

MURRIETA: Police agree to wait for pay raises

10:00 PM PDT on Thursday, June 30, 2011

By JOHN F. HILL
The Press-Enterprise

Murrieta police officers have agreed to wait an additional six months for their already-delayed pay raises as the city continues to tighten its budget.

The move will save Murrieta almost \$177,000, a city report states.

The agreement marks the second time in the past year that the police officers have agreed to defer a scheduled 6 percent pay raise.

Last summer, a month before the pay hike was to kick in, the officers agreed to postpone the raise 18 months, and to take it in installments over two years.

Now, they have agreed to wait an extra six months.

All of the city's 80-plus police officers will get a 3 percent raise in July 2012, followed by 1.5 percent increases in the next two years.

There was never any talk of layoffs, said Sgt. Don Weller, vice president of the Murrieta Police Officers Association. Weller said the city approached the officers asking for help, and the officers voted to go along with the plan.

"We're here to help the city," Weller said. "They're here for us and we're here for them."

Last year, as Murrieta scrambled to close a multi-million budget gap, most of the city's employee associations agreed to take pay cuts in the form of furloughs.

Most city employees now work 9.5-hour days four days a week, and City Hall is closed on Fridays.

The option to take Fridays off was not available for police officers, so they agreed to postpone their raises.

Mayor Randon Lane said that because the police contract was signed before the economic downturn, it had more room for savings. So the city approached the officers and they agreed, he said.

Lane praised the officers and the other employee organizations for agreeing to cuts.

"We have great organizations in our community they continue to work with us and we couldn't be more appreciative," Lane said.

He said no more pay cuts are planned, but "we're always talking with everybody" about where money can be saved.

The new agreement extends the city's contract with its police force until the end of 2014.

The officers have been working under the same contract since 2007.

The city reached agreements with both the rank-and-file officers and the police department's management. The agreements were approved by the Murrieta City Council last week.

Reach John F. Hill at 951-375-3738 or johnhill@PE.com