

Mayor
John Murray
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Mary Hornsby
Council Members
John Plourde
Willard Rodarmel
William Siegel



**Office of the
City Manager**

119 Fox Street
Lemoore ♦ CA 93245
Phone ♦ (559) 924-6700
FAX ♦ (559) 924-9003

To: Lemoore City Council Item # 8
From: Jeff Briltz, City Manager
Date: September 29, 2010
Subject: Lifting of Hiring Freeze for Position of Assistant
Planner

Discussion:

The Council will recall that we imposed a hiring freeze for new full-time City employees in February, 2009 for the purpose of allowing attrition to reduce overall City employment to a level that could be sustained with our reduced revenue stream. Since then, the City's full-time workforce has gone from 111 to 97, and in all but one instance, the reduction was due to retirement (some incentivized), voluntary resignation, for cause termination, and voluntary incentivized demotion to open positions. Unfortunately, we did end up laying off one full-time Assistant Planner earlier this year.

Last week, our remaining Assistant Planner submitted his resignation from City Employment, effective October 6, 2010. Once he leaves, the Planning Department will have one full-time employee, our Planning Director, and one part-time Planning Technician. Recall that just two years ago, we had a total of five employees in that department. Having just one full-time employee in the Planning Department creates some concerns for me relating to our ability to deliver services. First, we have the basic concern of providing coverage for the public, for both walk-in customers and telephone customers. Second is the ability to carry out the department's assigned functions, both in long-term planning such as the Zoning Update that we are in the middle of today, and current planning, which is largely development related, but also includes services such as home occupation permits and sign approvals for existing businesses.

In short, we have at least two options to consider. The first would be to allow the department to replace the Assistant Planner position once vacated. This will keep the department staffing at the level it is today, and have no impact on the current approved budget.

The second option is to take no action on hiring a full-time employee. In this scenario, in the near term I would bring on an additional part-time employee, and we would modify the department's office hours to something less than 8-5. Meetings and absences alone will create times or days when the office will need to be closed altogether. Some services provided by current staff today would need to be outsourced, such as GIS mapping, and potentially some current planning review. Those tasks could be performed by Kings County, Quad-Knopf, PMC or other consultants. Long-term, we would need to move those who remain in the department to another City location where

support staff could be shared for office coverage. A second long-term option would to combine the department more formally with other City staff providing compatible City services, such as Public Works/Building Inspections or the Redevelopment Division. Outsourcing of all the department's functions could also be an option to consider long-term.

Additionally, some of the GIS mapping services that we currently perform in-house will need to be handled in another way, simply because our current Assistant Planner has specialized skills in that area, and not all of those skills are shared by other employees. We will examine other options, such as asking the City engineer or Kings County to perform, and in several cases, where the mapping is a nice to have, but not a necessity, simply not providing.

I am proposing that the Council permit the hiring freeze to be lifted for the position of Assistant Planner only at this time. The City's Personnel System Guidelines have provisions for reemployment of previously laid off employees, which is the case here, as our only laid off full-time employee was an Assistant Planner.

Budget Impact:

The 2010/11 Budget provides funding to fill the Assistant Planner Position. If the full-time Assistant Planner remains vacant, the annualized savings will be approximately \$73,000. However, as stated above, I would still need to employ another part-time staff member and outsource some additional services, reducing the savings to perhaps \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year short term. Long term, the savings is unknown at this time, and dependent on which direction the Council would take.

It is important for me to point out that I believe our General Fund will end the year at balance with respect to ongoing expenditures, provided that revenues materialize as forecasted, based on the effects of the hiring freeze in other City departments in the recent months.

Recommendation:

That the Council, by motion, approve modifying the hiring freeze as discussed above.