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Councilors mull how to spend precinct money

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GREENFIELD — While Town Council Vice President Karen “Rudy” Renaud said she hopes to spend the \$10,000 the mayor gave Precinct 7 last fall on the dog park planned for Green River Park, other councilors said they’d like to put their precinct money back into the town’s budget.

Mayor William Martin announced last October that he would be giving all nine precinct councilors, as well as the four at-large councilors, \$10,000 each from “free cash” surplus for a total of \$130,000.

He said each councilor could do something for his or her precinct or could combine money with others for a project that would be for the greater good of the entire community.

The council approved the money at that time and recently began discussing parameters and process for its use.

The issue is currently with the council’s Ways and Means Committee and will most likely go to its Community Relations and Education Committee next.

Marjorie Lane Kelly, the town’s finance director, said she is not sure that Renaud will be able to use the money for a project that is already in the works and has been funded.

“The money is supposed to be used in each precinct for something that is for the greater good of that precinct or the entire community, but has not been funded,” said Kelly.

Precinct 1 Councilor Marian Kelner said she wants to hold a public forum before deciding what she’ll do with her money.

“I haven’t heard from anyone in my precinct,” she said. “I want the entire community to become involved and then see what comes out of those discussions.”

Precinct 2 Councilor Alfred Siano said he hasn’t heard from anyone in his precinct.

“One idea I have is putting the money toward a summer recreation program where kids would go to a town park or playground and do arts and crafts or something,” said Siano. “Maybe councilors could combine their money for a larger project that would benefit the entire town.”

Precinct 5 Councilor Penny Ricketts said she has heard from two groups — one that would like to spend the money on benches, signs or art for the dog park and another that would like to put banners that display children’s artwork along Main Street.

“Those are great ideas, but I’d like to see the money go into the town’s ‘rainy day’ fund,” she said. “I think there are a lot of questions to be answered before we start spending that kind of money.”

Norman Hirschfeld, councilor for Precinct 9, said he hasn’t heard from any of his constituents.

“I don’t think Precinct 9 needs a lot,” he said. “I’m really skeptical about this. I think I’d rather see the money go back into the budget and pay for the salary of a youth worker or teacher.”

Precinct 4 Councilor Steven Ronhave said he has talked with the town’s engineer and believes the money should either be used for drainage issues within his precinct or put in the town’s General Fund to be spent for something the entire town needs.

According to Martin, the idea was for councilors to work with residents in their precincts and decide how to spend the money.

He suggested the four at-large councilors work with precinct councilors to decide where the at-large money would go.

“At-large councilors could spend the money in the precincts they live in or could combine their money with other councilors for something bigger,” said Martin.

Kelly said if any precinct councilor decides to spend \$5,000 or more on any one project, the town will have to get quotes and follow state procurement laws.

Martin said he came up with the idea of giving each precinct money after attending public meetings where he heard concerns from councilors about their precincts and from the residents who live in them.

He said there are “little things” within the different precincts that don’t ever get done because they aren’t priorities for the town.

The money Martin gave councilors last fall will have to be spent by the end of the fiscal year on June 30. He said he cannot promise the same every year.

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