

Baxter City Council
Special Meeting - May 20, 2024

Mayor Bishop called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Members present: Jamie Milligan, Dan Kunkel, Dalton Kinzel and Steve Smith.

Mayor Bishop opened the meeting with a prepared statement thanking all in attendance. He encouraged all to take time to educate themselves, ask questions and make an informed decision. He reviewed the challenges of HF718 which mandates a true \$8.10/thousand levy over the next few years for general operating costs. There are only limited departments to which Baxter may make significant cuts. Chief Daggetts' resignation gives us options regarding the Police Dept.

He reviewed questions received to date as follows:

Status of School Resource Officer – Jasper County Sheriffs' office has applied for a federal grant which would pay for a full-time school resource officer for the first two years. Thereafter, the cost would be shared between the school, Sheriffs' Department and City. Grant would allow for full-time coverage during the school year and may only be awarded if the city contracts with the sheriffs' office for coverage. Grant deadline for this year is June 12. This is a great opportunity for all Jasper County taxpayers to share common resources and provide the school board, city council and board of supervisors a much easier road to balancing future year budgets.

Cost of equipment being turned over – Total costs estimated to be \$14,650. Much of the equipment is outdated or expiring soon.

Doesn't it seem like this is being rushed – Daggetts last day was Feb 16. Council has explored all options including contracting full-time with the sheriffs' office.

Councilperson Milligan shared budget information along with costs and challenges associated with recruitment activities. Per prior hiring consultant, our pay range is way too low and the current pool of candidates is dismal.

Nancy Foreman, 401 Cooper Ave., questioned if additional staff would be needed. Jasper County Sheriff John Halferty stated additional staff will be needed and the department is currently in the recruitment process.

Michael Churchill, 310 W. Buchanan questioned whether Baxter has been properly policed since Daggett left. Believes current coverage is reactive. He is concerned with how the change would affect local business. Sheriff Halferty responded saying there have been more hours currently logged than before. The officer assigned to Baxter will remain the same for at least a year to develop a relationship with business owners and citizens.

Peg Kimberley, 212 Davenport Ave., questioned whether or not the officer would be certified and would hours be rotated? Halferty stated a certified officer is mandatory and hours would be flexible. He does not want structured hours.

Jan Quinn, 123 Railroad, questioned if officer would write speeding tickets? Halferty responded yes, at the discretion of the officer.

Joyce Christianson, residing outside city limits, wondered what happens if no qualified candidates apply? Halferty stated the process would start over.

Susan Hulsinger, 302 Independence St., asked if residents still call 911. Yes. Calls will be prioritized.

Bonnie Churchill, 310 W., wondered if a survey had been sent out – have we ever done that? Great idea but unknown.

Tootie Samson, 302 K Street, stated traffic cameras paid for an officer in another community. Halferty responded saying county will not do mobile cameras at this time. Sampson questioned whether people would move here knowing we don't have a police officer. Prefers having our own department. Feels we are not making an effort to find a chief.

Milligan explained her data is very clear. Contracting is the best option. She doesn't want to waste tax dollars trying to hire when we've been told the challenges of that.

Rich VanBeek, 410 S. Main, wondered if the school resource officer and police officer could both respond to a major emergency. Yes. The school resource officer will also be an EMT and could respond to medical calls as well.

Stephanie Dart, 401 S. High St. asked if officers have a living radius? Halferty stated there are no state residential living requirements. But if Baxter hired their own chief, they could require that.

Nancy Foreman, 401 Cooper Ave., expressed concern that giving all the equipment away says we will never have an officer again.

Council responded saying money should have been put aside each year for cars/equipment. Current equipment is antiquated and outdated. If we hire, equipment will need to be updated.

Cory Robinson, 409 Walnut Ave., questioned the turn-around period for a new hire. Halferty stated worst case 12 months if the individual is not currently certified.

Peggy Kimberley, 212 Davenport Ave., thinks this is crazy and it's killing her to give up our Police Dept.

Brief discussion was held among council members regarding handling of nuisance abatement concerns.

Councilperson Kinzel stated having our own police dept gives him a sense of community, but he would also like to free up funds for other things. He encouraged residents to email him with their opinion.

Motion by Milligan, second by Kinzel to adjourn. All voting aye. Motion carried.