

# The Tenino Independent

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## Tenino Council discusses city's budget options

*Speakers are in support of keeping police*

By Dan Fisher  
 News Editor

Tenino Mayor Dave Watterson began the work session prior to the start of the March 10 regular meeting of the Tenino City Council by describing the city's financial situation.

"We inherited this financial crisis; we are addressing it," Watterson said. "Inter-fund loans haven't been properly accounted for. It's not just our general fund, it's all the funds we borrowed from."

Tenino finds itself facing a deficit of \$1.6 million, and the mayor and council debated on how to bring the budget back into balance.

"Tenino is the only city of our size in the county with its own police force," Watterson said. "It's a question of whether a city of our size can afford this. The answer to me is clearly 'no.'" Watterson said. "Our current fund level is at \$89,000, so one emergency and we won't be able to meet payroll."

Watterson said the city's gross budget amount is \$2 million. That includes a beginning fund of \$148,304 and a \$200,000 law enforcement grant, plus \$1,667,493 in other revenues.

Fixed costs, meanwhile, include electricity, taxes, debt repayment (including interest of \$150,000 this year and a projected \$190,000 to \$200,000 next year), plus \$180,000 per year for insurance from the Association of Washington Cities (AWC).

"City utilities amount to \$98,000," said Watterson. "Street lighting alone is \$35,000, and we're looking at a 12 percent rate increase from Puget Sound Electricity IT and software is \$152,000 per year. We're working on re-doing this one."

Watterson said he is taking a 33 percent pay cut in his mayor's salary, but Tenino has another \$728,898 in salaries and non-fixed costs.

"Next year is the Ag Park loan," he said. "We do get about \$35,000 revenue from there. It's an 18-year loan at about \$80,000 per year, with an interest rate of about two percent."

"We have a \$1.6 million debt we've got to start paying back with zero reserve funds. We have to build a responsible reserve fund of \$250,000."

