

Changes to city personnel policy proposed at council workshop

Written by April Peregoy

Several alterations to the City of Holyoke's personnel policy were proposed by councilman Barry Winckler in a workshop held after the regular meeting of Holyoke City Council on Tuesday, May 5.

At the end of the workshop, it was decided all the proposed changes will be put into a packet for council members to review, discuss and vote on at a future meeting.

The first change proposed by Winckler involved a section stating an employee who is discharged also loses his/her earned vacation time. He argued most employers still allow discharged workers to use their vacation time, as it is usually earned by them for work done prior to the dismissal.

City clerk Kathy Olofson noted that when Scott Szabo performed the city's audit report, he had questioned the policy as well, saying he thinks it is too harsh.

Councilman Orville Tonsing however, disagreed, saying if an employee does something to deserve being discharged, then he/she should lose the vacation privileges as well.

Winckler also put forth the idea of adding a provision that allows retired officers to carry weapons. He mentioned House Bill 214, which he said was introduced after 9/11 as an extra security measure. He added though retired officers are allowed to carry a weapon, they can not fire them unless they feel their lives, or other people's lives, are in danger.

At this point, city attorney Al Wall called the council's attention to an outdated provision that requires employees to retire at age 70. It is mandatory for the council, he said, to remove this as it is now illegal for employers to force retirement on employees when they reach a certain age.

The board is also considering removing a section of the policy which divides disciplinary action into two general categories: performance of duties and failure in personal conduct. In addition, it dictates the steps that must be taken to reprimand or dismiss an employee. These steps are no longer necessary since the city approved an ordinance allowing its department heads to make decisions regarding the hiring and firing of employees.

Though the personnel policy explicitly states the city is an at-will employer, examples are provided of actions that can result in an employee being discharged. Winckler suggested taking out these examples as well, but city supt. Mark Brown said he would like to see them stay in. He said the examples, at the very least, serve as standards to which employees are held to.

Calling all dog lovers...

Mayor David Nygaard made a public request at the council meeting for dog lovers in Holyoke to volunteer to help the city and police dept. with stray dogs. Currently, the city has no place to house dogs that are found at large.

The mayor is asking for volunteers to step forward who are willing to provide foster homes and/or transportation to area animal shelters, as well as anyone who is looking to adopt or has other ideas on what to do with strays.

Rec coaches and summer help hired

Hiring of coaches for the city's summer recreation program and summer help employees was approved by Holyoke City Council at its meeting Tuesday night.

Director Theresa Tharp was present at the meeting and told the council, so far, she had only been able to find one baseball coach. If she is unable to find another one, she is looking at possibly having all the coaches rotate and share their coaching responsibilities. The staff members of this year's program and their wages were set as follows:

Baseball coach—Stefan Betley (second year), \$1,350.

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Softball coaches—Danielle Olofson (fifth year), \$1,600; Kelsey Scott (second), \$1,450; and Kia Kassman (first), \$1,350.

Summer help—Daniel Koch (fifth year), \$8.60/hour; Morgan Eurich (third), \$8/hour; Mitchell Wittman (third year not consecutive), \$7.85/hour; Michal Brown (second), \$7.85/hour; and Kurtis Brown (second), \$7.85/hour.

Other business

In other business, Holyoke City Council members:

—introduced and approved the first reading of an ordinance authorizing the sale of lots seven and eight of block three in the O'Neal Subdivision to Alan Goldenstein for \$16,650. A public hearing on Ordinance 1 will be held at the council's Tuesday, May 19 meeting.

—heard an update from horticulturist Linda Langelo on the Community Garden. Afterward, the board agreed to turn the water back on for the garden, which is donated by the city.

—approved two liquor license renewals for KarDale's Restaurant and Holyoke Golf Club. The council voted to waive the local liquor license fees for the Golf Club as well.

—donated \$100 to Phillips County Relay For Life.

—approved a purchase request from Brown for a utility locating system at \$6,205.

—voted to take sealed bids on the city's old trencher.