

Gillette News Record

TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021 * 75¢ * GILLETTENEWSRECORD.COM



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Optional 1% revenue is expected to drop by 27%

City plans for more belt-tightening for the next fiscal year

By GREGORY HASMAN
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The city of Gillette is anticipating its Optional 1% Sales tax collections will take a large dip in the next fiscal year.

It's expected to drop by 27% from about \$22.3 million in this current fiscal year 2020-21 to \$16.2 million in 2021-22, according to the city.

Revenues earned from 2021-22 will be used for projects in fiscal year 2022-23.

Instead of proposing projects based on anticipated revenues, only projects for which there is existing money on hand will be approved, according to the city's preliminary budget.

In 2021-22 and perhaps beyond, some sewer main projects could be delayed as funding for sewer maintenance is expected to go from \$2.5 million allocated for this year to \$400,000 in 2021-22.

The city needs to prioritize what projects it can do, and with the decline in sales tax revenues "those choices are becoming more and more difficult," said Finance Director Michelle Henderson.

Also under the Optional 1% umbrella are social service agencies. They would receive \$865,799 under the proposed budget. This figure is based off 6% of the city's Optional 1% Sales Tax receipts it received from April 2020 through March. The \$865,799 is about \$90,000 less than what was distributed this year, \$956,000.

Other budget line items

Along with the 1%, the city looked at other department budgets at Wednesday's third and final budget workshop of the year.

The streets department's budget is looking at a 5% reduction from about \$3.09 million in 2020-21 to \$2.93 million in 2021-22. The biggest drop would come in the department's materials and supplies, which would go from \$1.63 million to \$1.5 million. Under this umbrella are items that include repairing concrete slabs and manholes, crack sealing and filling and vehicle maintenance.

The vehicle replacement fund is looking at a 35% drop in its budget from the \$1.6 million it got in 2020-21 to \$1.05 million next year. The bulk of the cuts are from replacing machine and equipment that cost more than \$5,000, and from replacing vehicles that cost at least \$10,000.

For city utilities, the water fund is looking at a 7% increase, from \$7.79 million in 2020-21 to \$8.29 million in 2021-22. The biggest jump is operating costs, from \$4.84 million that was allocated this year to \$5.35 million next year. Part of this includes dealing with an increase in costs for commodities like steel.

"We are doing our best to manage this and forecast it," said city water manager Howard Jones.

Also looking at a 7% increase is the city's power fund (from \$34.4 million in 2020-21 to \$36.6 million in 2021-22) with the largest increase coming in capital projects, \$4.44 million to \$7.14 million. This includes about \$2.26 million going toward continuing the city's efforts of placing city electrical lines underground.

There will be three readings on the proposed budget starting June 1. If it gets approved, it will go into effect July 1.

"It's a great budget," Mayor Louise Carter-King said Wednesday night. "It's just sad that we had to cut so much, but we did it."



News Record Photos/Mike Moore

Charlene Camblin assembles signs for the Vote Yes for Gillette College campaign during a kick-off event hosted in the college's Technical Education Center last week.

Battle on to be the big PAC on campus

Party lines drawn as campaign for Gillette College vote revs up

By JAKE GOODRICK * NEWS RECORD WRITER
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As summer begins and the August special election nears to decide the future of Gillette College, the campaigns for and against the vote to form an independent community college district in Campbell County are gathering steam.

In favor of the college, the political action committee Our Community Our College has launched its "Vote Yes for Gillette College" campaign, which began last week with a kick-off event hosted in the college's Technical Education Center.

In opposition of the new district is the Anti Tax Coalition, headed by rancher Jacob Dalby.

The Aug. 17 special election will ask voters to decide for or against approval of taxing up to 4 mills to create an independent community college district centered around Gillette College. In addition, voters also will elect seven trustees to oversee the new district, billed as the Gillette Community College District.

While those in favor of the new district tout a need for more Campbell County autonomy and self-determination, those against cite the possible repercussions of adding to the tax burden of an already struggling energy industry.

All those in favor

There have been past efforts to separate Gillette College from the Northern Wyoming Community College District, which is based in Sheridan.

What makes this effort different is timing and necessity, supporters say.

"We've been on a trajectory and the community's made investments, and the fact that we now have to make decisions to serve local needs, probably more so than ever before, we just have to have that autonomy to lead ourselves," said Mark Englert, the former vice president of Gillette College.

"That's a big one," he continued. "We've grown enough. We have a full-blown compre-



Micky Shober holds a Vote Yes for Gillette College campaign sign during last week's kick-off event leading up to an Aug. 17 special election.

Important dates

- * **Trustee filing period:** May 19 through June 8
- * **Early voting:** Begins July 2
- * **Election Day:** Aug. 17

hensive community college. It's time we have trustees and local control."

During last week's "Vote Yes" kick-off event, Englert said that local decision-making could lead to the introduction of new programming catered to industry needs. Furthermore, he said the "bureaucracy" of being an arm of a larger district has historically made that more difficult.

While those opposed to the independent district say the added tax on local industry will hurt the community, proponents say the added benefit of a trained workforce built through Gillette College courses, programs and certifications will offset that tax burden, or at least make it worth it.

Paul Hladky, a member of the Our Community Our College PAC and vice president of Cyclone Drilling, said autonomy over programming "means that we're keeping our workforce here, we're keeping our No. 1 asset here, which is our people. I think the coal mines recognize that as a value. They don't have to import skilled labor, they can get

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