

(The following is a synopsis of the minutes of the West Branch City Council meeting. A video recording is available for inspection at westbranchiowa.org. The minutes are not approved until the next regularly scheduled City Council meeting.)

**West Branch, Iowa
Council Chambers**

**City Council
Special Meeting**

**October 30, 2023
7:00 p.m.**

Mayor Roger Laughlin called the West Branch City Council special meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
Roll call: Council members present: Colton Miller, Jerry Sexton, Tom Dean, Jodee Stoolman and Nick Goodweiler. City Staff present: City Administrator Adam Kofoed, Finance Officer Heidi Van Auken, Police Chief John Hanna, City Attorney Kevin Olson. Absent: City Clerk Leslie Brick and Public Works Director Matt Goodale. Staff attending via Zoom: Library Director Becky Knoche.

APPROVE THE AGENDA

Motion by Miller, second by Sexton to approve the agenda. Motion carried on a voice vote.

PUBLIC HEARING / NON-CONSENT AGENDA

Discussion and Council direction regarding the West Branch Police Department

Based on challenges with police recruitment and the recent resignation of Officer Murdock, the West Branch Police Department is looking for direction from the City Council regarding their future. Kofoed provided three options for the Council to consider, all at a cost to other city departments and some city services. Sheriff Wethington refused two of Kofoed's options of merging departments and the hybrid of having the Cedar County Sheriff's office cover on-call time on a semi-permanent basis.

After much discussion, the Council felt that Kofoed's "Operation Blue Savior" was the city's best option for retaining the police department. As West Branch grows, a police department is needed for residents to feel secure. Some of the plans for attracting new officer's to West Branch (at least three additional) include: higher wages for Hanna and Steen to closer match that of Cedar County, new officer starting pay to range between \$74,000 to \$84,000, and eliminating the need for on-call time.

Kofoed's plan for funding this option are: eliminating city council annual pay (a savings of approximately \$17,000 per year), ending the Building Incentive rebate program (an estimated \$60,000 savings for the next four years when all eligible homes will expire), eliminating the parks and recreation department and ending the turf maintenance agreement (\$80,000), cutting the library budget (\$70,000), implementing an electric and gas franchise fee (\$150,000) and raising property taxes (\$150,000), cutting the City Administrator position to part-time (\$40,000), cutting the fire department reserve equipment fund (30,000), and installing solar panels to certain city facilities to save on energy costs (\$15,000).

The council discussed what these cuts may mean for the residents but all did not agree with the proposed cuts to parks & recreation or library. Some members, along with school district representatives at the meeting felt that those types of cuts would be detrimental to school district as those amenities are what help families choose West Branch.

The Council decided to invest in keeping the West Branch Police department and consider Kofoed's options for raising revenues and cutting costs in order to attract and retain a healthy police department and maintain public safety. Wethington, Kofoed and Hanna will continue to work through a temporary agreement for patrol coverage while Hanna continues with his recruitment.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Dean, second by Sexton. Motion carried on a voice vote. City Council meeting adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

Roger Laughlin, Mayor

ATTEST:

Leslie Brick, City Clerk