

Hokah council to consider library improvements

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Children are scared of the bathroom at the Hokah Public Library, and to librarian Shari Carlson, that just isn't right.

That's why Carlson is proposing improvements there, as well as to other areas of the library, that she presented to the Hokah City Council at its meeting on Dec. 1. After meeting with city clerk Eric Leitzen, Carlson found the library will have \$5,000 remaining in its budget at the end of the year, due in large part because outgoing director Barb Bissen cut back on her hours sooner than expected this year.

With that money now available, Carlson proposed the replacement of the carpet tiles in the library and redoing the bottom-level bathroom floor. With remaining dollars, as well as a contribution from the Friends of the Library, she said the library can cover the portions of the floors "within the doors" of the library, so she'd like to move forward with the upgrades.

Carlson has been in contact with Hiller Carpet and met with a representative at the Minnesota Library Association conference. The two discussed ways to save money on the project, which included selecting overstock carpeting and not lifting shelves in the library to carpet beneath. With the exception of the newer green kids carpet, the rest would be replaced with commercial carpet tiles (which can be removed in sections when needed) for a total cost of approximately \$11,000.

Carlson requested that the city consider contributing to cover the cost of the "shared spaces," which include the entryway and the bathroom floor and hallway. She provided councilors with photos showing paint peeling off the floors and cracks near the sink and in-floor urinal.

"It poses some unique challenges with the in-ground urinal, the really extensive damage to the floor already, and the curved cement baseboards," she said.

The total for the bathroom and hallway would be \$4,577.

Councilor Matt Vetsch, after reading the proposal, told city administrator Rod Blank that he has an uncle who is in the same line of work as Hiller and, looking at the estimate Carlson received for the work, thought "the price seemed very high."

Vetsch said his uncle could stop by the library the next day to assess its needs and produce a bid for the carpet tiles. Carlson said the Hiller bid is for \$24 a yard installed; Vetsch said his uncle could buy the tiles for \$11 a yard, with installation extra. Blank said two bids should be sought for the project.

Carlson said she wants to do the work for the patrons who use the library.

"The library is really very highly trafficked; there are a lot of people who use it on a daily basis," she said, "much, much more so than I realized until I actually worked there."

A lot of kids spend time there after school, and "I have several children who are afraid to go to

the bathroom at the library because it's scary," she added.

Councilors felt the project was worth pursuing and directed Carlson to solicit another bid for the work. Blank said once he receives the bids, he'll distribute them to the council and it can decide how to proceed.

2016 levy approved

The council voted unanimously to approve the proposed 2015 payable 2016 tax levy of \$295,583 – the exact same amount as last year. It includes \$220,933 for the general fund, \$21,000 for the library and \$53,650 for the wastewater treatment plant bond, again, matching last year's figures.

Barb Bissen, who will be retiring from her position at the library at the end of the month, was at the meeting and expressed her disappointment that the budget doesn't reflect a \$1,000 increase for the library.

"The taxes went down in Hokah and \$1,000 wouldn't have made any difference," she said.

People, she added, have to come expect all the programming the library offers throughout the year, and although grants are available to bring in special guests, it's a lot of work to coordinate the events.

"All that stuff takes planning and time, and Shari basically just has enough time to do the library," Bissen said. "It just takes a lot more than 25 hours, so I just thought \$1,000 wouldn't be that much to help out on the wages."

She also encouraged the council to look at the library revenues, as well, because "the expenses are only half of it."

With no discussion, the council approved the levy.

Delinquent utility accounts

The council passed a resolution to certify all delinquent utility bills of city residents to their taxes so the city can be paid for those services. There are 13 accounts for a total of \$7,737.36 outstanding.

A larger discussion ensued, though, as councilors debated who's responsible for the utilities for abandoned houses. In some cases, a resident won't pay the bill and months later, a bank forecloses on the house and the resident moves away. That leaves the city with several months of unpaid utilities and a bank or realtor as the house's owner.

Blank said there's no policy that outlines which party is responsible and what happens to the water meter. Several councilors felt it would be the bank that gets billed, but it was also stressed that a meter shouldn't be pulled, especially in the winter, because if damage were to occur because of such action, the city would be liable for it.

"I don't see a problem," councilor Don Bissen said. "I just see it as whoever owns it, it's their problem. It's not the city's deal."

Blank said he'll put together a policy about abandoned homes for the council to consider.

In other news

- The council authorized Chris Oliver of the city's maintenance department to purchase 20 street signs in need of replacement using money the city gained through the sale of a street sweeper tool. The sweeper was sold through a sealed bid process and purchased for \$2,560 by Jerry Martell.
- The city received a \$1,000 donation from Wieser Precast to be used by the Hokah youth baseball program.
- A retirement open house for Bissen will be held from 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday, Jan 2, at Hokah City Hall.