

Program brings about \$526K to Spa City

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SARATOGA SPRINGS - Talk about turning trash into treasure.

Finance Commissioner Kenneth Ivins announced Friday the city will receive about \$526,000 for an energy program that captures gas created by garbage at the Weibel Avenue landfill and turns it into electricity to power the city's two ice rinks, located across the street.

The funds will arrive in a grant from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and represent a 50 percent reimbursement of the city's costs to convert the garbage into energy over the last decade, said Department of Public Works Commissioner Anthony "Skip" Scirocco.

Scirocco commended Public Works Director William McTygue for seeking the grant.

"Money from this program is a reimbursement for monies spent on converting landfill gases to energy for the ice rinks," Ivins said. "However, the reimbursement has no stipulation on how we spend it."

Ivins suggested a number of spending options, which he said he will submit to the City Council for approval.

The first would be to use the money to build up the city's reserve fund, which holds \$4 million now. Ivins said auditors have recommended the city have \$10 million in its reserve.

Other suggestions offered by Ivins include applying the money to the general fund contingency for shortfalls; applying it to the general fund as a revenue which would reduce the expected 3.8 percent tax increase, or use it to fill Department of Public Works and Public Safety 2009 budget requests. Those departments are looking at proposed cuts of more than \$600,000 next year, based on their most recent requests.

Ivins said he is "leaning" toward applying the incoming funds to each of those areas, with at least 75 percent going to the public works and public safety departments, which constitutes a similar percentage of the city's overall budgetary needs.

"Although this is great news, we must be prudent in how we spend it," Ivins warned. "We will dig ourselves into a hole if we do not treat it as the one-time revenue source it is."

Earlier this month, Ivins presented the proposed 2009 comprehensive budget, which totals \$38,176,366.04.

Ivins will present an amended 2009 budget to the City Council at a preliminary council meeting on Nov. 3.

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