Widespread rumors that Police Chief Phil Biersdorfer will not be re-appointed to his position by Holyoke City Council led to a strong showing of support for Biersdorfer at the Holyoke City Council meeting Tuesday, April 7.

Along with Biersdorfer, the two-year re-appointments of city supt. Mark Brown, city clerk and treasurer Kathy Olofson, city attorney Al Wall and municipal judge Dave Colver will all be voted on at the council's Tuesday, April 21 meeting.

Before taking visitors' comments, Mayor David Nygaard told those present that this was a chance for the council to listen to the comments, but there would be no discussion back and forth. He also said the comments will be taken into close consideration when the council votes on the appointments on April 21.

Lori Nelson was the first visitor to speak in support of Biersdorfer. She told the council she has worked closely with him on numerous things, business and personal-related. She vouched for his professionalism and pointed out ways in which he and his family are assets to the community.

"He's purchased a home, he has kids in the school system and he treats the community as his own. That's why I think he's doing such a great job."

She added, "I haven't heard anybody say a negative thing about him since he's been Chief of Police. I just hope a wrong decision isn't made."

"I was on the board when we hired Phil," said Louis Murray. "Out of the choices we had he was by far, by far the best person for the job."

"My family has been very happy with the way Phil has treated us," said Jennifer Kumm. "Anytime we have had problems, he's right on top of it. He definitely does this out of love, not money."

Several more people spoke up, praising Biersdorfer for his professionalism, his devotion to the job, and the contributions he and his family have made to the community. One concern that was repeatedly voiced by various visitors was how the council will replace the police chief, if he is let go.

"As a local business manager, I know trying to find employees and attracting them to a small town has challenges, and I think when you find someone like Phil Biersdorfer who invests, not only his personal heart and soul into the community, but his family as well—that's critical," said Jessica Cumming.

"I challenge you," she continued, "to find somebody else who will not use Holyoke as a stepping stone—someone right out of the academy or another job who will be here a year or two and then move on to bigger and better jobs."

A couple of visitors asked the council to disclose why it is considering not renewing Biersdorfer's appointment. Nygaard answered it could not do that due to certain legal policy issues regarding the matter.

"But," he added, "this ungenerated support isn't unexpected or surprising at all. I personally don't know anyone who doesn't like Phil, including—and I think I speak for all of us—the council members."

He also took the opportunity to remind the crowd that no decision has been made yet; that the voting will take place at the next council meeting.

"That isn't what we were told," said Barb Neugebauer. "We were told the decision has already been made—and that was by a council member. Phil wasn't the one who said that."

Biersdorfer said it is true, he did not ask any of the people there that night to come, though he does appreciate their support.

Nygaard told Neugebauer the information she had been given was “entirely wrong,” and re-asserted that no decision has been made yet.

Wrapping up the comments were several more visitors who commended Biersdorfer’s character, the stability of the police dept. since his arrival, and his commitment to doing a good job as well as to helping others. They also said they hope council members are not making a mistake, restating their concerns that the police chief will be hard to replace.

**City to go for walking path grants**

A city council project that had been put on hold this past June is now moving forward again following a report given by councilman Ray Bailey.

At a June 17 meeting of the council, Bailey had proposed plans for the construction of a bike/walking path around the city of Holyoke using grant funding from various organizations he had spoken with at Rural Philanthropy Days in Burlington.

However, upon further investigation, it was found the available funds were not as large as expected. With time quickly running out for the city to apply during the current grant cycle, it was decided to put the project on hold for the present time.

The plans drawn up by Bailey and City Supt. Mark Brown show the trail beginning on Johnson Street where it connects with Highway 385. Located on the south side of the street, it follows it past Melissa Memorial Hospital and up to Evans Avenue.

Heading north by Evans, the path continues around the athletic fields and eventually meets up with the county’s proposed path on County Road 41.

Bailey reported to the board Tuesday night he had recently attended a workshop in Sterling and met a woman associated with the Colorado State Trails Grant. According to Bailey, she was very interested in the Holyoke walking path project, and even volunteered to visit later in the month to walk the planned route of the path and make a personal recommendation to the grant committee.

In order to apply for the grant, she also gave Bailey a list of things that need to be done or put in place for the committee to even consider the application, and suggested he come up with a timeline for when the items need to be completed.

The question Bailey put forth before the rest of the council Tuesday was, “Do we want to go ahead with this project and, if so, we need to vote on the time frame and put the proposal on the docket, that we are going to go ahead with this trail.”

Before they could answer, he added that he realizes the city is not financially ready to do the whole project all at once, but it could be done in phases, as money becomes available, with the first being the section on Johnson Street.

The Colorado Trail Grant, he said, would cover up to 70 percent of the costs, and at the same time, help the city find donations and grants from other organizations, such as Coors Foundation, Gates Foundation and GOCO, to cover the remaining 30 percent.

One complicating factor, pointed out by Nygaard, is the future plan to extend utilities over to the south side of the street to the recently annexed section of land. “Would we have to dig the path back up to do that?” he asked.

Brown said a 50-foot section would probably have to be dug up for the sewer connection, although he thought it wouldn’t take much to replace.

“Johnson Street has a lot of walkers on it, and it hasn’t gotten any safer for them, but are we at the point we want to move forward on this?” asked Nygaard.

Bailey insisted that, at this point, he is not asking the council to commit to spending any

money on the project. But there many nonprofits out there who have money they have to give away, and they're worried they won't be able to.

"I'd like to see the part going down Johnson Street done for people like my mother," said councilman Jerry Banaka. "She rides her cart everywhere, and there are a lot of people from the nursing home who need to get to the hospital."

Nygaard agreed he'd like to see it done as well, saying it would be a great asset to the community. With that, the council voted to move ahead with the project, as long as the city is not required to commit any money to it at this stage.

**Other business**

In other business, city council members:

—held a 50-minute executive session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter not involving any specific employee.

—approved the purchase of a used trencher with a backhoe.

—hired Theresa Tharp as summer recreation director. They also granted her request for a $300 raise for a total salary of $4,200.

—approved a travel request for Kathy Olofson to attend election official training from the Colorado Secretary of State.

—granted a request from Melissa Memorial Hospital Foundation for free use of the pool and a lifeguard during the Triathlon Event.

—recalculated and approved a lower sewer rate for the Masonic Temple building, which had water problems during the months in which the annual rate is calculated and based upon.

—agreed to allow the mayor to sign a new lease with Cornhusker Ag. The council had already decided in a previous meeting to lease a section of land at the Holyoke Airport to the business for the placement of a loading facility.

On Tuesday, Brown told the council Cornhusker Ag now wants to lease a larger section of land, on which it plans to install a hangar, office building and storage building along with the loading facility.

—voted 5-2 to allow Steve Deaver to borrow the Parade Fire Truck, as allowed by the Holyoke Fire Dept. Sara Bohrer and Orville Tonsing cast the dissenting votes.