Questions about Police Chief Phil Biersdorfer's reports to the council and a request to review the code enforcement officer's wages led to much of the conversation that took place at the meeting of Holyoke City Council members on Tuesday, May 19.

Discussion on these topics began when councilman Ray Bailey said he had questions about the activities listed on the Police Chief's reports to the council.

Bailey said over the last few weeks, he has been going over the reports that are submitted to the council before each meeting, and categorizing the items. According to him, the activities of the code enforcement officer make up at least one-third to one-half of the police report.

"I'm not questioning the chief's report," said Bailey, "but I am questioning the fact this report shows the code enforcement activities. Is that considered police work?"

He added he's not trying to be picky, and he's not suggesting the police department isn't active, but he would like to see more information on the types of law enforcement activities that are going on.

"I think there's professional police activities, such as traffic activities, constructional activities and public-relations activities. Those are the type of things I want to see in the report—not just how many dandelion tickets were issued."

Councilman Jerry Banaka noted there are details about cases and investigations that cannot be mentioned in a public meeting. Bailey agreed, but said he thought there should still be some general indication of what types of investigations are being done.

Council members then discussed whether the code enforcement officer's activities should even be reported to the council at all, or whether that is inter-departmental business that the police chief should take care of himself.

Specifically, council members drew attention to a letter that was sent to them by Holyoke resident Moe Smith. In the letter, Smith wrote he felt harassed and stalked by the code enforcement officer, adding he did not see there is a need for the position in Holyoke.

"So we shouldn't even get this letter?" asked Banaka.

Bailey said he felt it is Biersdorfer's job to supervise the code enforcement officer. "If he doesn't, that's when it becomes our problem," he added.

Councilman Orville Tonsing spoke up to say this is not the first instance he's heard complaints similar to Smith's, and suggested to Biersdorfer perhaps the code enforcement officer could scale back on the number of warnings and citations given out.

Councilman Barry Winckler added there is a city policy that states any concerns or problems with an officer should go directly to the police chief first and handled within. "Our job is to listen and do what we can, but it is not our job to micro-manage," he said.

Returning to the subject of the police report itself, Mayor David Nygaard asked Biersdorfer if he could, from now on, find a way to separate the code enforcement activities from the law enforcement ones. The police chief said he could, though there are some categories that would be hard to separate, such as follow-up investigations.

According to Biersdorfer, the follow-up investigations are counted for any officer who uses the crime star system. "I don't have a really good way to separate them," he said.

The police chief added the reason his reports are written with few details is because previous councils did not want them, preferring he summarize activities instead. "But I can certainly give more detail if you want," he said.

"That would satisfy me," said Bailey, adding he only wants to be informed so he can be in a position to support the police chief if somebody brings a complaint to him.

However, after this matter was settled, there was still the business of reviewing the code

enforcement officer's wages and deciding whether she should receive a raise.

Dawn Archibeque was hired May 20, 2008 at $10 per hour to serve as Holyoke Police Dept.'s code enforcement officer. The position was initiated as a pilot program to be reviewed after one year. In January, Archibeque was given a three percent raise along with the rest of the city employees.

It was noted by Nygaard and Bailey that the purpose of hiring a code enforcement officer is to relieve the police dept. from ordinance enforcement work, allowing officers more time to focus on law enforcement.

"There are a lot of communities around us waiting to see how this works for us," added Bailey.

Tonsing again mentioned the number of complaints he has heard against the code enforcement officer, saying, "I think her presence is definitely being felt. However, I think she needs direction. I don't see that it's time to do this at this point. I don't feel comfortable with the number of complaints." He suggested the council take no action at this time.

Yet, argued other board members, before Archibeque was hired there were many complaints the police dept. was not taking care of the weeds. Now they're getting complaints from people who have received citations.

"Since she's started, she's only written two actual tickets," interjected Biersdorfer. "What people are getting is warnings."

Councilwoman Sara Bohrer asked Biersdorfer to give them his review of how Archibeque is doing at her job. He told the council she is very knowledgeable of the codes and the steps that are supposed to be taken to enforce them. He said her reports are good and she keeps running follow-ups.

Lately, he added, he has asked her to make more personal contacts, but said that has been difficult for her since most people are not home during the day.

A motion was then made by Bohrer to give Archibeque a 20 cent raise to $10.50 per hour. A vote by the council produced a 4-3 majority in favor of the raise, with Banaka, Tonsing and Kevin Scott voting negatively.

Sara Bohrer resigns

Councilwoman Sara Bohrer officially handed her letter of resignation to the city council on Tuesday night. She and her husband Stephen are moving June 1 to Alamosa, where he has accepted a position as the BOCES director.

In her letter Bohrer wrote, "I appreciate the chance you gave me to serve on the council. Holyoke is a special community, and I hope everyone realizes how blessed they are to live here."

Bohrer was appointed to the council in November, 2008 after the resignation of former councilman Terry Meek. Another appointment will have to be made by Holyoke City Council to carry out the rest of Meek's two-year term, which ends April 2010.

Those interested in filling the empty seat are urged to contact the city clerk's office by Tuesday, June 9. Voting on the appointment will take place at the council's June 16 meeting.

Other business

In other business, council members:

—were presented with the 2008 audit by Scott Szabo of Lauer, Szabo & Associates. Before getting into the numbers, he told the council it is "a real treat" to work with the city because the

books are always in order. “You have a great office staff,” he said.

Szabo reported the city is in good shape financially. Like every other municipality he has worked for this year, there was a decline in the city’s pension fund; however, he added, that loss is due to the downturn in the stock market and is out of the board’s control. The rest of the city’s funds, including the general fund, all saw an increase in revenues.

—approved changes to the city’s personnel policy that were introduced and discussed in a workshop following the council’s May 5 meeting. The changes allow employees who are discharged to keep their earned vacation time, and removes a section dictating the steps that must be taken to reprimand or dismiss an employee. In addition, an outdated provision requiring employees to retire at age 70 was removed.

—held a public hearing for Ordinance 1, an ordinance authorizing the sale of lots seven and eight on block three of the O’Neal Subdivision to Alan and Dana Goldenstein for $16,650. Hearing no comments, the ordinance was adopted.

—approved Resolution 2, a resolution adopting a red flag policy and establishing an identity theft prevention program for the City of Holyoke.

—granted a special events permit for the beer garden at the Phillips County Fair and waived the local liquor license fees.

—gave permission to the Holyoke Swim Team to hold a swim relay event on Saturday, May 30. The board also donated $40 for the purchase of medals.

—approved the renewal of the option for elected and appointed officials to join the city’s health and dental insurance group plan.

—donated a free summer swim pass to Holyoke Elementary AR program.