Watterson said one par-

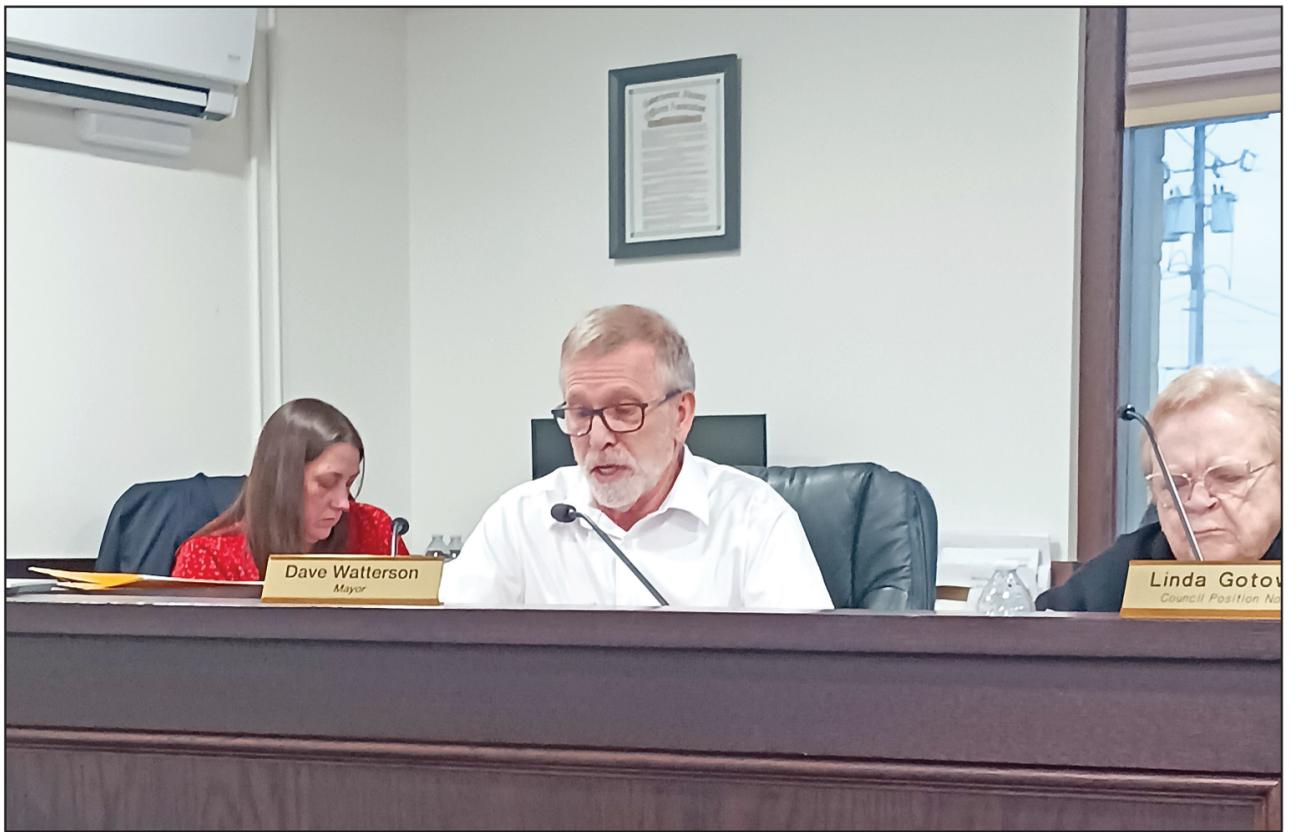


Photo by Dan Fisher

Tenino Mayor Dave Watterson reads through his report on Tenino's budget situation during the work session prior to the regular City Council meeting on March 10.

tial solution could be contracting with the Thurston County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) for law enforcement.

"We have no contract with the Sheriff's Office; we'll talk to them about it," Watterson said. "We need to work on our street and capital improvement funds. House Bill 015 allows a one-tenth of a percent tax which can be used in a sheriff's contract. We've got to look at this contract so we can make an informed decision."

Watterson said Tenino's projected ending balances get smaller each of the next three years.

In a five-year plan already proposed, the three percent interest on the 10-year payback of inter-fund loans is now closer to four percent.

"We would keep the police building for use as a sheriff's substation," Watterson said. "If we didn't have this debt, we would still be struggling."

Watterson identified some key issues.

"We need to confirm a budget cut number and confirm figures and the service level on a sheriff contract, adopt a formal reserve policy with clear procedures so we never get in this position again," Watterson said.

Opportunities for increased revenue include raising the Ag Park rate, sale of the food bank and public safety funds for police services. But collateral damage

could be done to water and sewer funds.

"A new rate study will provide a clearer picture," Watterson said. "For other cuts, we could eliminate education and training for city staff - there's some risk, but that's where we're at. We can cut the \$10,000 water donation to Fire District 12 and end our \$5,000 annual pool donation."

Watterson said the city could save an additional \$17,000 per year by cutting the Civil Service Commission, which would become unnecessary if the police department is eliminated.

"IT services and planning are both very high," Watterson said. "We have to have them but we need a more efficient way."

Watterson said the TCSO could supply a School Resource Officer (SRO) to replace the one provided by the TPD.

"The longer we put this off, the more it's costing us," Watterson said. "We'll be insolvent next year if we don't do something. The only building closure that would be a saving is the library. I don't see that we can do any significant reduction in personnel."

Local citizen Dave Champagne, owner of Castle Realty in Tenino, then asked to make a comment.

"It's important to recognize our revenues and our debt and where those shortfalls are," he

said. "Two big issues are, you have a solution tour shortfall on the table. I would recommend a task force of citizens who do this for a living to meet with the Finance Committee. The police solution is really lacking in information. These are questions to be answered."

At the start of the regular meeting, former Council Member John O'Callahan gave a presentation on e-bike regulations and insurance.

"Senate Bill 6110, approved overwhelmingly by the state, has been trying to force everyone into electric vehicles," O'Callahan said. "These (e-bikes) are an excellent option."

O'Callahan asked the mayor and council for a letter of recommendation for his application to join a council on e-bike regulations, a decision which was deferred to the next Council meeting on March 24.

In Public Comments, three Tenino residents spoke in favor of retaining the Tenino Police Department and City Clerk/Treasurer Nancy Reddick read an email from former Clerk Jen Scharber, also in favor of retaining the police.

"I believe strongly in the importance of having local officers embedded in the community," said Davina Sanchez, a Briar Lane resident. "Minutes (in response time) matter. I urge the council to reject this pro-

posal.

"I'm super concerned about the kids," said Brianne Ozetich.

The council then discussed proposed resolution on public safety and police funding intended to prevent elimination or budget cuts to the Tenino Police Department.

