

**COUNCIL MINUTES
CITY OF PASO ROBLES**

**EMERGENCY SERVICES FUNDING OPTIONS:
COMMUNITY MEETINGS**

ADJOURNED REGULAR MEETING

Monday, February 26, 2001 7:00 PM

CALL TO ORDER

The City Council of the City of El Paso de Robles, meeting in regular session at 7:00 p.m. on the above date in the Paso Robles School District Board Room, was called to order by Mayor Frank Mecham.

ROLL CALL Councilmembers George Finigan, Jim Heggarty, Gary Nemeth, Duane Picanco and Mayor Frank Mecham. Absent: Councilmember Jim Heggarty

PUBLIC DISCUSSION

- Pat Mackie expressed concerns about rolling blackouts in the summer and suggested taking a poll of residents to determine electrical requirements for medical needs. Councilmember Finigan responded that PG&E blackouts generally last about two hours and some circuit sites are exempted (hospitals, emergency services, etc.). Citizens should notify PG&E if they need to be exempted for medical reasons.

1. Future Funding Options for Emergency Services/Public Safety

Emergency Services Chief Doug Hamp gave a brief overview on past and current service levels and numbers of incidents, as well as how increasing state and federal mandates for firefighters limits those who may serve as volunteers. He then discussed the need for a recurring revenue source for Emergency Services/Public Safety. Both an early 1990s study and the September 2000 study reported a need for increased staffing and response levels. In order to address the deficiencies in equipment, staffing levels, response times and training opportunities, the City Council seeks input from community members to address the need for \$2.2 million in annual funding for Emergency Services/Public Safety.

Chief Hamp and Police Chief Dennis Cassidy presented an overview of two forms of new tax income, which could serve as a means to fund the expansion of Emergency Services:

- Seek authorization from the California State Legislature to ask the voters to approve an increase to local (City) sales tax rate (in place of the ¼ cent reduction just implemented by the State). Legislators in Sacramento need to support emergency legislation for a sales tax ballot vote. The City Council has submitted a letter to State legislators asking for permission to request a ¼ to ½ cent sales tax, but have not yet received support to explore this funding avenue. The earliest a new tax could be put before the voters would be November 2001. Any new tax proposal requires a two-thirds majority vote to implement. If citizens believe this option is the best, they should contact the officers of State Senator Jack O'Connell and State Representative Abel Maldonado.
- Establish a property-type parcel tax that would assess property owners a tax based upon the degree of emergency service risk inherent to their property and/or the uses thereon. This system has been successfully implemented in other California Communities.

Note: The City is not pursuing the option of a utility tax at this time due to recent energy crisis issues.

Mayor Mecham opened the public hearing. Speaking from the public were Fred Rogers, Myra Phillips, Matt Pomerico, Sharon Miranda, Dan Turner (Fire Chief of CDF/SLO County Fire), Pat Mackie, Gary Fowler, Kathryn Harris, Wayne Harris, Bob Treece, Tim Sobey, Gordon Koolman, and Marge Trager.

Questions and/or suggestions from the public included:

- Incremental implementation of fees/taxes.
- Consider sources for revenue other than another property tax
- Keep costs away from property owners and look for other avenues.
- How does automatic aid with the California Department of Forestry (CDF) work?
- What will \$2.2 million fund?
- Concerns about growth; growth hasn't "paid" for itself.
- Is bed tax an option?
- Senior groups are not interested in additional utility taxes.
- Importance of quick emergency response, since there is already a time lapse from time of emergency to calling 911.
- CDF versus Paso Robles firefighter pay rate?
- If bridges are not functioning, it is important that both sides of river have station and staff to respond.
- What portion of property tax goes back to the City and the Emergency Services Department?
- Questions on the Growth Management Plan, on CDF option cost savings and local control. Why aren't we looking at the savings of this option?
- Concern that Paso Robles not follow what happened in San Luis Obispo. User utility tax (implemented in 1970) was eventually used for General Fund and not purely for intended services.
- Sales tax should include ambulance transport to city residents.
- The most important services are police, fire, water, roads and sewage. These should be the priorities.
- CDF contract cost savings result from the difference in firefighter workweek: 72 vs. 56 hours, which means it uses less firefighters. State can economize in some ways, but cannot provide local control on some issues.
- Whether or not the City contracted with CDF for fire protection and emergency services, citizens would still have to have to pay for services. The tough part is deciding how to pay.
- Why don't we start by increasing medical (paramedic) response?

- I will not support any property tax increase unless it's on new development.
- Please consider distribution of defibrillators in police cars and elsewhere.
- Is the need for a 4-minute response time a scare tactic?
- Why was so much spent on a ladder truck we don't need?
- Contract service is a good way to go. You would have more resources.
- What is comparison of CDF and Paso City firefighter pay rates?

There being no further comments either written or oral, the public discussion was closed.

In response to questions and comments, the following comments were submitted:

Mayor Franck Mecham explained that 19 cents of each property tax dollar comes back to the City's General Fund. Development fees are currently under study. Fees, however, must show what the impacts are in relation to the services provided. The City cannot charge more than is necessary. In regards to the concern for designated public safety funds, he said the funds will not be co-mingled with other funds and will remain dedicated by ordinance.

The City Council has authority to make a decision about funding, but wants a plan that has support from the community and the Council wants to hear from the public about any other suggestions for revenue sources. Councilmembers are glad to talk to community groups if they are invited to speak about this issue. Instead of the survey that the previous City Council wanted, the current Council believes public feedback from citizens will help to better assess funding options.

City Manager James App said that the City has had budget cuts over the last ten years and that there is not much more to cut. As an example, he said that even if the City were to completely discontinue library and recreation services, the savings would not cover the future cost of emergency services.

Regarding developer's fees, a few years ago, the City Council reduced the bridge portion of developer impact fees. These fees are again under review.

Councilmember Gary Nemeth referred to previous Emergency Services studies and explained why they haven't been addressed.

Councilmember George Finigan reminded the citizens that Emergency Services provides many other services that are important for the community--First Aid/CPR training, business inspections and school safety programs.

The Council, by general consensus, adjourned from regular session at 9:05 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT to THE EMERGENCY SERVICES FUNDING OPTIONS COMMUNITY MEETING AT 7:00 PM ON MONDAY, MARCH 5, 2001, IN THE LIBRARY/CITY HALL CONFERENCE CENTER, 1000 SPRING STREET; AND TO THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING ON TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 2001, 7:30 PM AT THE LIBRARY/CITY HALL CONFERENCE CENTER, 1000 SPRING STREET

Submitted:

Sharilyn M. Ryan, Deputy City Clerk
Approved: March 20, 2001

