

Our City

Sometimes you are left with no easy choices; only right choices. Or more appropriately what you believe is the right choice. I have felt this way for a long time in regards to significant portions of our streets, water and waste water infrastructure. There are no easy choices, only right choices. And, those choices will make many of us uncomfortable.

In the January 23rd edition of the Press you read that: in Idaho the average per capita daily use of water is 210 gallons. In American Falls that number is 513 gallons per day during the winter, in the summer it explodes to over 1000 gallons according to a Keller's and Associates study. I realize that the 1000 gpcd is to some extent due to all the parks, golf course, playgrounds, practice and game fields and grassy areas maintained by the City and School District. The study further revealed that roughly one-third of our City's water mainlines are made of four inch pipe. Six inch pipe is the State standard for fire suppression. To meet fire flow requirements 5100 feet of pipe needs to be replaced with pipe six inches in diameter or larger. You will have a voice in our choice as to how we proceed to deal with this situation.

This last Tuesday I met again with James Mullen, Colter Hollingshead and Jared Richens of Keller and Associates along with Street Superintendent Daren Dahlke and our Water and Waste Water manager Scott Dalling to discuss the options that would be presented at the April 17th pre-council work session. Potentially Phase I of the plan will include continued public education on water use and conservation and if we can fit into our budget a leak detection test on the entire city water system. Both components of Phase I are estimated to cost the City about \$45,000. It is my hope also to work with our partners at the Southeast Idaho Council of Governments (SEICOG) and NeighborWorks Pocatello in finding cost assistance mechanisms so that people in need of financial help can repair and replace leaky and or high volume fixtures. If we can find and fix any leaks in the City's distribution system and property owners can do the same while installing water efficient fixtures our nonconsumptive use should go down. Of course we will all need to reassess the efficiencies of our irrigation systems.

In one of my meetings over Spring Break I met with Ivan Permann and Brett Leyshon who presented me with some grant options designed to help with water use efficiencies. Superintendent Chris Fehringer is working to see if the grants would allow us to upgrade the entire irrigation system at Lee Street and North and South City Parks at a cost of about \$100,000. Not only are the systems inefficient they are incapable of adequately irrigating the parks during the peak of summer use. If we are successful in the parks we will look next to the golf course for system improvements. I know that the School District is looking at similar improvements. While some will volunteer to install efficient fixtures and conserve when irrigating I believe more will need to be done because neither addresses fire flows in our distribution system.

Phase I of the proposed plan is more or less painless for most of us individually. If pursued Phase II will cause us to reevaluate our budgets, fee structures and priorities in the coming years. Phase II will affect every one of us in American Falls if the Council chooses to pursue it. I believe Phase II is critical to our community, I may well be in the minority. Phase II includes water meters on all services, improved water capture at Sunbeam Springs and the replacement of nearly a mile of four-inch water line and the repaving of that many city blocks. Phase II will

require the installation of water meters for any realistic chance at qualifying for any grants needed to complete the infrastructure upgrades. Phase II also matches our most crucial water lines needed for fire suppression with the streets above them that are in the biggest need of complete replacement.

I believe we are to the point that we can no longer kick this can down the road. It is my opinion that we would be irresponsible to do so. Yet, in the end it will not be my decision alone it will be yours also. I will keep you posted as things progress. There will be a public open house this summer and I suspect many after it which will help answer your questions as we decide what is right for our city.

Until next week...