

Proposed Seneca budget calls for

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SENECA — The figures aren't yet set in stone, but a modest millage increase appears to be in the works for the city of Seneca's budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

City council unanimously passed the budget by a vote of 8-0 — Councilman Scott Durham wasn't in attendance — on Tuesday night at city hall. It's the first budget with the guidance of newly hired city administrator Scott Moulder, as well as finance officer Joshua

Riches, who joined the city in October.

And while the city budget — along with five other budgets under the city umbrella — were met with unanimous approval Tuesday, there's still plenty of number-crunching ahead for Moulder and Riches, who had

no choice but to pen the budget with some unknowns.

"This is a draft budget, and these aren't definitive numbers until council passes first and second reading, so they're subject to change," Moulder said at the outset of his presentation. "These are the recommended

millage increase

numbers at this point in time given the information we currently have available to us."

Chiefly, the city has not received the latest census information, which is needed to determine the value of a mill.

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With that in mind, the proposed budget calls for a 2-mill increase, which could fluctuate before second and final reading is held next month.

"We don't have the final millage number that we can use, because we haven't received that information yet," Riches said. "It should be coming this week ... (and) I'm anxiously checking my email."

Riches added the value of a mill is approximately \$35,000, and the current increase would bring the city's total millage to 62.5 mills.

For reference, a 4.23-mill increase passed by council in 2016 equated to a \$16.12 yearly tax increase on a \$100,000 home.

The budget passed last year included a 1.2-mill tax increase, bringing the total millage to 60.5 mills, which was slated to generate \$1,753,613 for the city.

Another factor yet to be determined, Moulder said, is potential relief from the state to offset costs the city has to put forth to help replenish the state's struggling retirement program.

"There's a movement for the state to reimburse the cities and counties for one percent of the state retirement increase that we're supposed to absorb this year," Moulder said.

"These numbers don't reflect the state actually absorbing that on our behalf."

Of note, the city budget — which comes in at \$10,656,123 — includes a \$4.5 million transfer

and Water department, marking the first time the transfer has exceeded \$3.7 million going back to 2014 in data provided to council Tuesday night.

Moulder added in an addition to a yet-to-be-filled administrative assistant position, the budget includes funding for all currently authorized positions, while it doesn't include a pay increase for staff.

"That doesn't mean we're not going to propose one," he said. "We're not giving up on it yet."

"Some of these numbers may change between first and second reading, because we're not real sure what some of these numbers coming in are," Seneca Mayor Dan Alexander added. "That's not in our control."

A public hearing will be held to discuss the budget before second and final reading, which will not be held June 12, when council is scheduled to hold its regularly monthly meeting.

Discussion indicated the meeting will instead be held June 19, meaning Tuesday's meeting was the last for outgoing administrator Greg Dietterick, who has a conflict with the date.

Other budgets passed Tuesday include Light and Water (\$31,163,430), Hospitality and Accommodations (\$590,000), Accommodations (\$100,000), Transit (\$735,770) and Seneca Facilities Corporation (\$969,439).