

Manhattan Beach adds \$1 million to budget with new hires

By [Caroline Anderson](#) October 11, 2014



Manhattan Beach City Manager Mark Danaj. Photo by Caroline Anderson

Four new jobs were added to the Manhattan Beach city government Tuesday, despite objections from residents and one council member that it was not an economically wise move.

The city council voted 4-1 to approve the new positions, which the city estimated would cost almost \$1 million annually. The positions include two managerial roles and deal with economic planning and communications.

The vote appeared to be a test for the new City Manager Mark Danaj, who proposed the new hires. He said that the city's budget could accommodate the extra \$847,700 but said that they should reconsider subsidies for storm water and street lighting.

“We hired this man to change the culture here and to make us the most efficient and effective organization,” said Mayor Pro Tem Mark Burton, who supported the proposal.

Councilmember David Lesser, who gave the sole nay vote, was highly critical of Danaj’s proposal. He pointed out that the city had recently hired an assistant city manager and was currently looking for a community development director. In addition, the city had just come out of a hiring freeze, he said.

“What are the efficiencies that could be realized through our city’s staff without simply hiring new positions, and not just small ones?” he asked. “I think this council recently had a pretty big dispute about even making a part-time graphic designer full time.”

Residents were similarly critical of the decision.

“The first thing we should hire if we go with this plan is a very good bankruptcy firm, because that’s where we’re headed for,” said resident Bill Victor. “It’s folly.”

Another resident, Faith Lyons, suggested that there might be better uses for the money.

“What will we not be able to afford because we’re paying for these people?” she asked. “Will we be able to afford a skate park? I don’t know. Will we be able to replace our sewer lines when they deteriorate because they’re aging?”

Currently, the city has 282 fulltime employees, according to Danaj’s report.

The four positions, each of which has salary and benefits totaling over \$200,000, include an economic development director, whose job will include overseeing the downtown business plan; a communications/civic engagement manager, who will act as a public information officer and maintain the city’s social media; an information technology director; and an assistant director of finance to assist with budgeting, auditing and accounting.

Mayor Wayne Powell said that adding the positions would eliminate the need to hire outside contractors.

“We recently paid \$100,000 to our chamber [of commerce] to perform economic development services because we didn’t have somebody in-house that could do that,” said Powell.

Councilmember Amy Howorth said that although the new positions would require a lot of money, she thought they would benefit the city.

“This isn’t about efficiencies,” said Howorth. “This is about bringing us into the 21st century.”