

**COUNCIL MINUTES
CITY OF PASO ROBLES**

**EMERGENCY SERVICES FUNDING OPTIONS:
COMMUNITY MEETING**

ADJOURNED REGULAR MEETING

Monday, March 12, 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 City Hall, 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 Gary Nemeth

1. Future Funding Options for Emergency Services/Public Safety

- (a) Emergency Services Chief Doug Hamp presented information on the need for a recurring revenue source for Emergency Services/Public Safety. Chief Hamp discussed 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.

In the 1980s and 1990s the community focused on increasing staffing for law enforcement. Now the City is asking citizens to focus on current and future Emergency Services needs. The ultimate goal is the eventual staffing of 24 firefighters.

Hamp discussed the 1997 Insurance Service Office inspection and the 2000 Emergency Services Growth Management Plan, which noted deficiencies in equipment, staffing levels, response times and training opportunities. He then explained the importance of 4-minute response times for medical aids (cardiac incidents) and flashover during fires.

As a result of these studies and input from community members at the Growth Management Plan workshops, the Paso Robles City Council is asking for public input to address the need for approximately \$2.2 million in annual funding for Emergency Services/Public Safety. Although the City Council is reviewing various options for improving service levels, it is asking the community to focus on how the City is going to provide the needed funding.

- (b) The City Council members and Chief Hamp 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 a ¼ to ½ cent increase to local (City) sales tax rate (in place of the ¼ cent reduction just implemented by the State). The City Council submitted a letter to State legislators asking for permission to request the tax, but had not received support for this emergency legislation. It is important for constituents to contact legislators in Sacramento if they want to seek this option.
 - Establish a property-type tax to assess property owners based upon the degree of emergency service risk inherent to their property and/or the uses thereon. However, the City does not want to pay for a firm to conduct the parcel assessment study if community members do not want to explore this option as a funding source.
 - City is not pursuing the option of a utility tax at this time.
 - There is also the option of blending funding sources. In either case, the new tax proposals would require a two-thirds majority vote to implement. The earliest a new tax could be put before the voters would be November 2001, but it would need to be submitted by August.
- (c) The City Council recognizes that the public will determine what funds are available and whether Emergency Services staffing increases are incremental or immediate. However, the focus of the discussion is to find ways to meet the demands of the existing and future population. Over the next few months, the City plans to provide costs estimates for the options above based on the public's requests.

PUBLIC DISCUSSION

Mayor Mecham opened the public discussion. Speaking from the public were Gordon Koolman, Sherry Nelson, Fred Rogers, Gary Fowler, Steve Gonzales, Rick Giubbini, Bob Chute, Marge Trager, Bob Thomas, Kathy Barnett, Myra Phillips and Jo Cowley.

Questions and/or suggestions from the public included:

- Use motor vehicle fund to assist with funding, as there is a 12% increase each year. Do we have to pay for the full implementation of 24 firefighters right now? A 4-minute response time is not realistic.
- Neighborhood CPR training is good. Not supportive of a parcel tax. Who were the people who wanted a 4-minute response time?
- How long before the cost of additional Emergency Services personnel can be completely funded by the General Fund? Suggest adding a fee to the fairgrounds entry rate for additional revenue.
- Satellite horse racing brought \$37,600 to the City of Santa Maria; this is a recurring funding source. City and County would both get a portion. Concerns were expressed about parcel fees for senior housing. How much does San Luis Ambulance pay for Fire Station 2 rental? Would like to see City-owned ambulance, with ambulance fees billed by the City. The "2-in, 2-out" federal law was instituted because of lobbying by fire-related political action committees. Suggested contacting community leaders and ask them to meet with State Representative Abel Malondado and State Senator Jack O'Connell.

- Are development fees in place to assist with the impact on services? The federal mandate of “2-in, 2-out” was instituted to save lives.
- What are the funding mechanisms for the General Fund? There are other ways of finding funding for Emergency Services. Staffing is a General Fund obligation. It would not be correct, when times are bad, to have one funding source (public safety) remain intact when other department’s budgets are being cut. Take money from funds already in place. Mr. Giubbini distributed a cost comparison showing Emergency Services versus Public Works portion of the General Fund.
- [Note: City Manager Jim App explained that fees are generated by sales tax, property tax, vehicle license fees, transit occupancy tax and development fees. There are limited means by which taxes may be raised.]
- How many medical calls are legitimate? Suggests charging for other services provided by Emergency Services.
- Over half of Quail Run’s Phase 1 are single women on limited income, so parcel tax is undesirable; sales tax is most fair. Can any City property be sold to pay for Emergency Services? Is there any discussion of a moratorium on building? Why does an engine go out to medical aid calls?
- Does City have any property that is available for long-term lease?
- CDF is an excellent organization, but its skill is forestry firefighting; a city fire department is structure fire oriented. A two-man engine company is not adequate.
- Wants 4-minute response time. Suggests sending a survey or advisory letter to determine interest in sales tax option before spending money on a ballot initiative; this may save the cost of an election. Special elections have historically poor poll turnouts. Most supportive of sales tax as an option.
- How many Automatic/Mutual Aid responses by CDF to Paso Robles annually?
- If the City entered an agreement with the CDF, would their firefighters be trained in structure fires?

There were no further comments either written or oral and the public discussion was closed.

The Council, by general consensus, adjourned from regular session at 8:47 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT to THE REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING ON THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2001, 7:00 PM AT THE LIBRARY/CITY HALL CONFERENCE CENTER, 1000 SPRING STREET

Submitted:

Sharilyn M. Ryan, Deputy City Clerk
Approved: May 1, 2001

