Points to Ponder from the Police Department

We are here to serve you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Please feel free to contact us (507-437-9400) at your convenience if you have additional questions.

CITIZENS POLICE ACADEMY

The Austin Police Department is finishing its second annual Citizens Police Academy as this newsletter is going to print. The Academy offered 18 Austin residents the opportunity to be part of a six-week training session where they met one evening per week in September and October to learn about police work and how we serve our community. Participants were offered hands-on training, facility tours, and demonstrations. We are looking forward to offering the Academy again in 2017.

SELLING OR BUYING A VEHICLE AND TRANSFERRING THE TITLE

One thing we often hear from people is they sold a vehicle in the past year and the new owner never transferred the title. There are a few easy steps to follow for your protection from a situation like this:

- Go in person with the buyer/seller to your local Minnesota Department of Vehicle Services to transfer the title. If you are unable to transfer the title in person, please follow these steps:
  - Complete ALL the information on the back of the title.
  - Record the buyer’s information on the bottom back of your title where it says “Seller’s Notice of Sale” and tear off this section to keep in a safe place.
  - Once you sell the vehicle, you have ten days to report the sale. You may access the Department of Public Safety online at dvs.dps.mn.gov to record the sale, or you may call them directly at 651-284-1234.

From the Fire Department

SNOW SHOVELING AROUND FIRE HYDRANTS

In the winter months, it is especially important to be aware of how snow-covered fire hydrants can delay fire services, costing crucial seconds or minutes that can mean the difference between saving a life or structure. It is the responsibility of the property owner to clear around the fire hydrant.

TEST YOUR SMOKE ALARMS!

Change your clocks, change your batteries! Five minutes is all it takes to save lives. Visually inspect and replace your smoke alarm batteries every six months. Smoke alarms should be located on every level of your home, in all sleeping areas and replaced every 10 years.

DO NOT BURN LEAVES!

It is unlawful to burn leaves with or without a permit. Leaves must be taken to the recycling center for disposal.

PARKING ORDINANCES

We often receive calls regarding city parking ordinances, so we have listed a few of the more common parking violations. It is unlawful for any person to park a motor vehicle:

- on a sidewalk or a crosswalk
- in front of a public or private driveway
- over 12 inches from the curb
- upon any city street for a continuous period in excess of 12 hours

During snow emergencies, it is unlawful to park or leave standing any vehicle on designated downtown streets or parking lots from 1:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m.

For most other areas in the city during snow emergencies, vehicles may be parked between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. on the even-numbered side of the street on even-numbered days of the month, and on the odd-numbered side of the street on odd-numbered days of the month.

Please be aware that once the snowplow has gone down your street it does not mean the city crew is finished clearing snow in your area, and the snow ordinance hours are still in effect.

Visit the Parks and Recreation website for this season’s youth, adult and nature programs.

Packer and Riverside Arena will have open skate for the public. Check our website or Facebook page for times.

Austin Parks and Recreation  |  121 4th Avenue NE  |  507.433.1881
www.ci.austin.mn.us/park-recreation

The Parks and Recreation offices will be moving to the Municipal Building, 500 4th Avenue NE, in spring of 2017. Watch for exact date!

FLOOD AWARENESS IS FLOOD PREPAREDNESS

The City of Austin provides floodplain and other flood-related information on its website and on Facebook. On our city website, look for “Protect Yourself and Your Property from Flooding” under Flood Mitigation Program. Visit Floodsmart.gov for more information to protect you and your property.
**BUDGETING FOR 2017**

A recent newspaper article suggested the city government is looking at a 3.8 percent tax levy increase that would raise revenue by $407,580. When it comes to paying taxes to support our mutually shared public expenses, most would agree a 3.8 percent increase would be better than a 9 percent increase in their local taxes.

The news article about a city increasing its taxes by 3.8 percent isn’t an article in our Daily Herald but rather one from a paper that covers the City of Anoka, Minnesota, a suburban city northwest of Minneapolis. Anoka has a population of 17,276 (30% smaller than Austin) and is conducting their annual budget process just like we are here in Austin.

The tangible difference is the Austin preliminary levy increase is at 9 percent which will raise about the same amount of revenue as Anoka’s 3.8 percent increase. The Austin levy is preliminarily proposed to increase $441,000 for a total levy of $5.341 million while in contrast the City of Anoka has a total levy of $6.6 million – nearly 20% higher – while significantly lower in population.

Suffice to say, perspective is important and percentages don’t tell the whole story though we seem to often be governed by them. The bottom line is as a taxpayer you are much better off in Austin than you would be in Anoka.

We have roads to plow and squad cars to buy just like Anoka and other cities across Minnesota. We also have a great group of dedicated employees. We take pride that residents and businesses can get about their day while services like sewer, public safety and plowing of roads are done without much thought and are there when we need them. To keep our workforce strong, 7% of the budget increase for 2017 is directly related to wage adjustments and increasing health care expenses.

