

CITY OF BIXBY MEDIA RELEASE

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Bixby City Council Approves City Budget for Fiscal Year 2014/2015

(Bixby) Members of the Bixby City Council at their June 2nd City Council meeting approved an overall budget totaling \$38.2 million in operational and capital expenses for the new fiscal year (FY-15), which begins July 1st. The budget for the general fund, the primary operating fund for the city, is \$8.2 million, more than 60 percent of which will go toward public safety. Declaring it a “fiscally responsible, balanced, and sustainable budget”, City Manager Doug Enevoldsen said, “it places a very heavy emphasis on the city’s public safety and streets, reflecting the high priority which our City Council members clearly place on those functions”.

“More than 85 percent of our new General Fund spending will be for our fire and police departments,” Enevoldsen said. “This includes monies for two new positions in our Fire Department, the only new positions being added this year. One is a firefighter position that was actually brought on earlier in the current year, the other is a Deputy Fire Chief position,” he added. Funding for each of those positions had been eliminated a few years ago, as a belt-tightening measure ago, in response to a Great Recession-induced slump in local sales taxes, which fund the daily operations of the city government, Enevoldsen explained.

“I’m pleased to report this budget restores all positions in our Fire Department to their pre-recession level,” Enevoldsen said, “and I look forward to the day when we can say the same for our Police Department and our Streets Department, which is our goal in coming years.”

The budget also provides for compensation increases for both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel. Cost-of-living increases for Department heads will be one-time in nature, and administered on a performance basis. Increases for non-uniformed rank and file employees will also be based on performance, but can be awarded on an ongoing basis, the City Manager explained.

Bixby Mayor John Easton called it “a good budget”, and one which “both protects our investment in our workforce - our most important asset – and helps improve our community’s streets and utility system infrastructure. These are each key to our providing for the continued health and safety of our citizens in the coming year,” Easton said.

“Our City Council, City Manager and his staff spent an unprecedented amount of time to developing this year’s city budget, including multiple work sessions, the latter largely in response to the recent changes

in our Council's membership and leadership", said Easton, who was selected by his colleagues in April to serve as Mayor for the coming year. This is Easton's first time to serve in that role, having served the past two years as Vice-Mayor. Councilman Richard Stewart joined the Council in April, for his first time, as representative for Ward 4, after narrowly defeating incumbent Ray Bowen, who had also served eight years as Bixby Mayor. Councilman Brian Guthrie is serving as Vice-Mayor this year, his first time to do so.

"I think the multiple budget workshops helped our new Council bond together, both as an elected body, and with our city administration. By devoting such time together, we all gained an increased familiarity with the budget, and ultimately reached a consensus and a common understanding with our city administration, as to our overall budget philosophy. We also identified a number of topics which we plan to study in greater depth in the coming months." The budget was ultimately approved on a vote of 4-1, with Councilman Stewart casting the lone "no" vote. Stewart indicated he wants to see even more resources devoted to maintenance of Lake Bixhoma, located several miles southeast of Bixby.

City Manager Doug Enevoldsen said he, the Council, and City Treasurer Betty Koehn really focused on making sure the budget Council adopted was sustainable. "This was in a concerted effort to avoid unwittingly planting the seeds of future fiscal instability which appears to have consumed some of our area metro communities," he said. "Nearly all Oklahoma cities struggle to maintain balanced budgets, largely due to the inherent volatility of the local sales tax, on which Oklahoma law provides they must rely to fund their day to day operations, and we must be very judicious in how we grow our budget".

Enevoldsen commended the Council members for their willingness to give so freely of their time and expertise to learn the issues and work with the City administration to fashion policy solutions to address the many challenges faced by our rapidly growing community. "We're blessed to have some very experienced businessmen on our Council, as well as persons who have many years of public service. We reached a consensus that it important to live within our means, something best achieved by limiting our increases in operating spending to increases in ongoing revenues, and by using one-time revenues for one-time purposes and/or saving it for future rainy days," Enevoldsen said. "Our continued adherence to those principles will serve our organization and community well going forward."

One of the more significant features of the FY-15 budget and an example of this budget philosophy involves creation of a \$1.2 million disaster relief fund, Enevoldsen said. He explained that budget savings from a series of good years have allowed the creation of the fund. "Having witnessed the devastation and havoc which natural disasters such a tornadoes, floods and wildfires have wreaked on other communities, our Council recognized the importance of using past one-time budgetary savings to creating for Bixby a natural disaster recovery fund. These monies are be used to match and supplement available state and federal emergency relief aid, as necessary to help restore order to our community after a natural disaster," Enevoldsen said.

The new City budget employs a similar strategy to budget funds this year and in future years for a new city-wide street and drainage rehabilitation program to preserve the city's investment in its road and bridge infrastructure. Resources will be allocated based on a professional, data-driven, prioritized approach devised by city administrators and as approved by Council in future meetings.

Other highlights of the FY-15 City budget include:

- continuing on-going efforts to address mandated waste water disposal facilities (build a new wastewater treatment plant, or to transfer Bixby's effluent for treatment to the Haikey Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant);
- water system improvements to mitigate anticipated capacity and pressure issues in South Bixby;
- increasing within the Economic Development Fund by \$400,000 the city's reserve for funding future infrastructure improvements as required to stimulate economic development within the community, as determined by Council, this funded from past budgetary savings;
- budgets multi-phase capital improvement funds to implement the recently-completed City Hall and Dawes Building Master Plan which will: extend the useful life of these assets; promote improved employee productivity and workflow efficiencies; enhance security, and; improve customer service;
- augments ongoing funding for critical street repairs and provides one-time matching funds for future pavement overlays via our partnership with Tulsa County, and;
- funds necessary equipment replacements within various departments to ensure our employees have the tools necessary to accomplish their mission, these funded largely from the Capital Improvement Fund. This includes funding Bixby's new Police and Fire radio communications system, new patrol vehicles and Fire personal protective gear.
- The budget projects growth in the Bixby Public Works Authority revenues because of previously approved utility rate increases. The third year of a five-year phased-in sewer rate increase will go into effect July 1, to fund the city's new sewer treatment process. Water utility rates will increase by 7% effective October 1st, as a result of action taken by the City's water provider, the City of Tulsa. The budget does not project any growth in sales tax collections in the coming year.

Enevoldsen explained that goals in future years will be to grow revenue enough to be able to bring all departments to pre-recession staffing levels, through hiring two dispatchers, a police officer and a street department laborer. The City also currently has no dedicated Human Resources Officer, something the City Manager said is needed to help Bixby keep up with the growing complexity of federal employment law and procedures, and to better manage risk and serve employee needs. He also explained he foresees a need to sufficiently grow revenue in future years to hire additional firefighters and police officers, to accommodate growth in the community so that response times are not affected.

"Like other area cities have been doing, ours should revisit the level of service and fees charged for providing fire and first responder services outside of our community, to help ensure we recover our costs of maintaining the capacity required to make those calls," Enevoldsen told councilors. "Bixby also needs to enact an alarm ordinance, as other cities have done, to help ensure alarm systems are properly maintained so our public safety resources are not wasted chasing repeated false alarms." He noted that last year, of the 1,580 alarms to which two Bixby police officers responded each time, all but two proved to be false alarms. "We cannot go on this way, and it makes no sense to try to do so. We need to fix the problem at the root, which usually involves poorly maintained alarms," he concluded.