

Downtown daily whistles eliminated

Written by Chris Lee

Businesses and residents near the downtown area noticed something different on Wednesday, Jan. 6. The daily whistle that sounds at 7 a.m., 12 noon and 6 p.m. didn't make a sound in the downtown location.

City Council members voted at their Jan. 5 meeting to turn off the daily whistles on the downtown tower located near Holyoke Marketplace and the fire station. The siren will still be used for tornadoes and fires.

Both Ray Bailey and Jerry Banaka said they began asking people about the whistles and found most people wouldn't want to see them turned off. Bailey said they add character to Holyoke and suggested placing the issue on the ballot or hold a public meeting.

It was suggested the downtown whistle be turned off and only be used for emergencies such as fires or tornadoes. Council members agreed the whistle is rather loud.

Mayor David Nygaard suggested changing the downtown whistle and see what the response would be.

City Supt. Mark Brown said the duration could be shortened which would mean they wouldn't ramp up as high.

Councilman Kevin Scott added the whistles should only sound for a tornado. He said in his past experience as a fireman, fire whistles attract people and lead them to follow fire trucks to emergencies.

An older whistle was taken down from near the school and it was suggested it be placed near Johnson Street and S. Interocean Avenue. Tillie Fisbeck said when the wind is right, no sirens can be heard in the southwest part of town.

It was also mentioned the whistles are hard to hear within the hospital. Placing one near the south part of town would help alleviate that problem. Brown said he will price the receiver needed for the old whistle and bring it before the council.

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Emergency buttons to be installed

Council members approved the purchase of four emergency buttons to be installed within the city office. The panic buttons and system was priced well below the expectations of council members.

Reports of city officials

Mayor Nygaard mentioned he and councilman Bailey attended a golf meeting on Monday, Jan. 4 to discuss budget ideas. He said communication is open and they will continue to meet and act as liaisons.

City Supt. Brown said city crews have been dealing with trouble calls caused by the wind and snow during the Christmas storm. He also reported a vehicle accident knocked down a light pole by Buzz Stop and it will not get fixed until the weather gets warmer.

A water main broke in the 700 block of E. Gordon Street. Brown said it was one of the worst ones he has ever seen and the pipe had been leaking for quite some time. The area is barricaded off so crews can let the area dry so repairs can be made.

Police Chief Phil Biersdorfer reported six traffic accidents within the last two weeks. He said the majority of the accidents occurred on Interocean Avenue as a result of people not paying attention to traffic when backing up.

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He also mentioned Christmas and New Year's were relatively quiet.

Biersdorfer also presented council members with the Click It or Ticket program. He applied for a grant that will allow Holyoke P.D. to spend Feb. 18-24 enforcing seat belt laws in Holyoke. He said the grant covers all costs included with the overtime spent by the officers involved.

Another time grant money can be used for the program is in May. Council members approved the February program and will vote on the May program after they see how the first one goes.

City Clerk/Treasurer Kathy Olofson announced Jean Clayton was named as a new library board member. Clayton replaces Barb Kreider whose term expired. She also reported the city received two generous gifts from the Heginbotham Trust. One of the gifts was \$5,000 to help purchase a new mower for the cemetery. The other was for \$50,000 to help with library maintenance projects.

The building inspector report was given by Olofson who reported there were 148 total permits in 2009. 130 were residential while 18 were commercial.

Council members entered into executive session for 23 minutes to discuss personnel matters. After exiting executive session a motion was made to accept the 2010 wage proposal for city employees.

Other business

In other business Jan. 5, council members:

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—accepted report from the Holyoke Volunteer Fire Pension Board.

—approved application for special events permit for Holyoke Vets Club for Jan. 16.

—accepted an engagement letter for the 2009 audit and the local highway finance report from Lauer, Szabo & Associates, PC.