

COUNCIL

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cant positions and save the city over \$100,000 in payroll and benefits costs.

"Some of us will have to double up but if you tell me to cut jobs, that's what I will do" said Maney.

Maney said he had underspent his utility budget each of the 13 years he has been in Kings Mountain. He recommended that one position be upgraded and he said with reorganization his department could end up with three people who might have to call on contract help if they got in a pinch.

Maney said he could also cut a meter reading position but Council objected, noting that if meters are not read on time that customers will complain when they are billed for 40-42 days instead of 30.

"That will really get out of hand during the winter months and at Christmas for low income people," said Mayor Scott Neisler.

Maney said the city is moving to prosecute people who steal power and Council Dean Spears asked why this measure hasn't been taken before now.

Maney suggested that Council consider an equal payment plan for utility users who could spread out their payments over 12 months and improve the city's cash flow.

Council approved the transfer of the meter reading business from the Finance Department to the Utility Department and Maney will supervise that program.

Parsons said there have been numerous repeat offenders in power thefts and the city had up to \$61,000 in bad debts from power bills recently. "We're tightening up," she said.

Council indicated they would not name an Assistant Finance Director and took Parsons' recommendation to place an accounting clerk in that slot to coordinate the cash collections and consolidate other duties in the utility department at City Hall.

Councilman Ralph Grindstaff suggested a "pool" car for the employees who need one for special assignments or training and cut car expenses for certain departments. Councilman Rick Murphrey suggested that mileage be paid instead, upping the mileage from 21 cents to 29 cents per mile.

After discussion with Fire Chief Frank Burns, the board said it would designate a car presently used by the Fire Department as a "pool" car for the finance department and Economic Development Office to use.

Planning Director Gene White suggested some cuts in his department and inferred he would make a decision in September on a rumor that he may be considering retirement. "I don't anticipate that you will hire a Planning Director in the 1995-96 budget," he said.

Jim Guyton questioned additional costs for salaries of \$4,000 in White's proposed budget and concurred with White that building inspector Jeff Putnam should receive a car allowance of \$200 per month since he drives his own vehicle.

Burns said the only cuts he could make would be to postpone hose and nozzle repairs but Council nixed that idea. "I don't want you to come over in my neighborhood to fight a fire with worn out hoses," said Councilman Ralph Grindstaff.

Guyton questioned the current fire inspection policy and Councilman Jerry White said a local garage owner complained because he was charged a \$40 fee when Bethlehem Fire Department is the first responder. Burns said the city is required by law to do fire inspections also in the extra territorial jurisdiction area.

"But we collect \$40 from one man and then \$650 for the entire year according to the proposed budget," said Guyton. "Something's out of whack."

Burns said that only since July 1991 has the state had standby fire codes. "If you inspect one, you should inspect them all," said Guyton.

Mayor Scott Neisler asked the

criteria for the charges and Burns said the charges are set to be competitive.

Councilman Jerry White said that the City of Shelby makes no charges.

Burns says it takes his department about a half a day to inspect and then another two hours of follow up duty.

Burns said his department has been going through a learning process since fire inspections became mandatory with the recent tragedy in Hamlet at a food processing plant.

Building Inspector Jeff Putnam said he had a problem with giving up his travel pay and using the fire department car. "That car would not put me in the place I need to be sometime."

And Burns said he had offered the extra car to other employees before but the use time would have to be scheduled so it would not conflict with firemen picking up parts or going to school. "You wouldn't want us to take a fire truck out to get these things, would you?" he asked.

Librarian Rose Turner said the library will up the price of video tape rentals from 50 cents to \$1 and the fee for overdue books from a nickel to a dime.

Guyton questioned the additional library salary cost, up \$5,000 over the \$91,340 previous budget.

Recreation Director Bruce Clark recommended that some activities be scrapped, including the elimination of Mountaineer Day fireworks which cost \$3150 and reduce one full-time secretarial position to a part time position and save \$12,000.

Clark said he hoped that the July 4th fireworks could continue because of the large drawing crowds it generated but the mayor said he had a problem with paying for fireworks and asking people to cut and make layoffs.

Jerry White questioned the Parks & Recreation \$19,000 secretarial salary and said that police officers start at that salary. White said he has a problem with telling people they may be out of a job and then spending money for fireworks.

"Be realistic," said White.

Councilman Phil Hager asked Parsons to "regroup and see if at all possible we can keep the fireworks because families enjoy them."

"I can't see the sensibility of paying for fireworks when we ask people to cut back," said Grindstaff.

"Get people to donate if you want them and blow what we can blow, if it's only one pack," said Guyton.

The Mayor asked Clark to explore donations for the fireworks. But Clark said that already this year the Recreation Department has raised \$25,000 from the community to support ball teams.

The board voted unanimously to decrease from 45 to 40 percent the cost the city pays for dependent insurance coverage which will save another \$34,000.

Councilman Jim Guyton was vo-

cal in his objection to dependent coverage. "This is the only business I know of that pays for dependent coverage for employees' families," he said.

