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**Opinion****Editorial: Budget raises questions**

Posted at 12:01 AM

The good news is, the city of Ashland apparently won't face a projected general fund deficit of \$10 million three years from now. And the Parks Department's projected shortfall is now just \$600,000, not \$5.9 million.

But the explanation from city officials leaves much to be desired, and raises more questions.

Finance Director Jim Welch says the current budget for the 2017-2019 biennium includes projected future deficits that are larger than they should be because they were mistakenly based on a 12 percent increase in salary, wages and benefits for city employees. The 12 percent figure should have been a 10 percent increase in health coverage and 2 percent in Public Employee Retirement System contributions. The actual increase in personnel costs should be 3.5 percent, Welch said.

While that's a relief, it doesn't completely explain how the error happened — Welch blamed “turnover of staff at the time” — or why it is only now coming to light. The City Council adopted the budget in June, although Welch said he expressed disagreement with the projections in May, and Citizens Budget Committee members questioned the figures as well.

There has been friction for months between citizen members of the Budget Committee and the council. Only now that the budget is part of the justification for a recall campaign against three parks commissioners is a fix in the works.

That's a little late. Errors, particularly of this magnitude, should be corrected promptly, not when it gives the appearance of political expediency.

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