

## City taking action on false alarms

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ALTON - City officials are sounding the alarm against false alarms that require police and firefighters to respond to hundreds of groundless calls each year, tying up responders.

At Wednesday night's Alton City Council meeting, aldermen OK'd a resolution on a 5-1 vote that would amend city ordinance to require alarm companies to file a yearly form with the police chief, among other requirements in a 19-page ordinance.

Any such business operating in Alton would be required to have at least one staff member complete certification training at first, then all workers within a year's time. Customers would be instructed in preventing false alarms and would pay the company a fee when they first subscribe to the service. The cost will be \$25 for residences and \$50 for commercial customers.

The fees will go to the city.

Alarms will be required to have standby batteries to prevent false alarms, and new systems cannot go directly to the Alton Police Department. In the event of a second false alarm within a year's time, the subscriber would have to pay a fee of \$25. The third and fourth such false alarms within 12 months would cost \$50 each. After the fourth such alarm within a year, the police chief can suspend the service for 30 days.

Aldermen also voted 5-1 in favor of an agreement with Municipal Dynamics to handle alarm registration and manage false alarms. Alderman Mick McCahill, 2nd Ward, voted no on both resolutions. Sixth Ward Alderman Gary Fleming was absent.

Police Chief David Hayes said the ordinance is the same as in St. Louis, which he said had a 50 percent decrease in false alarms during the second year after the ordinance went into effect.

"The subscribers are holding the vendors responsible," he said.

Besides gasoline costs, when police respond to false alarms, Hayes said it "takes officers out of doing something legitimate."

In 2009, he said, the city recorded 1,272 alarms of all types - 522 residential and 750 at businesses.

One out of every 195 of the residential alarms was an actual burglary. Eleven out of 68 commercial burglar alarms turned out to be burglaries. In addition, 261, or 46 percent, of alarm locations had two to nine activations, and eight had 10 or more alarms.

One home's alarm went off 17 times, and one business' alarm sounded 26 times, with police responding. There were 135 false alarms for the Alton Fire Department.

In other business, aldermen suspended rules to approve:

- an ordinance adding the Days Inn property, 1900 Homer Adams Parkway, to the River Bend Enterprise Zone, so as to provide incentives to owner Champion Hotels of Oklahoma City.

- a contract with RCS Construction for \$16,544 to replace a pipe section, so as to repair a sinkhole on city property near the Holiday Inn.

The council also approved an ordinance tightening restrictions on noise and a resolution approving up to \$1.5 million in incentives - possibly up to 10 years - to Giant City Properties (Simmons law firm) for renovations to its building at 1 Court St. The property is in the city's new, second tax increment financing district. The city would borrow the first \$500,000 from the first TIF account, then repay the money.

TIF money can be used only for improving properties or public assets - not for city operations - and is derived from property tax revenues that exceed the level when the district is established.

Aldermen also OK'd a special-use permit for Club Paws, 299 E. Elm St.

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