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FEATURED

Higher pay, more staff requests to Lancaster City Council

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Lancaster City Council held a goals session with 13 city department heads on Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Each department head compiled a list of funding requests for their offices to be considered in the city's new budget for fiscal year 2023-24, which begins in July.

There were many similarities across departments, from equipment purchases to cosmetic upgrades to new training systems for employees. Several department heads asked for employee benefits in the form of overtime pay increases, merit-based salary increases or raises in general.

Fire Chief Justin McLellan, Lancaster Police Chief Don Roper, Public Works Director Rendell Mingo, Lancaster Solid Waste Department employee Jonathan Carnes, IT Department Director Melissa Izzard, Building and Zoning Director Louis Streater and Human Resources Director Angela Roberson all made requests for increased staffing, regular pay or overtime pay increases for current employees.

Location	Property Name	Monthly Pay
Rock Hill, SC	Country Club Apartments	\$1,275
Rock Hill, SC	Paces River	\$1,109
Columbia, SC	Town Center at Lake Carolina	\$1,299
Rock Hill, SC	Brookstone Apartment Homes	

Izzard said IT department staffers have has been struggling to keep their heads above water, especially post-COVID.

“We had almost 4,500 (help) tickets last year,” ranging from “my internet’s not working” to voicemails, she said. “We get security for the buildings for the camera systems and we have to maintain all of that.”

Izzard said she was concerned with future IT requests increasing, as the city continues to expand.

Mingo asked council to consider on-call pay policy changes, because of the strain it puts on Public Works Department employees. He asked council to revise the City Personnel Policy Manual to “allow for compensation for employees who must remain close enough to report within 30 minutes of contact and remain sober.”

“Basically what this is asking is to give the on-call employees some kind of stipend,” Mingo said. “They basically put their life on hold (because) they have to be within 30 minutes of work at all times, so they are on call for seven days.

“When I was on call, me and my wife used to drive two different cars to a restaurant, and there’s numerous times I had to get up and leave.”

Councilwoman Jackie Harris agreed, and said if people haven't been on call, they do not understand what it is like, and called it a "total disruption of your life."

See Lancaster, the city events and promotions department, wants to increase programming and events in downtown Lancaster. This request includes continued funding for events like the "I Have a Dream" parade, pageant, essay contest and ceremony on MLK Day; Red Rose Festival; Juneteenth; Christmas in the City; and Veterans Day float, to name a few. The total cost of continuing and increasing their 11 current events will be about \$180,000.

See Lancaster wants to add 10 new city events, such as a St. Patrick's Day celebration, farm-to-table event with local farmers, a Black History Month celebration and an American Legion fair.

Council members expressed concern that Finance Director Kirk Medlin's outlined requests do not include additional staff. Medlin has been in his position for 11 months and has worked with staff turnover and training new employees, while dealing with increased workloads.

"The concern was there was not enough staffing, under-training and people getting burnt out," Mayor Alston DeVenny said to Medlin. "Tell us where that stands."

Harris said Medlin needs to ensure staff in the finance department are given the tools and training to succeed, instead of working for two months and then resigning.

"That's why I was wondering if you would have a plan in place to make your department a little bit more efficient or the city administrator administering whatever you have to do to assist with making that happen," Harris said. "I know we try to save money and everything, but you're overwhelming employees (with responsibilities)."

DeVenny suggested Medlin rework his budget requests, as some changes, like new credit card machines, do not need to wait until June.

Medlin applauded his employees who have worked to help train new employees, while managing a full workload, and said his current staff is extremely capable.

Lancaster Municipal Court Administrator Cammie Heath addressed safety concerns for her staff, as there is poor lighting and no security surrounding the parking lot they use, on the right side of the Lancaster Police Department.

“We do not make everyone happy while performing our jobs. If someone wanted to do either of us harm, they could easily approach us at our awaiting vehicles and flee the area before anyone would notice or have time to respond,” Heath wrote in a letter to City Administrator Flip Hutfles.

Roberson asked council to consider merit-based salary increases and longevity raises for the Human Resources Department. Roberson said she would like to see hard work and loyalty rewarded to incentivize people to not only stay in their jobs, but to also promote a productive and lively workplace.

“I believe performance-based increases for employees will build loyalty, boost morale and assist with retention efforts. No merit increase may be granted to an employee, which would cause the employee to exceed the maximum pay in that pay grade,” she wrote in her letter to Hutfles.

Hutfles said the City Council budget goals session will be March 8 to take the requests provided and begin working them into the budget.

Haley