• Council

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tax. Thus, he floated the idea to bring a referendum to voters in October to raise the sales tax from the current 5 percent to 7 percent.

Councilmember Scot Henderson said that his idea was to spread the pain and that the budget as presented was not a balanced solution as neither the city nor the schools were presenting any reduction in spending. He opposed the idea to not show a good effort of cutting spending, but asking citizens to voluntarily raise their expenses via a sales tax. He thought asking voters for a 2 percent sales tax hike would be a risky proposition.

After a lengthy discussion, the council landed on a reduction in the city's contribution to the school district. "I don't think there is anybody on this council who does not support the schools. But we have to make the city's budget and the school's budget work," Johnson said. He said that if there is an emergency, the council would step in and help the schools. Pressed by the state-mandated May 31 deadline, Councilmember Mark Johnson made the motion to amend the resolution, reflecting a city contribution of $2.7 million. The vote unanimously approved the amended resolution.

In another vote, the council unanimously passed a resolution to set the mill rate at 11.5, on a value of $488 million of taxable property.

The council voted on the budget ordinances of various funds, including the general fund, in first reading. Another work session is set for Wednesday, June 4 at 5:30 pm, prior to the vote in second reading, public comment and final passage.

In other business, the council voted in first reading to amend the city's zoning map to include a downtown mixed use district.

After the budget work session, the Nome Common Council, with all members present, convened as the Board of Equalization and voted on an appeal from Norton Sound Health Corporation, asserting that eight properties should be tax-exempt. Councilmember Cameron Piscoya, who works for NSHC, declared a conflict and was excused from voting on the matter. The properties include the housing complexes, the Kusqii House, the Wellness Center, hostel and maintenance center complex, the prematernal home and the west campus. The board of equalization voted property by property and denied each appeal.

After the 3 hour and 40 minute meeting, only few council members volunteered comments. Maggie Miller suggested to add other tax increases to the ballot come October, such as bed tax. Scot Henderson thanked the Planning Commission to get the downtown zoning amendment before the council. Cameron Piscoya echoed Miller's suggestion to get other tax increases on the ballot. Adam Martinson cautioned that voters may react adverse if too many tax increases are presented on the ballot.

Mark Johnson requested from the city manager to look at installing basketball hoops around town. And finally, Mayor John Handeland asked the interested public to take initiative and help put on events such as the Memorial Day festivities or the upcoming Midnight Sun events.

The next work session on the budget is planned for Wednesday, June 4 at 5:30 p.m.

Photo by Diana Haecker

BUDGET TALKS— The Nome Common Council convened on Tuesday for a work session and the regular meeting to vote on the city's budget in first reading. The council also set the mill rate at 11.5.

• Graphite One

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Dept. of Defense grant financially supported the feasibility study, citing "national security" reasons. As demand for graphite is growing, the mining plans call for a much greater output than initially forecasted.

The mine

According to Vice President of Mining Kevin Torpy, the mine is designed as an open pit mine, with a drill and blast program, material will be loaded into large mining trucks, hauled to the processing plant, where the graphite is separated from the rock. The product leaving the mine would be a fine, 95.5 percent graphite concentrate, which is then put into 20-ft containers.

The tailings will be dewatered and put in a dry stack facility, which does not require a dam structure.

A power plant is on site, as is a fuel storage facility holding 850,000 gallons of fuel. The entire fuel consumption is estimated at 8 million gallons per year, requiring five tanker ships delivering fuel to Nome and additional storage capacity.

The mine's life is expected to be 20 years. Aside from work force development, additional creation of housing in Nome, the fate of the mine hinges on significant infrastructure development.

Infrastructure

Two things need to happen to make the proposed Graphite One mine a reality as the company envisions it. First, road improvements and road building. In order to access the remote mine site, it would be necessary that the State of Alaska reconstructs 30 miles of the Kougarok Road and then builds a 17.3-mile access road across state land to allow industrial truck traffic between the mine site and Nome. Graphite One projects 12 tractor-trailer trucks transporting containers of the graphite concentrate from the mine to the port of Nome for shipping during the ice-free season.

Asked about the currently potholed Kougarok road, Schaffner said, "The one thing I can guarantee you is, we could not drive equipment on the road in the condition it's in. It would break down. I mean, the road you guys have is right now would not be sufficient for equipment to run across." He said that the Kougarok Road is a state highway and Graphite One is not allowed to maintain it. He said Graphite One is in negotiations with the State DOT to see if it's permitted to help make payments to keep the road maintained or "if we could help them with a contractor to maintain that road."

The access road would be a private road, not open to the public. No details were discussed as to how that road would be paid for. Vice President of Mining Kevin Torpy said that he has flown the route with the Commissioner of the DOT and is in talks with the local DOT Superintendent Calvin Schaeffer on how to improve and "cap" the road to support the traffic they anticipate.

The first being the concentrate shipment out. The plan is to truck the approximately 7,000 20-ft. containers year-round from the mine site to the port of Nome, translating to 12 double tractor trailer trucks making the round trip a day. Also, on a daily basis, two double trailer trucks would deliver fuel to the mine. Adding to the daily traffic would be four busloads carrying workers back and forth for each shift, plus other miscellaneous supply trucks going to the mine. Currently, the DOT only does snow removal to Banner Creek. With year-round trucking, even through the winter months, the operation would need to be supported by significant road maintenance and snow removal efforts.

The second crucial infrastructure component would be the timely expansion of the port of Nome. In order to ship the containers out, the Port of Nome expansion and its deep draft access would allow container ships

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Photo by Nils Hahn

DETAILS (*right*)— Nome-Beltz highschool junior Alora Stasenko asked some technical questions for the Graphite One leadership to answer.

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