

Our City

Much of what I already knew was reinforced this last week; and along the way I learned a few things too. If you read last week's ramblings you would know that much of the week was spent working out the details of how to best mitigate the water call issued by the Director of Water Resources on April 29. For their help and insight into my decision that needed to be made last Tuesday I need to thank our City Attorney Randy Budge, NicBehrend (Chairman of the Aberdeen-American Falls Ground Water District), Pam Warner (Secretary of the Water District), Seth Griggs (Executive Director of the Association of Idaho Cities, AIC) and Public Works Coordinator Jeremy Peirsol. Recall last week that American Falls was to curtail the use of 306 Acre Feet (AF) of water as demanded by the Director of Water Resources. It was going to cost the City \$6,120 through the AIC's 2016 mitigation agreement to forgo that curtailment. That \$6,120 would only cover the cost of this April 29th curtailment, more may follow throughout the irrigation season. In working with Randy, Nic, Pam and Jeremy it was concluded that the City could find safe harbor from future curtailments by becoming a member of the Aberdeen-American Falls Ground Water District as well. But, safe harbor comes with a price; initially more than the AIC agreement.

I have thought for years that the City owned water rights to 20.9 cubic feet per second (CFS) of water. I learned while in Randy Budge's office last week that we actually only have rights to 14.9 CFS. When the well out by the High School was established in 2000, the City applied for another 6 CFS of water rights. It turns out that the application was protested by both the Bureau of Reclamation and the Surface Water Coalition and was never granted. The good news I suppose is that even during our peak pumping season we use less than 9 CFS. Our agreement with the Aberdeen-American Falls Ground Water District is based on the proportion of the 14.9 CFS that could potentially be used during the irrigation season, April through October. Our estimated annual domestic water usage is about 224,975,928 gallons per day, 139 gallons per capita. We use 497,545,990 gallons for irrigation which accounts for 69% of our total water usage. To calculate membership the Ground Water District multiplies the percent of water used for irrigation (69%) by our total available water rights of 14.9 CFS which equals 10.3 CFS. The 10.3 CFS is then factored into their mitigation assessment. As new members in the Ground Water District we have to pay membership fees for the previous three years. The City's total payment for 2016 will be \$8,277.39 and place us in safe harbor for the remainder of the year. Next year our membership is expected to cost about \$2,337. The current advantage of being a member of the Ground Water District is that their mitigation agreement extends for 20 years where the AIC agreement is currently for 2016 only and their future agreements are still being developed.

So the good news is that although slightly more expensive initially our membership in the local Ground Water District should serve our needs well into the future. The cost of joining the Ground Water District will be absorbed by the Water Department and not passed on to you, the consumers, at least for this year. As we begin the budgeting process that may change for 2017. The concern also remains as to how we will reduce the amount of water we use by 12 as much of Eastern Idaho's ground water users are having to do. During last Wednesday's City Council meeting our conversation extended almost an hour as conservation methods were discussed; more on that as plans are developed. At the end of the conversation the Council

voted to ratify my decision to become a member of the Aberdeen-American Falls Ground Water District. Time will tell if we chose wisely.

Those of you who read this column also know that I do a bit of walking around town. Mostly I walk on the streets. I do so because in the wee hours they are better lit and safer to traverse in the dark than some of our sidewalks. Some of our sidewalks are in shambles with heaves and cracks; all manner of tripping hazards. The sidewalks are the property owner's responsibility to maintain even though they are placed in the City right-of-way. An ordinance exists that if enforced would allow the City to fix the sidewalks and then charge the property owner for the costs. But rather than doing that at the outset I have asked Jeremy Peirsol to work with our Ordinance Officer Judy Fehringer to identify the sidewalks that pose the most severe hazards and contact the property owners to fix the hazard. I have also directed Street Superintendent Daren Dahlke to set aside \$2500 to be used for labor and gravel in an attempt to help remediate the very worst sidewalk sections with compacted gravel where property owners are unwilling to fix the hazard themselves. No, it is not the City's responsibility to do this. But I believe it is better that we work to solve problems together when possible, than to completely ignore the problem.

I believe that both the decisions above are in our best interests; further they provide a positive path forward where one didn't previously exist. I look forward to the challenge of finding solutions to our water conservation needs as I know we can do better. We must do better. On that note I received an email from a citizen today explaining several thoughts on the matter of conservation and water use. I am pleased that it is not just me that it is thinking about these things. Thanks Linda.

Until next week...