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Letters for January 30, 2014

About the city attorney

Re “A valued position” (Letters, by Andy Holcombe, Jan. 23):

Regarding the letter from former Chico City Councilman Andy Holcombe, there are three positions that report to the City Council, not two. He opined that contracted city attorney services would be more expensive, yet Chico is the rare example of a city its size bearing the payroll and benefits costs of an in-house City Attorney Department, particularly in this day and age, when business is conducted largely via telephone and email.

Payroll and benefits costs for the city attorney alone cost more than \$263,000 last fiscal year. That’s on top of the costs for department staff, which brought the total pay and benefits to more than \$636,000. An additional \$150,000 in specialty outside-attorney fees and other costs brought the department costs to more than \$810,000.

This expense continued during the years when the city was burning through millions of dollars more in expense than revenue each year, and took the city dangerously close to insolvency. This further demonstrates the need for far greater levels of city-attorney objectivity and independence from internal management and staff.

The city-attorney proposal process will enable the council to make an informed decision about how best to procure city-attorney services in the future, rather than to just keep doing things the same old way.

-- Mark Sorensen, Chico