The ordinance included a provision requiring a "supermajority" vote of the council to approve any funding reduction, though the smallest majority on a five-member council would be 3-2 and a 60 percent supermajority.

Council Member Adam Carney checked in with his opinion.

"If we don't fix what we've got, we don't have a police department in 12 months," he said. "More information is needed or I can't support this. Anything we do has to leave us with at least one officer available at all times."

"I agree with Councilman Carney," said Council Member Jeff Eisel. "I'd like some more information."

The resolution failed by a 3-2 vote.

In other action, the Mayor was authorized to hold preliminary fact-finding discussions with the TCSO, strictly to gather data on the potential costs and coverage models for contracted law enforcement services, and to report those findings back to the council.

## Voter database privacy bill headed to governor's desk

By Ayeda Masood

OLYMPIA— A bill aimed at protecting Washington's voter registration database from being disclosed through public records

requests is headed to Gov. Bob Ferguson's desk.

State officials sought the bill after a recent request from the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ)

for sensitive voter information.

On Sept. 8, the U.S. DOJ sent a letter to Washington's Office of the Secretary of State requesting the state's full voter registration database within 14 days, according to the Secretary of State's website.

The request, signed by U.S. Assistant Attorney General Harmeet Dhillon, asked for information including registrants' full names, dates of birth, residential addresses, and either their state driver's license numbers or the last four digits of their Social Security numbers.

"We have serious concerns about how federal officials want to use private and protected voter information, which the DOJ has continually refused to address," Washington Secretary of State Steve Hobbs said in an email statement.

Requested by Hobbs, SB 5892 would prohibit county elections offices from producing records generated by the statewide voter registration database in response to Public Records Act

(PRA) requests. Instead, county offices would be required to direct those requests to the Secretary of State within five days.

State or local election officials who knowingly distribute private voter registration database information without authorization from the Secretary of State would face a Class C Felony.

Previously, Washington law only stated that county elections offices were "not required" to produce records in response to such PRA requests.

Under Washington law, a voter's date of birth, driver's license number and the last four digits of a Social Security number are considered private and protected information and are not included in the state's publicly accessible voter registration database.

The only information currently available to the public includes a voter's name, address, political jurisdiction, gender, birth year, date of registration, voting record and registration number.

Washington maintains two

voter registration databases: county voter registration databases maintained by county auditors, and a statewide voter registration database maintained by the Office of the Secretary of State.

During a public hearing on the bill, concerns were raised that the proposal could limit county election officials' discretion in determining whether to release information in response to requests they consider to be valid.

However, Hobbs said changes to the database system make stronger protections necessary.

"The nature of the databases has changed since the implementation of VoteWA, which is one of the reasons we have to do this," Hobbs said. "In the past, it was just the county's voter database. Now a county worker has access to the entire voter database in the state of Washington."

The Washington State Journal is a nonprofit news website operated by the WNPA Foundation. To learn more, go to [wastatejournal.org](http://wastatejournal.org).

### Prep Sports Calendar

**Wednesday, March 18**

**Baseball**

Mark Morris at Rochester, 4:30 pm

**Fastpitch**

Montesano at Tenino, 4 pm

**Thursday, March 19**

**Fastpitch**

Rochester at Elma, 4 pm

**Friday, March 20**

**Fastpitch**

La Center at Rochester, 4 pm

Blaine at Tenino, 4:30 pm

**Boys Soccer**

Ilwaco at Rochester, 6 pm

Forks at Tenino, 6 pm

**Girls Tennis**

Tenino at Montesano, 3:30 pm

**Saturday, March 21**

**Baseball**

Kalama at Tenino, noon

**Fastpitch**

Toledo at Rochester, 4 pm

Elma at Tenino, 4 pm

**Track**

Tenino, Rochester at Rainier

Icebreaker, 11 am

**Monday, March 23**

**Boys Soccer**

Hoquiam at Rochester, 7 pm

**Tuesday, March 24**

**Baseball**

Tenino at Rochester, (2), 3 pm

Girls Tennis

Fort Vancouver at Tenino, 3:30 pm

**Wednesday, March 25**

**Fastpitch**

Rochester at Woodland, 4:30 pm

**Boys Soccer**

Raymond-South Bend at Tenino,

6 pm

Rochester at Forks, 7 pm