

Council takes action on Homestead Exemption, makes agreement with Housing Authority

Written by By Betsy Blevins, Managing Editor

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Jan. 20, 2011 - Taxpayers within the City of Leonard may notice a change on their 2010 tax bill. At some point, an error was made and some residents started receiving the Homestead Exemption, despite no resolution allowing it from the city council. Recently, a new computer system was initiated at the tax office that caught the error, and the city and tax office are now taking the necessary steps to correct it. City council members voted last Tuesday night to pass a resolution forbidding the appraisal district to apply the exemption.

The Homestead Exemption allows persons 65 years of age or older to receive a tax break or deduction. This exemption, however, is only applicable if the city council passes a resolution allowing it. which was never done in Leonard. City Administrator Butch Henderson said that those who had been getting it - for several years - will no longer see it on their tax bill.

"Legally, all of those who got the exemption should owe us for the discount they received, but we're not going to go there," he said. Henderson added some who had received the exemption are already upset that they aren't getting the exemption any longer, and that trying to collect the additional money from the previous discounts would just make matters worse.

Council members also passed a resolution to establish an interlocal agreement with the Leonard Housing Authority pertaining to sidewalk work. The Housing Authority had received bids for sidewalk work that were much higher than what it was costing the city to do their sidewalk work currently under way. The interlocal agreement would allow the Housing Authority to purchase the materials and the city would do the work for them.

After lengthy consideration, council members made a motion to move money from the general fund and debt-service fund to pay vendors on the street grant projects who have been waiting on payments for August, September and October. This money will be reimbursed to these accounts after the money is received from the state.

"We have vendors who won't do business with us right now because we are past due with them from the grant work," Henderson stated. "We can't operate like that, and we have enough money between the two accounts to pay the vendors."

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Henderson said no work pertaining to the grants has been performed since October of 2010 because vendors cut off supplies to the City due to non-payment. This action allows the city to resume business with the vendors.

A routine item that is looked at annually is the racial profiling report from the Leonard Police Department for the year 2010. The council had looked over the report prior to the meeting and moved to accept it.

The final action was a motion by the council allowing the city administrator to remove or abate any property at an address on Palomino Drive that the owners had previously been cited for due to a city ordinance violation. Henderson stated the situation started over a year ago with a ticket from the county to the residents for “junk” collecting. The city got involved, but the residents failed to come into compliance, and even stood trial for the offense, where they were given ten business days to clean up the property. If the property was not cleaned up within that time frame, the motion made at the council meeting would allow Henderson to remove the items in question and charge the property owners for doing so.

“It’s just like violating the ordinance for mowing your grass,” Henderson said. “If you don’t take care of the problem, this is where it leads if you ignore it for an extended amount of time.”

Henderson stated Tuesday that the bulk of the stuff had been cleared up over the weekend, with the exception of two items that they were looking for a place to move them to.

“It’s not our intent to take their property, but they need to come into compliance,” Henderson said. “We are working with them as much as we can.”