

City hires consultant to weigh tax for fire district

December 21, 2019



The City Council on Monday approved spending \$23,614 to hire a consultant to explore the community's appetite for new taxes to finance current and future needs of the Crescent Fire Protection District.

The discussion arose during interim Crescent City Fire and Rescue Chief Bill Gillespie's explanation of an amendment for the professional services agreement that pays for the services of Planwest Partners, which includes subcontractors Bartle Wells Associates and Godbe Research.

The council had met Nov. 21 with the Crescent Fire Protection District Board for a breakdown of the district's 10-year master plan, which Gillespie said detailed "the past, current and future service delivery needs of the fire department to be effective in the Crescent City area, to continue to provide the service our community wants, needs and deserves."

That plan talked about capital improvements, apparatus replacement recommendations, funding, training, governance, and operational and administrative needs.

“These were different topics to have a well-rounded, effective and efficient fire department for this community going forward 10 years into the future,” Gillespie said.

“We also dove heavily into revenue sufficiency. So that we knew, number one, what the identified cost was to do this, and (number two), what the recommendations were on how to get there.”

For example, Gillespie said, the fire district currently has the funding to get two interviews into the search for a new fire chief. A plan to address manning levels - with three new Captain II positions, and to build a sleeper program under them - would be dependent on money the community would be willing to provide.

The \$23,614 authorized by the council includes \$23,000 for Godbe Research to help the governmental agencies identify a funding tool.

Gillespie said this would be done by polling the community and gauging the potential for a successful special tax, sales tax or some sort of assessment within the city limits.

“Each option comes with different requirements,” he said. “A special tax requires two-thirds vote. A general sales tax, which can be a general earmark toward the fire department, needs only a majority to pass.

“We don’t know what our community would support, to provide and improve future service delivery.”

Polling would be conducted from December through January, and a survey analysis written up in February.

A draft recommendation would be brought to the City Council with an eye of bringing a ballot measure before local voters in November 2020.

Councilmember Alex Fallman asked Crescent City Manager Eric Wier when was the last time city area residents had been polled. Wier said this would be the first time in his 16-year tenure.

“I wanted to know if additional baseline questions could be added to the survey, even if it cost an extra couple of thousand dollars,” Fallman said.

“Do you feel your city council listens to you’-type questions. Because the only data we have on that is the occasional post on Facebook, and the community member who comes in for public comment.

“This is a chance for us to really get a look into our community. We could use this tool for other projects in the future.”

Gillespie said the poll would center on an in-depth telephone interview lasting 15 to 20 minutes.