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Proposed Capital Improvement Program budget: Where the money's going

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — The city's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget may be more than double what it has been over the past few years, but Mayor Scott Johnson stressed that this is in large part due to the city's plans for a parking garage on Woodlawn Avenue — something he said will generate revenue in the long run.

"I hope the city does not see this as an expenditure," Johnson said, who pointed out that because more cars will be able to find parking downtown, more revenue will be generated through sales tax.

The entire CIP budget is \$5,565,188, however, \$1,275,000 of that is for water and sewer needs, which will come out of water and sewer fees and will not entail new bonding for the city.

The CIP is separate from the operating budget of the city. Together with the debt service payments, the three make up the city's overall budget.

Currently, the city has \$25,869,396 of bonded debt. The 2012 capital budget would be added to that.

According to the mayor, the impact on taxes cannot be assessed without all three components of the city's overall budget.

"You don't know if there will be an actual tax increase based on the capital budget alone," he said. "The vast majority of taxes go to the operating budget."

The past two years' CIP budgets were between \$1.5 million and \$2 million, not including the water and sewer needs or the parking garage, this year's CIP adds up to approximately \$1.7 million, which Johnson said is "wholly in line with past CIPs."

The projects are listed below in order of priority as determined by the CIP Committee.

1. A \$453,000 project to replace the Lake Avenue Fire Department's floor. According to Johnson, unlike most fire departments, Lake Avenue's building has an open basement, meaning

all of the fire equipment is supported above it on the ground floor. The floor is in need of work, according to the mayor, who described it as a “public safety issue.”

2. The city’s \$2,582,000 share of the \$4.7 million parking deck proposed for the site of the current Woodlawn parking lot. Johnson said he expects the city’s share will not be that much, but with the passage of the CIP, the city will be permitted to expend that amount.

3. An upgrade to the city’s water treatment plant filter system. According to Public Works Commissioner Anthony “Skip” Scirocco, the system has not been upgraded since 1968 and is in need of the \$825,000 project. This is one of the CIP items that will be covered by the city’s water and sewer bonds and will not require additional city funds.

4. As part of a multi-year upgrade to the city’s aging infrastructure, \$350,000 is being set aside in 2012 and the five years following for city sewer, water and stormwater upgrades. “Basically, we have an old infrastructure that needs to be continually upgraded,” Johnson said.

5. The time and attendance system in City Hall is “archaic,” according to Johnson. “It relies on extensive manual input.” In order to improve it, the city will expend \$60,000 to upgrade the system. When complete, less employee time will be required every pay period to handle timecards.

6. The sound and recording system in the meeting room in City Hall, which records all of the city’s meetings for minutes, is aging and it “leaves much to be desired,” Johnson said. \$17,000 will be spent for a new one.

7. A “routine entry” on the CIP, the city sets aside \$200,000 on an annual basis to repair buildings and facilities around the city. It is on the CIP for the next six years.

8. Similar to item No. 7 on the list, the city plans to set aside \$300,000 every year until 2017 for rehabilitations to the Canfield Casino. “There have been issues in the building relating to moisture,” Johnson said.

9. The city is planning a satellite Emergency Medical Services facility on the Eastern Plateau of the city near Saratoga Lake. “We are concerned over the need for emergency responses to the Eastern Plateau,” Johnson said, but said the staffing and facility that would be required to build a fire department were not feasible. He said the vast majority of calls to the area, though, are medical, not fire. The CIP sets \$200,000 aside in 2012 and another \$192,250 in 2013 to construct the facility.

10. The city plans on expending \$185,530 to rehabilitate the ice rink in order to keep it competitive with private and public ice rinks in the area. Another \$36,960 expense is being planned for 2013. According to Johnson, there may be as much as \$50,000 contributed to the project from a private Saratoga Springs donor as well.

11. Replacement equipment is needed for the city’s radio system, primarily for the fire personnel. In 2012, \$24,663 is being set aside for it.

12. In order to maintain the historic Spirit of Life statue in Congress Park, the city is planning to spend \$100,000 over the course of the next four CIP budgets (\$25,000 each year) to restore it.

13. The security cameras in Congress Park will be replaced and new cameras may be added to Caroline Street with \$125,000 from the CIP in 2012. "It will assist police, provide better response time and record what is happening," Johnson said. The current cameras do not have the capabilities the new system will have. "It will also be in the heart of our late-night activity that oftentimes can lead to issues."

14. Another \$100,000 will come out of the city's water and wastewater bond money for the city's annual wastewater pump system upgrades. In subsequent CIP budgets, the city plans to double that amount.

15. The city's police department will get some upgrades to the building and infrastructure. In the 2012 CIP, \$46,490 is set aside, and about double that in 2013.

16. The West Avenue Fire Station parking lot will be rehabilitated at a cost of \$54,120 in 2012.

17. The least expensive and lowest priority, the sidewalk at the Lake Avenue Fire Department will be replaced.