City adjusts staffing and services in response to COVID-19 outbreak

The Salina City Commission approved an alternate staffing plan prepared by city staff to temporarily reduce the schedules of its workforce possibly through the end of the year in an effort to compensate for projected budget shortfalls due to the COVID-19 outbreak and statewide stay-at-home orders.

The action includes a furlough for 32 city employees while almost 200 more employees will experience a reduction of work by either 20% or 40%. Emergency and first-responder services such as police patrol, fire response and ambulance services will maintain regular shifts and staffing. The staffing plan is one of several cost saving measures being implemented by the City in an effort to address revenue losses that have been estimated to be as much as $5.6 million depending upon the significance and duration of the Coronavirus pandemic.

City Manager Mike Schrage said, “While this effort may seem extreme, it was absolutely necessary in these unprecedented times. We made every effort to protect our employees financially while preparing for the financial impacts of the Coronavirus pandemic and stay-at-home orders which could be in place for an unknown duration of time. We are hopeful that with unemployment compensation from the state and emergency aid from the federal government, our employees should have total income similar to their normal take-home pay.” The city will continue to offer health insurance benefits under the temporary staffing plan.

“Senior management worked with each department head to find a solution that prevented us from making permanent reductions in staff,” said Schrage. “We are doing everything in our power to keep our workforce intact. Our employees are our most valuable resource and we hope to be back to full staffing as soon as possible.”

The City Commission was informed that this action will likely result in noticeable changes in service levels due to the revised staffing levels “We will continue to provide the highest level of service possible, but we also know that with fewer staff we may not be as responsive as citizens have come to expect,” said Schrage. He also noted, that revenue forecasts will be reviewed and the staffing plan will be revisited as additional economic information becomes available and the duration and possible number of stay-at-home orders becomes known.

Schrage cited the mowing of right-of-ways, park care and maintenance, street maintenance, and response times for calls and inquiries to some city departments may be delayed. These actions should not affect police officer, fire department, or EMT response times. The budget projections also assumed elimination of nearly all part-time seasonal employees for the
remainder of the year with on-going review of programming as more information becomes available.

Schrage commented, “I hope our citizens will be patient as we adjust to these challenging times. I’m looking forward to a time that this is behind us and we can continue to help make Salina a very special place to live, work and visit.”

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