.**

The end result was increased pay for Williston city employees who serve in departments other than the police or fire departments.

An initial budget proposal of a 3 percent across-the-board pay increase for those workers changed -- so that those city employees saw increases of 15 to 20 percent, depending on various factors such as longevity and their current pay scale.

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Some workers will see raises of as much as \$2 to \$3 per hour.

The choice to adopt the pay increases came after City Manager Scott Lippmann recommended them.

They were approved by a 4-0 vote of the Williston City Council, with City Councilman Charles Goodman being absent that night.

At the outset of the budget hearing, Mayor Jerry Robinson told the four City Council members present why he felt they should vote in favor of the amended wage increases for city workers.

To keep the good employees the city has now and to be able to add competent workers for current and future projects were a couple of reasons, he gave for those four to vote "Yes." Mayor Robinson also said the reason to vote in favor of these raises is to assure that the people of Williston will be provided with the level of service they need.

City Council Vice President Marguerite Robinson said she agreed with the mayor, her husband, in regard to voting in favor of the proposed pay raises.

City Council President Nancy Winger gave a narrative of reasons as to both why, and why not, to vote in favor of the raises.

Concluding that speech, President Winger said she would have to hear a lot to convince her to change from her plan to vote "No" on the raises.

Winger said she was concerned that these raises will need to be covered in the coming years, and she could not determine the funding method.

Director of City Finance Stephen Bloom said he found revenue to cover this added expense this year. Moving forward, he said there are too many changing factors from year to year to say about future funding.

"You don't know where your pension plans are going to go," Bloom said. "You don't know where our assets are going to be at. On the other side of that, on a positive, you don't know where your taxable values are going to grow."

To name funding sources for these pay increases for future years presents "one of those crystal ball scenarios moving forward," Bloom said.

Williston Public Works Director C.J. Zimoski explained that the city has vacant positions now that no one will apply to fill because the pay is so low for the work that must be done. The city has run many help-wanted ads with zero qualified applicants showing up.

Zimoski explained that there are jobs the city will have to subcontract for as a result of not having the workers to complete the jobs, and that will cost the city far more than is budgeted, even with these increases in pay.

Zimoski said the work completed by previous city workers has significantly saved the city money in comparison with the cost that would exist if the city had hired independent contractors to complete those jobs.

According to information in the agenda packet, the following jobs are vacant in Williston – city planner, roads and street-crew worker, water-sewer-gas supervisor, utility technician-water, and groundman-electric.

People are leaving employment with the city of Williston, Zimoski said, over a \$2-an-hour difference in pay.

The year before last, the city faced dire straits in its electric department, Zimoski said, when it would have cost the city \$1,500-per-day to have two workers to subcontract to run the electric department.

The city is on the brink of seeing that same problem in its sewer and gas departments

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right now, Zimoski said.

“All it takes is one person leaving,” Zimoski said, “and you’ll be contracting that service out within the next year.”

Mayor Robinson added to what Zimoski said, by saying the wage increases proposed “will seem like peanuts” very quickly after the city is forced to hire subcontractors to perform daily operations.

Williston Code Enforcement/Animal Control Officer Wayne Carson also provided the City Council with reasons to give employees the raises shown on the amended Compensation Pay Plan, as did a couple of other city workers. One worker spoke about his own family finances affected by the current pay he earns with the city.

City Clerk Fran Taylor shared insight with the City Council as well to show why the best choice would be to vote “Yes” on the proposed pay increases.

As a result, the City Council adopted a resolution that helps employees so they may overcome being compensated below the current poverty level.

The new pay rates become effective with the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1.

To determine the amended raises, City Manager Lippmann put the lowest annual pay at \$25,000 a year and he worked from there.

And while City Councilman Justin Head voted in favor of the resolution awarding pay increases, he however was the lone dissenter in a 3-1 vote to approve a \$13,840,483 budget, and Councilman Head cast the “No” vote in a 3-1 vote to approve a millage rate of 6.25 mills.

That proposed tentative city millage rate reflects a 7.1 percent increase in the ad valorem property tax rate for Williston city property owners in comparison with the previous year.

After the budget hearing, Councilman Head said he voted "No" because he felt the millage rate did not need to be increased by quite that much.

After the hearing, City Manager Lippmann said the city has obtained equipment to complete jobs that it formerly would have had to hire subcontractors to complete. Now the city wants to keep the workers who can operate those machines, and continue to save the city money, he said.

Lippmann’s comment reinforced what Public Works Director Zimoski had mentioned when he explained to the City Council that -- thanks to the equipment the city has now, it brought in \$70,000 to the city that would have not have happened before.

The second and final public hearing to adopt the budget and millage for the city of Williston is scheduled to start at 6:50 p.m. on Sept. 25 in the temporary Williston City Council Room, in the former multi-purpose building and band room of the old Williston High School, 427 W. Noble. Ave. (U.S. Alt. 27).