

Failure of paid parking could endanger 31 more jobs

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — If the City Council votes against installing a paid parking system this spring, where will the \$1.35 million already budgeted as revenue from parking come from?

It's a question residents were left asking last Tuesday, when the advisory committee appointed to study the paid parking management proposals voted to reject all of them.

Following that meeting, Finance Commissioner Kenneth Ivins Jr. said the likely answer to the deficit is more layoffs.

“We're primarily looking at people,” Ivins said Thursday, “unless somebody else has another solution.”

After initial cuts to services, and a round of layoffs, Ivins indicated that more than 80 percent of the city's budget is still employees and benefits.

He said the Finance Department currently employs four full-time administrative staff, three information technology staff and one part-time worker.

Ivins has requested that any City Council members who choose not to support a parking plan come to two scheduled public workshops with line-by-line budgeting solutions to close the gap.

“I have an open mind,” said Public Safety Commissioner Richard Wirth said. Wirth has begun to go through his budget to look for potential cuts, but is hoping the city will help him can prevent layoffs.

“I have to look at the whole picture, painted by the public and city merchants,” he said.

Wirth also said he will pay close attention to the recommendations of Assistant Chief of Police Michael Biss, his appointee to the advisory committee.

Based on state contracts, 79,272 boxes of Federal brand 9mm Luger rounds at \$17.03 per box would plug the deficit.

“You can't take a right away from the people,” Accounts Commissioner John Franck said.

Last year, Franck and Mayor Scott Johnson spoke against paid parking as a deficit solution.

“I think Commissioner Ivins is going to have to finish the job that he did last year and look for more cuts,” Franck said, referring to layoffs that took effect at the beginning of 2010. Twenty-six full-time and 16 part-time employees were laid off, including police and firefighters.

Commissioner of Public Works Anthony “Skip” Scirocco said he did not plan on supporting any of the paid parking proposals, based on the opinion of the advisory committee given last Tuesday.

“The proof is in the pudding,” he said of the committee's opinion, adding that any plan for paid parking would need

more thought.

Public Works lost \$300,000 originally in the city's capital budget to replace a vacuum truck used to clear debris from water-main and sewer leak sites. They recently spent \$8,000 to replace a part on the vehicle.

At \$58.42 per ton, 23,108 tons of road salt could be forfeited to make up the \$1.35 million.

Scirocco also noted that concessions made by unions in newly negotiated contracts could potentially ease the budget burden. Labor contracts for police, Department of Public Works and City Hall employees have been expired since 2008. Under the City Charter, the mayor is the sole negotiator between the city and the union.

"I'm not sure what more we can do," Johnson said of his role in union negotiations. "I don't believe they see the seriousness of what the city is facing."

Johnson added that he identified layoffs as a possible result of the failure to adopt paid parking in his State of the City Address. If paid parking is not implemented, up to 31 more employees are in danger of losing their jobs.