

## Tax hike will pay for city building

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A new city building will cost property owners \$92 for each \$100,000 their property is worth, auditor Trent Williams said at Monday's Portsmouth City Council building.

Those with \$50,000 worth of property will pay about \$46 annually should the city build the new building at the former Adelphia Communications site at 807 Washington St.

Such figures would raise about \$675,000 each year. City officials talked about a 20-year debt to pay for the building, which would net \$13,500,000.

City Council adopted a resolution to accept a building committee's recommendation to build a \$10.4 million building on Washington Street.

"I never say anything is definite," City Council President Howard Baughman said. "But this gets us moving to the Adelphia building."

He said City Council still will have to approve architectural studies and several other steps along the way in building the municipal complex.

Councilman Mike Mearan last year said he wanted to build a building without raising taxes.

But that apparently won't happen.

"It is a tax increase that we will see when we approve an ordinance to create the debt," Councilman Bob Mollette said.

That's because the city will collect money from the debt retirement fund, which relies on property taxes. Some city officials say because the debt fund has been used before, it is not a tax increase.

However, there has been no use of the fund for several years. Therefore, when the city does institute the fund, property taxes will rise from what they are today.

That concerned several residents who spoke out against the building. Mollette said he felt uneasy about the plan after hearing them speak. However, he voted to adopt the resolution.

One speaker said Mearan stands to gain financially because he represents the California resident who donated the building to the city.

Such comments drew Mearan's ire, and he said some people are looking for something bad to drag the city down.

"I take offense to the claim of the committee being a sham," he said. "I have no ax to grind and no financial interest. I simply convinced someone who lives 2,500 miles away to donate the building to the city."

In other business, City Council passed ordinances:

€ Accepting \$1,600 from a firefighter certification training program;

€ Authorizing the transfer of \$17,741.27 in donations to the police department.

First reading was given to ordinances:

€ Authorizing the city to enter into an energy services agreement with Ameresco, Inc;

€ Authorizing Mayor Jim Kalb to sell Allard Park to the Sciotoville Community School for \$1.

City Council also adopted a resolution supporting Norfolk Southern's decision to open a car repair shop in the city.

The Council tabled, or postponed action, on an ordinance forbidding non-domestic animals from being raised in the city. Councilman David Malone asked to table the ordinance because the health department is working on revisions to the ordinance.

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