The seven Council members asked Parsons to work up a preliminary budget projecting a four cent ad valorem property tax and a 8-10 percent hike in water costs but indicated they wanted to take another look at the projected rate increases if enough savings are realized from department cuts to warrant it.

After lengthy discussion, in which there was a mixed reaction from council, the board indicated to Parsons that she should not figure in a 2.5 merit increase to employees but over strong objections of Personnel Director Winston Bagley and Utility Director Jimmy Maney.

Councilmen Guyton and White said the city could not afford to give raises and layoff people.

"Could we freeze merit raises this year?" asked Hager.

Councilwoman Norma Bridges suggested that workers who earn \$15,000 and less should receive the merit increase but City Attorney Mickey Corry suggested that to avoid confusion that raises be given instead.

"This is the fourth year we haven't had a cost of living raise and we were promised that you'd take a look at the pay classification plan five years ago," said Maney.

"You have reversed what you said last week and now you're taking more and more from a city employee's pockets and they will walk," said Maney.

Bagley said he is concerned with the employee morale. "If you aren't willing to pay more for good employees you will lose them."

"I fought for employees for cost of living raises but I am referring to city bonuses which I don't think we can give when we are cutting back," said White.

Guyton said he disagrees with some who say that city employees are underpaid after hearing a state employee from the state treasurer's office say that the city, in fact, overpays in some positions.

"People get to the top of the ladder and stay there and a lot of them jumped to the top when they started."

Bridges said that \$5 million is allocated for salaries in a \$19 million budget. She said a state official said recently here that Kings Mountain ranked at a per capita salary of \$650 per person as opposed to the average city of similar size of \$355.

"When you give a 2 1/2 percent merit raise to a man making \$40,000 that's a good raise but when you give it to an employee making \$200 a week it isn't much," said Guyton.

"Where do we put the cap on payroll?" asked Grindstaff.

Corry suggested that instead of trying to figure out how to give the merit raise to those making less than \$15,000 to give them a pay raise instead.

But the mayor warned that could

cause problems in a department where one person got a raise and the other did not.

Council, after about an hour of debating the issue, stalemated and generally agreed not to include the item in the budget. They did not vote, however, and the Mayor did not call for a vote. Cutting the merit raises on the anniversary date would amount to a savings of \$36,000 in the budget.

City patrolmen and firemen will still work 12 hour shifts on their regular schedules but vacation time will be figured for all employees based on eight hours.

"Calculate hours, not working days, for holidays, sick days and vacations," said White.

Guyton estimated that the originally proposed 10 percent water rate hike, could be cut to 7 or 8 percent and lower, noting that water consumption is up.

Grindstaff said that the city took in \$5,000 more than budgeted for water during the period January-April.

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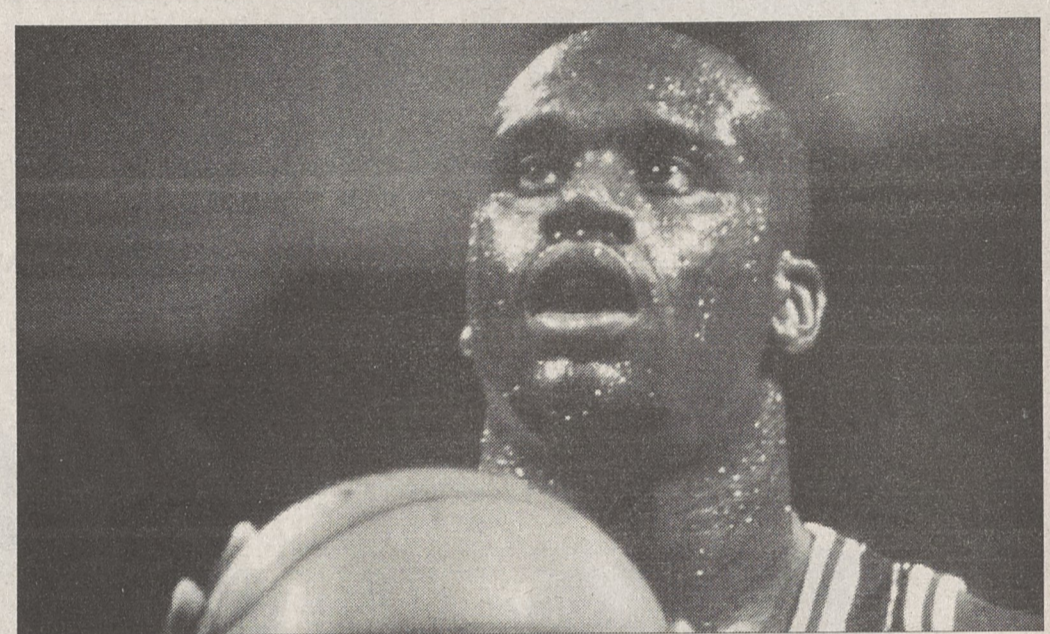
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