

Our City

Sometimes what you think is going to be a very contentious and difficult decision turns out to almost make itself and then at other times it does not. Both scenarios happened last Wednesday at the recessed City Council meeting which began an hour-and-a-half early with a discussion on our water use and infrastructure.

I gave you numbers in regard to our water use about two months ago so I won't bore you with all of them again but will simply say that often in the months of June, July and August we at times use more than our current City water rights allow. I believe this is largely due to two things; first the 120 plus acres the City waters in our parks and on our golf course and a roughly similar amount around elementary, intermediate and middle schools. The high school is irrigated with water purchased from Falls Irrigation and is not included in any of the water use calculations. Further encouraging news is that a new sprinkler irrigation system is also being installed at the intermediate school as part of the construction project finishing up there this summer. Within the City we are also taking steps to hopefully make the existing irrigation systems in our parks more efficient. I say "steps" because to replace the current systems would take about \$25,000 per park and triple that for the golf course; those funds are not available. Perhaps, a long term solution to that problem can be part of the more difficult discussion and decision.

The part of the Water Study that concerns me most is its reference to the water distribution infrastructure that is between 50 and 70 years old and exists in four-inch water mains. Recall, State requirements are a six inch mainline for water. These facts in my opinion are call for considerable concern. The "can" cannot be safely kicked down the road much longer. While the four inch lines make up most of the "old town" water infrastructure they exist throughout the City, fully over 70,000 linear feet. It is a problem that is not going away, only getting worse.

Next month we will hold a public open house to further inform you and discuss the graveness of the water distribution system. The open house will be followed by a one month written comment period. To emphasize the importance of the open house consider this number \$25,000,000. That is roughly the amount it will take to bring the water distribution system into compliance and improve efficiencies of water use. I know, it scares the hell out of me too.

We will have a few years to determine how to best move forward. With good planning, coordination and a bit of luck it will be realistically possible to offset the total cost with grants by about 25% to 30%. It is still a lot. With proper planning we won't have to eat the whole elephant at once, but slowly over five to ten years. Your input will help us make the best decision possible.

During the regular session of the City Council meeting the major topic of discussion was annexation. The short version is that cost to install the needed water, sewer, storm water and streets currently exceed the ability of the City. The needed infrastructure would cost between three and four million dollars in the areas north and south of town. It was the general consensus of the Council to wait until each area is further developed and work with the developers to install the needed infrastructure. That being said, we will continue investigating whether or not it will be feasible to annex the properties south of town from Teton Street to the

Idaho Transportation Department that currently have City water and sewer. The decision to pursue that annexation will likely be made in the next month or so.

The numbers made the annexation decision for the Council. Even more troubling numbers will develop into a very difficult decision as we determine how to address the state of our water distribution system, water use and efficiencies. I am sure we will be talking.

Until next week...