

# City Council Discusses Future of Liquid Infrastructure, Full-time Firefighters | Anna-Melissa Tribune

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By Bryan Heath

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The Melissa City Council met Tuesday to hold public hearings regarding the city tax rate and budget, rename residential developments and listen to a presentation regarding the future of the city's water-related infrastructure.

Council approved renaming North Creek, Phase Five to North Creek Estates, Phase One. The land is 24.61 acres in size and houses 108 residential lots and five Home Owner's Association lots. The land is described as being located at the intersection of Throckmorton Road and Milrany Lane in Melissa.

Council approved renaming Phase 6 of the North Creek Two development to North Creek Estates, Phase 2. The development phase is intended for 85 residential lots and five Home Owner's Association lots. The final plat for the area is 29.08 acres in size and located 1,100 feet northwest of the intersection of Throckmorton Road and Milrany Lane.

Public hearings were held to give the floor to any citizens who wished to speak regarding the city's fiscal year 2015-16 budget and tax rate. Gail Dansby, Director of Finance for the City of Melissa, reviewed the tax-related items on the meeting's agenda.

"The general fund, we're presenting a budget of \$6,024,063. There's several things that we are proposing to fund that has to do with the strategic plan, goals," Dansby said of the projects needed for the city to continue fostering positive social and economic growth in the quickly-expanding community "Some of the highlights of those [proposals] are public safety, we've got a transition for our fire department into paid employees, we have got three full time captains we are proposing. We've got the police that we are upgrading their starting salary."

Council will vote on the city tax rate during the regular meeting on September 8 at 6 p.m. in council chambers at Melissa City Hall, which is proposed to remain at .61 cents per \$100 of valuation. If approved, it will be the eighth year for the city's tax rate remaining the same. Council will hold a second public hearing on Sept. 8; the public hearing will allow any citizen who wishes the chance to speak publicly. The hearing is needed in order for the city to officially adopt the proposed budget for the 2015-16 fiscal year.

Council approved a resolution authorizing City Manager Jason Little to execute an amendment to the city's contract with AUI, the contractor for the City Hall Park Project. The amendment was in regards to the maximum price given to the project's contract and will allow a slight increase in the project's budget. Little said the park will be located immediately behind City Hall.

Melissa's city staff is continuing in its collective efforts to increase environmentally friendly and efficient city infrastructure. Erin Mynatt, assistant to the city manager, updated Council on the status of the city's contract with Fathom and the project's goals. Mynatt updated Council about the city's ongoing project with Fathom, a water utilities company which specializes in providing modern, tech-based solutions with water utilities and equipment with environmentally friendly, efficient approaches such as digital, solar-powered water meters. She said the initiative will provide the city and its residents with "increased accuracy in

confidence in the readings and billings they are receiving.” The city will seek to streamline and modernize the process of providing water and billing for water utility service through the services provided by Fathom, which will serve as a third party company.

One of the larger goals of the project is to provide new water meters and replace outdated meters for residences.

“Any meter that is less than three years old will be retro-fitted, those that are older than three years old will be exchanged,” Mynatt explained. She elaborated about how the project is not only ecologically-friendly but economically-friendly. “It’s very cost-affordable as well; it gives us a predictable rate as we grow.

“The key message is that we want to deliver to our customers about this is, obviously, the benefits,” Mynatt continued, “The fact that they can look to the increased access to the data of their actual usage.”

Mynatt said one of the greatest benefits to the consumer is they will “be able to get more familiar with their own usage be able to identify things they can do to change that,” Mynatt added. “They get an idea of what it really does.”

Mynatt explained the project makes water use data available to the customer in a fashion familiar and user-friendly, similar to methods used by many internet and phone service providers. Mynatt said the project will “help give people an appreciation of what valuable and finite resource water really is.”

Mynatt reviewed many key points and changes such as updates to the payment options for water utilities and assured those in attendance that the city staff will be very much active and available to citizens during the entire process as well as the customer services offered by Fathom. Mynatt and Fathom’s President and Chief Growth officer presented council with slides detailing the entire project and its goals. The project involves a significant upgrade to the city’s water infrastructure, one of the larger efforts included in the plan is replacing out-dated water meters with modern counterparts. The water use data will be compiled and studied closely by Fathom which will assemble the raw data into figures which will be used to show the city and residents their exact usage and offer tips on how to use the city’s water supply more efficiently while cutting back on over-consumption of resources.

More information regarding forthcoming changes to the city’s water utility services is available through the City of Melissa’s website.