As part of my economic development responsibilities there has been a lot of attention paid towards the challenge of a pending workforce shortage as baby boomers hit retirement. Experts project we won’t have the necessary workers to fill many of our jobs. As an employer the City of Austin needs to be cognizant of this fact and mindful that we have to stay competitive.

You may be interested to know the number of applicants for many positions is down and in one instance we have had an engineering position open for over a year. We also cannot respond as quickly as the private sector to these projected workforce shortages and a gradual accommodation is much better than a spike should we find ourselves increasingly uncompetitive. We also have to contend with mandatory arbitration and other state statutes that govern public employees that are all a part of the employment process.

The City of Austin has had a self-insured health insurance plan for many years and has benefitted when claims were low and returned those funds to the fiscal health of the plan in many instances. However, claims as of late have proven to be financially unsustainable. We are working to find the right balance to reconcile these losses while maintaining a solid benefit to our employees, but these expenses place pressure on the City’s levy and are a part of the 7% for wages and health care costs.

The other 2% is going towards pedestrian ramps/sidewalk repair, alley reconstruction and hazardous building removals. These are basic services. The hazardous building costs are the result of the City working to be more proactive on nuisance properties while the pedestrian ramps are related to Americans with Disabilities Act compliance efforts. These are just a few examples.

A lot of factors play into a local levy but Austin is among the lowest tax rate per capita and we should recognize we have historically been getting quality services at an affordable price especially when you factor in state support from local government aid. According to the most recent State Auditor information Austin is ranked 224th out of 229 cities in Minnesota for taxation on a per capita basis. Now that’s comparative value.

Please let us know if you have any questions or comments regarding the 2017 budget process.

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**No Leaves in the Street**

The colors are beautiful on the trees as the leaves begin to fall. But leaves placed in the curb line will flow to the nearest storm drain and eventually clog the inlet. Once this happens the street can become flooded and potentially damage your and your neighbors’ property. Leaves that do make it through the drain end up in our local rivers and streams causing a number of water quality concerns. This fall please bring all your raked leaves to the local collection center. It is located in the Cook Farm Industrial Park just off US 218 North and will be open daily through November 27.

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**Pet Waste Disposal**

The City of Austin has miles of trails and sidewalks to take our favorite pet for a stroll. But pet waste left on the ground is unsightly and can wash into the stormwater drains nearby. This water does not go to the waste water treatment plant before entering a river or lake. Every piece of waste has billions of fecal coliform bacteria that could end up in these waters.

The City of Austin requires all pet owners to properly dispose of pet waste from public and private properties (Ordinance Chapter 10.02). Remember to bring a bag or two, collect any waste your pet produces, and dispose of it in the trash. Contact the City of Austin Engineering Department for more information on this or other water quality concerns.
POLLING LOCATIONS FOR 2016

The City of Austin has six different locations where citizens vote. You must vote at your correct precinct. Please review the map of the City to find your ward and precinct.

Live in: Vote at:
1. City Hall – Council Chambers ............ Ward 1, Precinct 1
2. Austin High School Hastings Gym ........ Ward 1, Precinct 2
3. Austin High School Hastings Gym ........ Ward 1, Precinct 3
4. Southgate Elementary School ............ Ward 2, Precinct 1
5. Banfield Elementary School ............... Ward 2, Precinct 2
6. Mower County Senior Center ............. Ward 3, Precinct 1
7. Ellis Middle School ....................... Ward 3, Precinct 2

Riverland Community College Is No Longer a Polling Location
Only one precinct has changed from the last municipal election. Riverland Community College will no longer be a voting location. Citizens in Ward 1, Precinct 1 will now vote at City Hall in the Council Chambers.

If you have not pre-registered to vote in your precinct, please do so prior to the Election Day at the Mower County Auditor’s Office in the Courthouse or on the Minnesota Secretary of State’s website. Please call Ann Kasel at 437-9943 if you have any questions.

To find where you need to vote, go to this website:
http://pollfinder.sos.state.mn.us/

AUSTIN & MOWER COUNTY HOME BUYER ASSISTANCE

If you are planning on buying a home in the near future, assistance through the Austin-Mower County Homeownership Fund (AMCHF) is available. Any resident of Mower County may apply for a low interest loan to help cover the down payment and/or closing costs if they meet the following criteria:

- The maximum loan amount is $4,000.
- The home that is being purchased must be located in Mower County and must have a purchase price of $120,000 or less.
- The income from all sources for everyone living within the residence must be under $78,900 for 1-2 people and $89,985 for 3+ people in the household.
- The loan is for a maximum of five years at a rate of 2% interest.
- Loan repayments must be made automatically from the applicant’s checking or savings account.

In special circumstances, the Loan Review Committee of AMCHF reserves the right to make loans outside the general boundaries established above.

For additional information please contact Ann Kasel at (507) 437-9943 or via e-mail at annk@ci.austin.mn.us.