

Our City

I was in my City office last week when Pete Ramsey stopped by to talk to Jeff Nelson, our Building Administrator and Street Superintendent. As Pete passed my office, he stopped in. We exchanged seasonal pleasantries and then he asked me how things were going. My response was one I use quite a bit, "Opinions vary," I said. He smiled and asked me a more direct question, "Do you consider the Downtown Revitalization project a success?" I thought for a second because I knew there was more behind the question than a simple yes or no could answer. I responded by saying that yes I thought it was a success beyond having the Idaho Transportation Department and Depatco redo hundreds of square yards of concrete sidewalks. I told him too that I realized some of the changes made snow removal more difficult but it was a good tradeoff for the overall outcome of the project; again opinions may vary. Then we got to the heart of Pete's question which was, that in the overall design and construction process I failed to see the need for a connecting sidewalk through the parking strip on Fort Hall and Idaho Street to his business High Desert Laundry. Which in hindsight makes perfect sense because as snow accumulates in the parking strip, it makes access to his business very difficult from Fort Hall. Next summer, access walks will be added to remediate the problem. It has been my experience that many mistakes only persist if I allow them too. I have no problem admitting that I make them; I hope I am learning how to make fewer and find solutions to the ones that are fixable.

While I enjoyed the white Christmas I was pleased that it didn't get any whiter last Thursday night or Friday. As you will recall, the Street crew had to work much of Thanksgiving clearing the season's first snow and had worked long hours much of the week leading up to Christmas Eve and Day doing the same. That they were able to spend both with family pleased me greatly; sometimes things work out how you want them too, even when you have zero control.

I am pleased too with the overall efforts of our Street department working through long hours of snow removal being one person short of a full crew for the past two months. This Monday afternoon that position will be filled as we are set to interview five candidates for the position. I am confident that a very qualified new hire will result from the process. And as the Street department continues to do outstanding work through the winter again please remember to help us help you by removing snow from sidewalks and driveways to your yard or parking strip not out into the street. We are aware that there are certain areas in town that require much more work to keep roads clear from blowing and drifting snow but if a street develops heavy drifts that we miss please make a courtesy call to City Hall and let us know about it and we will get it addressed; problems many times only persist if we allow them too.

Looking beyond this week to the New Year, many of the same possibilities remain as they did last year; and I continue to wonder why some efforts take so long to come to fruition and why some of the same issues keep creeping into the mix. Yes, our Public Works Coordinator, Jeremy Peirsol, continues to do exemplary work on getting the tennis courts completed, writing a grant that would pave the entirety of the old Willow Bay Campground, reapplying for the Community Choices grant which will see the sidewalks completed around and through City Park and down Bannock Avenue. He continues to work with Councilwomen Jensen and Love on a Splash Park, while he and I will continue to work with our Golf Pro Denny Howell, Superintendent Cody Moldenhauer and the Bureau of Reclamation to develop a golf driving range within the Willow Bay area and neither Jeremy nor I have forgotten the possibility of the

Seagull Bay to Massacre Rocks trail as those efforts continue. Continued cooperation by many will be required in order to see any of these projects through to a desirable outcome.

Little will get done that requires funding from the City, County or School District should the new proposed Business Personal Property Tax legislation pass our State Legislature and be signed into law by Governor Otter. If replacement dollars for the loss in revenue to public taxing districts is not guaranteed, these projects will only be ideas. For the City, the loss would be upwards of \$36,000, which frankly is most if not all of our discretionary funding. Things beyond basic services would not be available to us as we would not be able to meet the matching funding obligations required by most of the grants, needed street improvements and other service maintenance requirements. The lobbying by the Idaho Association for Commerce and Industry (IACI) has been very persistent towards their efforts to limit or eliminate taxes paid through Idaho's Business Personal Property Tax policy and our efforts to see guaranteed replacement funding attached to any new legislation can be no less persistent. I understand IACI's desire to reduce taxes but know it cannot be accomplished in the best interests of our Community without guaranteed replacement dollars. I will keep you informed as the 2016 Legislative Session starts. Your added input could be critical to the ability of the County, School District, City, Library, Rural Fire Department and Cemeteries to serve your needs.

I will also be meeting Monday with Denny, Cody and Robyn to discuss how to improve efficiencies at the Golf Course, improve services therein and discuss the implementation of an afterschool youth golf program this winter. In the vein of improved recreational opportunities, I must commend the efforts of our local Birding Committee for their ongoing efforts to promote one of our better natural attractions; thank you all for your continued vision and follow-through. Also the outstanding efforts of Chris Fehringer, our Organized Recreation coordinator has produced a highly successful youth basketball program by working with our High School coaches in developing the needed skills in our kids early on so that they may be more successful as they grow older. A terrific example of cooperative efforts paying dividends.

When Pete Ramsey stepped into my office last week I was working on developing a new City employee performance evaluation template. The evaluation will be used in conjunction with the newly adapted salary schedule to provide our employees with constructive performance feedback and the opportunity for step-raises on an annual basis. Of course, to be fair the superintendents and City Council will have input into the template as well. As part of the process the City Council will also be identifying goals within our strategic plan for the coming year. Upon affirming our City-wide goals I will then ask the superintendents to develop departmental goals to facilitate the accomplishment of our strategic plan as we move forward as a City in continuing to make American Falls the best place to live.

As community members I encourage you to drop by City Hall and let us know what we can do to better serve you. I cannot promise that we will always have the means to facilitate your suggestion, but if it is in the best interest of the community you will get our very best effort. I look forward to hearing from you.

As Pete and I concluded our conversation coming to a resolution to his concern I wished him a Merry Christmas and shook his hand. He smiled and did likewise. Typically problems persist only if they are allowed to. It is something I contemplate quite often; even more so upon the dawning of a New Year. May yours be all that you can make it.

Until next year...