



Wish list day at the Emporia City Commission

By [Jeremy Shapiro](#)

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The Emporia City Commission began Wednesday sifting through a wish list of equipment, vehicles and construction projects brought forth by city department heads.

While many of the items would probably help city operations, the reality is the vast majority won't get done soon. The city has little money to spend on capital improvements so usually the requests get pushed back year after year.

"This has always been an exercise in futility," said Commissioner Jim Kessler. "The department heads say they need it every year, but we obviously don't have money to do it."

The commission began reviewing the 2012-2016 capital improvement plan at a study session Wednesday. Non-recurring expenses of more than \$5,000 are considered as part of the capital plan.

Every year the commission establishes a list of potential equipment or projects and then city staff prioritizes it to attempt to take care of the greatest needs. This is done prior to setting the city's budget for the following year.

City Manager Matt Zimmerman said they typically spend about \$140,000 annually on CIP items. That amount won't even put a dent in the wish list. For instance, the Police Department's 2012 items alone cost \$742,300 and the Fire Departments total is \$452,000 if you don't count the \$2 million it could cost to renovate Fire Station No. 2.

Nonetheless, commissioners began the process of putting together the CIP by asking department heads to explain some of their requests.

Mayor Kevin Nelson asked why the police needed \$119,000 for a city-wide wireless network.

Ed Rathke, facilities manager, said there are many practical uses for the network, such as ER doctors being able to see how paramedics are treating patients en route to the hospital.

"It also would replace some radios that are right on the line as far as meeting homeland security standards," Rathke said. "It also gives us more convenience in outlying areas with phone and radio communication"

Another request was \$27,000 for warning sirens downtown. Police Lt. John Koelsch said it would be a voice-activated and placed on top of Civic Auditorium.

"It will cover the downtown area and cover part of ESU, but not all of it," he said. "It would be larger than the one at the aquatic center but very similar."

Fire Chief Jack Taylor was asked about a request for 10 signal pre-emption emitters for \$12,000.

"When an emergency vehicle approaches, the emitters turn the stoplight in that direction green and all the other ones turn red," Taylor said.



Zimmerman said currently the policy is for the emergency vehicle to stop at the intersection regardless of light color and make sure no one is coming. Studies have shown the system can improve response time by 33 seconds, he said.

"In an emergency situation, that's a huge amount of time," Zimmerman said.

One of the Civic Auditorium requests was truck pointing and **sandblasting the exterior of the building** for \$212,000. The golf course list started with enlarging pond No. 9 for \$180,000 and the park list included playground equipment at Hammond Park for \$125,000.

Zimmerman also brought up two policy discussions subjects relating to the CIP though the commission didn't have time to address them Wednesday.

One was about the city's multi-year fund, which comes from a countywide sales tax and has been used for infrastructure. Zimmerman said he recommended continuing to use the money for infrastructure because that's what they told voters it would be spent on. He wanted to know if the new commission was comfortable with the definition of infrastructure.

In addition to things like roads and sidewalks, the previous commission also included anything attached to land, including buildings and park improvements. City leaders received criticism earlier this year by saying the new entrance limestone monuments counted as infrastructure.

The other policy questions was about debt. Some of the projects on the CIP are so expensive borrowing money is probably a must.

"The only other way to pay for it is use up our cash reserves," Zimmerman said.

The previous commission said to lay off the credit card, The general philosophy on some equipment has been to use it until it breaks, Zimmerman said.

The commission will continue discussing the CIP at its May work sessions.