

Powell City Council's Finance Committee took time during its Sept. 13 meeting to review the budgets of the City's buildings and grounds, IT and building departments as part of its ongoing budget review process.

For the past few months, the committee has been reviewing the budgets of each City department in an effort to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent wisely. Department heads have given brief presentations to the committee, sharing information on cost savings, outsourcing opportunities and how revenue has been generated in the past year.

Development Planner Eric Fischer kicked off the September meeting with a presentation on the City's IT department. Fischer said the fact that the City does not have a full-time IT staff member generates a big savings. Fischer handles the in-house IT duties as part of his job description, and larger IT projects are handled by the City's IT consultant, Kirch Technology Group.

"I devote time to IT as needed, and our current contract with Kirch is pretty generous," Fischer said.

Fischer said he has worked to find creative solutions to otherwise expensive IT projects, and while he said there is no real revenue generation from the IT department itself, he said the City's other departments wouldn't be able to generate revenue for the City without the proper IT support.

Committee member Jim Hrivnak said Fischer's ability to assess an IT issue in-house and determine how to best remedy the situation "saves the City money in the long run."

Future goals for the department, according to Fischer, include upgrading and adding more of the cameras used in City parks.

"The current park cameras are aging and have been excellent tools for the police," Fischer said. "I'd like to continue adding those as funding allows."

A long-term goal for the department would be having a fiber optic network that the City could control through its infrastructure. Fischer said such a network is expensive to set up and connect, but Committee member Tom Counts agreed that it should be on the City's list of long-term goals.

Chief Building Inspector Doug Wenzel spoke on behalf of the Building Department, and told committee members that the department's inspectors have multiple certifications, which allows the department to stay small.

"With our multiple certifications, having our two building inspectors is like having 10," Wenzel said. "That isn't common among (municipal building departments). Every three years, we get 30 hours of continuing education to keep these certifications."

Wenzel said there isn't much the department can do to generate revenue ("We can't go and ask you to add on to your house," he said), but Counts said the department does generate revenue through

the fees associated with plan reviews. Counts added that having a small staff over time has helped the department weather the challenges that have come from a down economy.

City Finance Director Debra Miller spoke on behalf of the Lands and Buildings department, which has no employees. The department budget handles City facilities such as the Lechler Building on South Liberty Street and the Center for Business on North Liberty Street, as well as custodial services.

“We’ve put in some new windows at the Lechler Building to save on utility costs, and our custodian visits only once per week,” Miller said. “Staff is responsible for keeping things clean in between those days.”

Miller said the department generates revenue through room rental.

The Finance Committee will review the budgets of the Development and Police departments at its Oct. 11 meeting. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. in Council Chambers, 47 Hall St., and is open to the public.