Long Beach City Council to vote on furloughs

By Paul Eakins, Staff Writer

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LONG BEACH - For the second time this month, the City Council will vote today on whether to give City Manager Pat West the power to furlough city employees for 15 days.

This time, it's a foregone conclusion that the council will approve the unpaid furlough days, although West won't have to enact the policy just yet.

The council meets at 5 p.m. at City Hall, 333 W. Ocean Blvd. The meeting can be viewed live on Charter Communications Channel 8, Verizon FiOS Channel 21 or at www.longbeach.gov.

Last week, the council voted to delay a vote on the furloughs as city management continued negotiations with Long Beach's largest employee union, the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. Balancing Long Beach's budget depends upon city workers freezing their pay, as most of the other eight employee unions have agreed to do.

City and union negotiators have yet to reach a deal, Assistant City Manager Suzanne Frick said.

She said that a meeting between union and city officials to discuss how to proceed was planned for Monday, but actual negotiations weren't expected to continue.

"There's nothing new that's been put on the table," Frick said.

The IAM's 3,800 members, which make up the bulk of non-public safety city employees, have a contractually promised raise of up to 4 percent over the next year.

IAM negotiators have offered to delay the raise, but only if they get a guarantee of no furloughs for a year. West says he needs the ability to furlough workers if the economy should take a turn for the worse.

The IAM agreed to delay the pay raises, which had been scheduled to begin Oct. 1, until the end of the month to allow more time for negotiations. However, if a deal isn't reached soon, West has said he will implement the 15-day furloughs by the end of the month.

PCH and 2nd expansion

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Also today, the council will have a public hearing and vote on whether to use the power of eminent domain to take a sliver of property to widen Pacific Coast Highway in southeast Long Beach.

City officials plan to create a right-turn lane north of 2nd Street. To do so would require taking a strip of land behind City National Bank and in front of Hof's Hut restaurant.

"It doesn't in any way impact their current business or other operations," Director of Community Development Dennis Thys said Monday. "It will be a significant community benefit to have a dedicated right turn pocket."

The city has offered the property owners $655,000 for the land, which Thys said consists of landscaping and a single parking space. Thys noted that Hof's Hut would be temporarily impacted during the construction of the turn lane.

However, the owner has refused the sale offer.

The council can use eminent domain - the ability to force someone to sell their property for the public good - to move the project forward, which is exactly what Thys is recommending.

An attorney representing the property owner didn't return a phone call seeking comment Monday.

Refuse hauler fees

In another public hearing today, the council will vote on implementing new alternative fuel requirements and higher fees for private refuse haulers.

As part of the budget solutions that the council approved this summer to create more revenue, Long Beach's 16 refuse
hauling companies are being asked to increase their fee payments from 12 percent to 16 percent of gross revenue. About half of the money - $1.3 million - would go into the city's general fund.

The new contracts would also require that the companies convert their trucks to alternative fuel vehicles by 2015. The seven-year contracts would be expanded to 10 years if all of a company's vehicles are compliant by Oct. 1, 2012, or two nine-year contracts if compliant by Oct. 1, 2013.

Jim Kuhl, manager of the city's Environmental Services Bureau, said the refuse companies currently have one-year contracts, but not the alternative fuel requirement.

"We're giving them 10 years of certainty in the city of Long Beach instead of one year, and that was the trade-off," Kuhl said.

He said Consolidated Disposal Services was the company that had, had the most concerns about the new contracts, but it seems to be content with the deal now.

Consolidated spokesman Noel Hacegaba said the new contract addresses the company's concerns and that given Long Beach's ongoing financial problems, Consolidated is willing to pay a little more.

"Consolidated is cognizant of the city's fiscal challenge, and we view the new refuse hauler fee as an opportunity to lend a hand to the city," Hacegaba said.

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