

Our City

I wrote last week about the City's Fitbit Challenge and how having a scoreboard changes things a "bit" or in my case slightly. For me it is more about a personal goal and not so much who is at the top of the leader board; and I think it is like that for many of us. However, I would be lying if I said I don't care if my numbers aren't at least respectable in effort. For as far back as I can remember I have been goal driven; from wanting to earn my way up the pecking order at the ranch from riding drag when I was eight, to riding wing or one day point, playing in a big varsity football game at Highland as a sophomore, graduating from the University of Idaho and having a 4.0 GPA in my master's program and thesis. Some of those goals are nearly 50 years old; but I am still trying to earn my way to riding point albeit not on the ranch, I am still trying to make a difference in the big game although no longer at Highland or in football; and I am still trying to set the best example I can for my students although the grading system is somewhat more innocuous than the four-point scale. Have I always achieved all my goals – hardly. But, what I can say it that whether successful or not, the honest attempt at achievement made me better; I know it is cliché to say, but then the truth sometimes is.

So when the Fitbit Challenge began I had been walking five to ten miles per day. Fitbit wise for me that is roughly 20,000 steps. A goal should make you better I believe so I upped the ante by 5000; about 12.5 miles per day. So my goal became 12.5 miles per day for 40 days. The challenge goes through the end of March but my schedule at school and the City won't accommodate the time it takes me to put 12.5 miles under my feet every day much past March 11th. It is difficult now managing the time but that is what of life is about; spending one's time where it does the most good.

As I look to the next 22.5 months that remain in this term of my mayoral duties I find myself looking forward and prioritizing my time to make the most effective use of it. The Council and I had a very constructive discussion as we reviewed our Strategic Plan a few weeks ago and we will continue that discussion prior to our March 2nd Council meeting. When I assumed this position three and half years ago, I didn't know what I didn't know and had little direction beyond the projects already in the works for us as a City. Since that time I have learned a number of things; one continues to be, there is a lot I don't know. But I try and make solid common sense decisions given what I do know; I have been fortunate to work with City Councils that do the same. And while much has been accomplished in the last three and a half years more is in front of us.

I wrote last week too of finding a rhythm when I walk and it is in that rhythm that extraneous things slip away and I think and prioritize. In a big picture sort of way I narrowed down my to-do -list to ten projects beyond the maintenance of normal City services.

1. In the last month I have walked nearly every street in town, yes we have a Street Improvement Plan, but nothing puts the condition of our streets in perspective as walking them every day. The first two blocks of McKinley Street past Fort Hall are disastrous; beyond normal repair, and need to be replaced completely. There are sections of streets in town that have the requisite curb and gutter but lack paving, they are sheer ice after it snows and rougher than a cob in the summer and need to be paved. Other streets throughout town are in decent shape but will fail too if not maintained. Funding for our streets is crucial.

2. We have met the financial obligations for the FLAP Grant which will see the intersection at Fort Hall and the Highway 39 By-pass greatly improved and safer while also providing emergency access

to Willow Bay. If the time table holds, this project should be complete in 2017. The other much needed improvement to the By-pass is the conversion of the interchange at Pocatello Street to a truck and heavy equipment worthy round-about which thanks to the help of our County Highway partners and friends at JUB Engineering is in the queue at ITD and should be done by 2020. Both projects will increase safety and efficiency along the By-pass.

3. In an effort to reduce pumping by 12% from the Snake River Aquifer I believe it makes a lot of sense to reuse water we have already pumped that is processed through our Waste Water Treatment Plant. Through grants and conservative use of capital improvement funds I think it will be possible to water the Golf Course and Vard Meadows Park with reused water, reducing summer pumping significantly.

4. Short of mandatory water meters I think incentives can be developed to promote water conservation by all users within the City.

5. Sunbeam Springs can be upgraded to maximize water capture of artesian springs; reducing pumping even more.

6. Of course the sidewalks around and through North and South City Parks need to be completed.

7. I know it is a priority for many to see a Splash Park incorporated in those same parks and it will be should funding become available and it proves to be within our budget to maintain.

8. Lack of maintenance is the reason we are in the process of and very close to being able to reconstruct the community tennis courts. Long term plans have been discussed and agreed to that will insure the maintenance of the courts once built.

9. Willow Bay must once again become a stable and inviting City enterprise. At this point I can only assure you that we are on what I believe to be the right path. I will share the details once they have been worked out over the next few weeks.

10. Finally, no I have not forgotten the Seagull Bay to Massacre Rock trail or route designation. Like many things a simple idea and goal became vastly much more complex than I had originally thought it would; lack of experience on my part I guess. Nonetheless I believe something is achievable.

If you are a parent, grandparent or guardian read further. In an even larger big picture sort of thing I briefly explained last week about the Ag Program's goal to "grow our own." Before I retire I want a pipeline established that will allow students a path forward and a future in American Falls or a least regionally in a career suited to their abilities and liking. A career in which they can earn a good living while contributing to the overall economic vitality of our community, region and State. In partnership with all of American Falls High School, the Your Future In Technology (YourFit) economic development group, the American Falls Ag Program and several members of its Advisory Committee will be sponsoring the first annual Ag and Technology Career Day on February 24 at the High School. Many of the careers that will be represented you and I never even dreamed about; but, there is a severe shortage of employable workers for them now. Honestly, this is the most comprehensive career fair I have ever seen or heard of being assembled for high school students. If it doesn't point a path forward for a majority of students I will be surprised and disappointed. If you are a parent you will be

receiving a letter from the High School and YourFit encouraging you to attend the evening session of the Career Fair from 5:30 to 7:30 in the AFHS Commons with your daughter or son. Dinner will be provided, scholarships awarded and valuable prizes handed out. This event is the result of a unified vision and goal of many to make American Falls and Eastern Idaho the best place to live, work and raise a family. Don't let those efforts on behalf of you and yours be wasted; not to be cliché, make the most of this great opportunity.

Until next week...