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Powder Springs Mayor Answers Ex-Councilman's Criticisms

"I've taken the high road, but ... I'm going to address the concerns from now on," Pat Vaughn said.

By [Michael Stone](#) | [Email the author](#) | February 7, 2012

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Powder Springs Mayor Pat Vaughn spoke for nearly 20 minutes at the end of Monday's City Council meeting in response to former Councilman Ra Barr's [latest letter](#) to Patch.

"I don't normally do this, but this has gone on for about 2½ years, and I've taken the high road," she said in the council chambers at the [Community Development](#) building. "But ... I'm going to address the concerns from now on."

In Barr's letter, he questions city spending—notably council members [voting to raise their own retirement pay](#)—while recent media reports have discussed possibly dangerous patrol cars for the [Powder Springs Police Department](#).

Police Chief Charlie Sewell was merely [laying out plans for the future](#) at the last council work session of 2011, Vaughn said, and there is no immediate danger.

"In looking at the fleet of cars, he wanted to make the council aware of some of the needs for some new police cars," she said. "I do not think it was Chief Sewell's intention whatsoever to threaten the council ... and to imply that everybody is unsafe."

Sewell was "very upset" after reading one report from a newspaper, and another newspaper left out some parts out of the story, the mayor said. "Sometimes the media will try to make a sensational story."

In Barr's letter, he says former Chief L. Rick Richardson told council members of possible vehicle dangers. But Vaughn said Richardson only requested new vehicles and didn't say current ones were dangerous.

As a result of the retirement increase, Vaughn said she will receive only \$160 more instead of the \$480 mentioned in Barr's letter. She said to get the retirement, council members must serve eight years, but, at six years as a councilman, Barr was the only one grandfathered in.

"If you would like to ... you're certainly welcome—or anybody—to give their retirement back to the city," the mayor said.

Also in response to Barr, Vaughn said:

- The [stormwater fee](#) is based on the square footage of impervious surface for all buildings except houses, which will universally be charged \$36 a year. "So it doesn't make any difference if it's a \$1 million piece of property or a \$20,000 piece of property." She also said collections from the fee can go only to stormwater purposes.
- The city is "fortunate enough" to have sponsors for the council's annual retreat. The mayor said that in her 16 years on Powder Springs' legislative body, she has paid 95 percent of her expenses. "I do not charge mileage or anything, so I wanted to make that clear. And I'm not the only one; I have council members that do not charge mileage and different things."
- [Public Works](#) Director Greg Ramsey hasn't expressed a need for new garbage trucks.
- The [Coach Ford Center's Reception Hall](#) does run at a loss but is used by many organizations for various events. "That facility was to be used not as a moneymaker but ... for the citizens of Powder Springs to use. And that is precisely what we use that for."
- The mayor's phone budget is \$1,730 for the current fiscal year, and she has used \$800 so far.
- The [Senior Center's](#) monthly \$250 phone expense is because the facility is billed like a business, and the charge includes Internet.

Vaughn said she will follow up with a written rebuttal to Patch.

The mayor also noted that her State of the City address has been postponed from today to March 20 so she can see the results of [the community assessment](#).

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[christine fehr](#)

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8:28 am on Tuesday, February 7, 2012

I think it is the responsibility of the mayor to address the concerns of the citizens. The high road is like a child ignoring someone taunting you. These are people with real concerns! It should be a responsibility to address the concerns of the people. The government is there to serve the people. and personally I think the Ford Center is wildly over priced for the people of Powder Springs to use. If it's there for the people then price it accordingly and use it more. I also think there should be more police on bicycles- if they need cars then by all means schedule it, but don't ignore other forms of transportation. Maybe they should hire more police and put them on alternate forms of transportation and use some of the car money to give another person a job. There are so many empty buildings downtown it's ridiculous! We need to work on increasing the economic stability of the area. and get volunteer groups going to help with the storm water runoff problem. I'll be the first to sign up to help dig and plant!

Reply

[Lee](#)

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10:10 am on Tuesday, February 7, 2012

The reason the Mayor has paid 95% of HER retreat expenses is because she was receiving double pay, mayor pay and city manager pay! You paid nothing Mayor, the taxpayers did.

Reply

[Grace Heimendinger](#)

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10:18 pm on Tuesday, February 7, 2012

To suggest that our police use bicycles is ridiculous. I want our officers to be available to respond quickly and safely when needed. And to complain about the costs at the Senior Center is petty. Most senior centers have full time paid help. Our Powder Springs coordinator is paid for 4 hours a day, but seldom works less than 6 hours daily. She also works many Saturdays without pay helping to raise money to support the center. The city provides the building, but the members paid their own supplies and entertainment. Members spend many hours with their quilting and crafts, sales, dances and other functions to help defray costs for the city. submitted by Grace Heimendinger, president of the Senior Center

Reply

[James](#)

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9:24 am on Wednesday, February 8, 2012

Seems to me if she had responded to the needs of the various departments, Ra Barr would not need to write any letters, but Mayor Vaughn likes to keep everything out of the public eye.

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Bob

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8:24 pm on Friday, March 9, 2012

Ra Barr wasn't alone in commenting on Senior Center expenditures. Was he nitpicking? Maybe. But in this day and age, all expenses (retirement increase anyone?) need to be questioned. Former city manager Rick Eckert, in April 2011 (<http://westcobb.patch.com/articles/powder-springs-facing-375000-budget-shortfall>), reported to council that at some point the Senior Center - and museum- would need to become shelf sustaining. He did not give a reason why but I think it's safe to say that it would help contain the city's budget. (\$100k is spent per year, I think. I could not locate it the budget on the city's website to confirm). Personally, I think it will be very challenging for PSSC to fund it's own operations without outside support. Still, and as part of the process, City Council will need to continue to consider cuts in all areas.

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