

City council fights over social funding

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2/17/86

With federal funding continuing to dwindle, the Ames City Council Saturday sent major funding cuts for human services agencies back to an advisory panel for another round of reductions.

The Analysis of Social Services Evaluation Team, the council's adviser on spending the \$220,000 it has allocated for local human services, will Tuesday recommend how to cut an additional \$33,000 that Ames has now learned it will not receive in federal money during 1986-87.

WHILE the council sent ASSET's recommendations back for another round of cuts, council members had

heated words at times over how the limited funds should be distributed among the 17 agencies asking for city money.

With Ames relying on about \$117,000 in federal revenue sharing money and another \$70,000 in state liquor profits funds to make up the pool for human services, representatives Ann Campbell, Larry Curtis and John Parks talked of using all liquor funds to pay for local substance abuse programs.

"I think we can do a few things well with the dollars that we have," Curtis said during the debate.

But council members Georgene Shank and Pat Brown criticized that idea, saying spending city money that way might mean no funding of up to seven agencies that aid the poor. Some may be forced to close,

they said.

SHANK and Brown voted against a 3-2 motion to have ASSET prepare a plan on spending liquor profits money on substance abuse for the council.

"As a middle-class and upper-class community, we're ignoring the needs of the poor. And that's evident by the way we're voting," Brown said.

The agencies which officials said might lose all city money as a result are the United Methodist Day Care, Sexual Assault Center/Battered Women's Project, Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Ames Visiting Nurse Service, Open Line, Mid-Iowa Community Action and the Emergency Residence Project.

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As it is, ASSET formulated its recommendations without regard to whether agencies were involved in substance abuse training, and nearly all agencies lost some money. Three large agencies — Youth and Shelter Services, Regional Substance Abuse Center and Children's Services of Central Iowa — were targeted for nearly \$100,000 of the cut.

"I COULD sense that there was a strong majority on ASSET to save all the agencies this year," said ASSET member Marvin Julius. "That means you fund the smaller agencies at near their current levels and the larger agencies, fair or not,

take most of the cuts."

Revenue sharing, the major money source, is scheduled to end this fall. As a result, the \$400,000 now available for local agencies is being cut by more than half in 1986-87.

Council members are unwilling to raise property taxes to pay for the agencies, saying they lack political support for such a move. They also say the funding cuts should come as no surprise to the agencies.

"The problem is not of not wanting the services. The question is the funding," Curtis said. "And the agencies have been warned for seven years that (revenue sharing) is soft money."

The council's decision on which agencies will get funds may come next week.