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Aldermen pass 2018-19 budget in close vote

proposed budget, with a second from Ward 2 Alderman Jim Martin. The amendments included:

1. That all provisions related to department head raises, salaries, and benefits, with the exception of \$5,000 plus appropriate benefits to the Community Development Director and the City Clerk, be removed from the appropriate budget line items, with the portion from the general funds to revert to the general fund, thus raising the ending balance of the budget, and the portion from the Water/Sewer Fund to remain in the Water/Sewer Fund until allocated by the Board of Aldermen for salaries or for other purposes.
2. That all sums related to hiring an Economic Development person, including salary, benefits and office expenses, be removed from the appropriate budget line items, with the portion from the general fund to revert to the general fund, thus raising the ending balance of the budget, and the portion from the Water/Sewer Fund to remain in the Water/Sewer Fund until allocated by the Board of Aldermen for salaries or for other purposes.
3. That the sum of \$68,945 be removed from the Personnel section of the Court Services budget line item, with such sum to revert to the general fund, thus raising the ending balance of the budget until allocated by the Board of Aldermen for salaries or for other purposes.

Cashion spoke against the amendments, first addressing salary increases for the City's department heads.

"We have thoroughly vetted the department head structure and looked at several other cities for comparison. Given the makeup of Mississippi, the cities we used were comparable," said Cashion.

City Clerk Russell Wall recorded the vote on the amendments to the budget proposal, with Garrett and Martin and Ward 1 Alderman David Ellis voting

en-page explanation of the rationale behind the figures provided by Fisher, and a public hearing of the proposed budget at the September 4 regular meeting of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen.

One of the key elements reflected in the Mayor's budget proposal was salary increases for all department heads, as well as merit raises for employees as determined by their department heads.

Fisher said, "In 2013, our department heads were paid in a range from \$35,000 to \$60,000, considerably less

The budget also provided for promoting Anna Hawk to department head level, increasing her salary from \$60,000 to \$65,000 as she takes responsibility for the promotion and activities of the newly constructed replica Train Depot.

The salary of the City Attorney, formerly \$95,000, was raised to \$105,000 based on her ten years of municipal experience.

In commenting on the department head salaries, Fisher said, "The department head salaries are now competitive and in line with other cities in the state. This will be the last increase for our department heads in this term."

Another area of disagreement between some of the aldermen and the Mayor had to do with hiring a full time municipal judge. The City currently employs two part-time judges.

According to Fisher, "The volume of trials and pleas in our court system is growing as the number of arrests increases. This is due to many positive changes in the Clinton Police Department, such as the increase of sworn officers, better training, the creation of a patrolling division and a traffic division, as well as passive policing methods. The result is a substantial increase of cases in our City courts. There is a direct correlation between an increase in arrests and a growth in court cases."

The third item of disagreement on bud-

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Photo by Doris Bynum

"yes," and Cashion and Barnett voting "no." Cossitt, registering her vote by phone, voted "no." Ward 4 Alderman Keith Peritt was absent, with no provision made for casting a vote and no reason for his absence noted. In the face of a 3-3 tie among the aldermen, Fisher voted "no" to the amendments.

When the vote was called for the approval of the original budget as presented, Martin, Ellis and Garrett voted "no." Barnett, Cashion and Cossitt voted "yes." Fisher voted "yes." The original budget passed on a 4-3 vote.

The approval of the 2018-19 budget followed months of preparation, a sev-

than department heads in other cities, with women paid much less than men. Since the completion of that salary survey, I have been moving department head salaries upwards to get in line with other cities we compete against."

"I realize these increases are higher than one might expect," he said. "But the starting point was much lower than it should have been." Fisher said he conducted an informal survey of salaries in other cities such as Meridian, Tupelo, Gulfport, Biloxi, Ridgeland, Olive Branch and Oxford in 2016 as well as considering figures from the 2017 Stennis Institute Survey.

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