

The Pueblo Chieftain

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City Council approves funding 12 new police officers

City also will spend \$30,000 on a retail development study.

By JEFF TUCKER
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

While garbage and drag racing dominated the Pueblo City Council's action this week, council also put the final touches on other issues it has been discussing over the summer.

Council unanimously approved funding to hire 12 new police officers.

Bolstering the police department has been a topic of discussion since May, when Police Chief Jim Billings made a pitch to hire 17 more officers.

Billings said the current staffing level actually is lower than it was when he started with the department in 1975.

The police department currently has 195 officers. In 1975, the department had 197. The cost of hiring the officers won't have any impact on the 2008 budget, but it will be a heavy price for years to come.

Because the city must recruit potential applicants and screen them, the training academy for the 12 officers probably won't take place until January. The estimated cost of the new officers in 2009 is \$702,433.

The cost goes up incrementally every year and by 2018 will be slightly more than \$1 million.

In other action:

Council approved spending \$30,000 on a retail development study.

The city will partner with the Urban Renewal Authority of Pueblo to give Texas-based Buxton Group three intersections to study to see what retailers or restaurants might be interested in coming to Pueblo.

Buxton uses demographics from the community to match the markets targeted by a number of companies that subscribe to its service.

Buxton will not do any active marketing of Pueblo.

Assistant City Manager Doug Fitzgerald said the company will send letters to the first 20 companies that come up on its list, but it will be the city's responsibility to pursue the businesses from there.

Councilman Michael Occhiato voted against the proposal, saying that using taxpayer money to do retail studies for privately developed areas was tantamount to subsidizing private development.

Occhiato suggested that most national companies already do this work.

Others council members also were concerned about the quality of results. City Manager David Galli said the company is rehired by its governmental clients 80 percent of the time.

Council approved a sales tax exemption for dyed diesel fuel used on construction projects.

Dyed fuel specifically is sold for vehicles that are not intended to be used on area roads and usually is sold for less than normal diesel. The fuel is dyed to differentiate between the two types of diesel and people can face heavy penalties and fines if their vehicles are stopped on a road with dyed fuel.

Council unanimously approved putting a measure on the ballot to increase fines and jail time for municipal offenses.

If approved, the maximum municipal fine will go up to \$1,000 from \$300 and the maximum jail time will jump to a year from six months.

Council wants to try to use the extra revenue from fines levied above \$300 to pay for graffiti removal in the city.