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Coopersville: Local businesses gain bidding edge

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By Ron Cammel

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COOPERSVILLE -- Just as the Chamber of Commerce plans a "Buy Local" campaign, the City Council approved a new policy to boost the purchase of local products and services.

Under the policy, the council will award projects to local businesses even if their bids are up to 5 percent higher than a low bid from an outside company.

City Manager Steve Patrick proposed the policy after learning of other municipalities that give special consideration to local businesses. He said such policies keep tax dollars within the community and assist local companies in providing jobs.

"This may even be an additional boost to encourage all Coopersville residents to spend more of their dollars locally, thus stimulating more dollars circulating and building more wealth within the community," Patrick wrote in a memo to the council.

Mayor Ken Bush said the policy is a good idea, but he worried the city could "get off track" by paying more when local businesses are in the market to compete like others.

"But if it's just a little over . . .," replied council member Roger Whitman.

Council member John Scherff said the city turns to local businesses in emergencies and it does not make sense to favor out-of-town companies that might be unavailable when the city needs. He added that local businesses pay local taxes, so the money stays in the city.

"This is the municipal version of doing business with people who do business with you," said council member Larry Crandle. "The money comes back to you."

"But what is a 'local business'?" said council member Charlie VanderKolk. "Anything within the city limits? Within five to seven miles?"

"If it's not just within the city limits, it opens Pandora's box," said Scherff.

Council members agreed to start the policy for businesses within city limits and decide later on an expansion. They also settled on the 5 percent difference in price.

The council approved the new policy 6-0, with member Brad Sprague absent.

"Let's see what happens," Bush said after the vote.

Chamber director Cindy Timmerman said that group might promote local buying.

She told the council about the book "The Small-Mart Revolution" by Michael Shuman, which argues that doing business with local companies is better for the economy overall than using national companies.