Seneca officials considering options for beautification

City also rejoins economic alliance

BY CHRISTINA CLEVELAND
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SENECA — Seneca officials are discussing ways to enhance the appearance of the city by possibly bidding out work or creating a new beautification position.

During the discussion of its 2015-16 fiscal year budget at a special called council meeting Tuesday night, city administrator Greg Dietterick said the city is considering combining beautification efforts and recommending moving the beautification from the street department to the recreation department.

Money was also included in the budget for a possible horticulturist position.

Mayor Dan Alexander said the idea for the horticulturist would be a person to work on all city property such as sites like the Kellett property — the location of the former J.N. Kellett Elementary School that the city has planned to redevelop into a park.

Officials also said at the meeting the city was considering applying for grants available through community development block grant funding to move the project forward.

According to Dietterick, Seneca's beautification is currently under public works director Mark Krabbe, though recreation director Rick Lacey also performs similar work.

"We're duplicating those efforts, and I'm thinking if we combine them, put them under one roof, under Rick where they can share equipment — there's purchasing power with fertilizers and so on that we've used through the years," Dietterick said Tuesday. "It's a consideration that we're looking at right now to try to consolidate, to get the most bang for our buck when we're buying that kind of stuff in bulk."

The administrator said officials completing efforts on their own is labor intensive and is one of the reasons the city is considering bidding out projects. Dietterick said Seneca only has a supervisor and two people for beautification.

"You can imagine when we had (Seneca Fest last weekend), our guys were just flat-out running getting everything cut and clean and everything," he said. "Our parks are key. I think it's time we tweak this a little bit and keep an eye on the prize ... the first time you come into the city, that impression you get is key, and we've spent millions of dollars doing infrastructure and getting everything ready to see the type of growth that we're seeing now."

Along with a horticulturist, he said officials have also thought about possibly putting key sections of property out to bid to have a company that just oversees city properties including the Lunney and Strickland museums, the rock wall sign, Miracle Circle and the Kellett property for beautification purposes.

"I just think now we need to tweak it a little bit and look at that stuff that the public doesn't see, because we can afford to do that at this point. I think we'd be foolish not do it," he said. "That first impression is huge on new companies and new businesses coming to town and the quality of life. We've got our buses out there that are zero emission. We need to put a stamp out on that."

In other business, council members voted at this week's meeting to rejoin the Oconee Economic Alliance, a private-public nonprofit effort promoting economic development in the county.

Alexander said the city was a member of the alliance at one time and recommended this month it get back on board. The fee is $3,000, which officials said is lower than in previous years.

"Over the last several months, I've had the opportunity to go to the Oconee Alliance meetings, and they're doing some great things in Oconee County," Alexander said.

Dietterick agreed.

"I spoke with (county administrator Scott) Moulder and (OEA executive director Richard) Blackwell, and I've worked with them on the BorgWarner projects and the Seneca Rail site," he said. "They've been great to work with, and that's what this is all about — the alliance — to bring business into our community and support it, so I think that it's a good thing."

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