

Our City

In the March 6th column I wrote, “Through multiple calls and conversations with State licensing boards it was found that several of the City employees currently working in Water and Waste Water are eligible or close to eligible for applying and testing for the Water Distribution II license, which is the standard for managing the type of water system we have in American Falls. I would suspect that as soon as June we may have one Class II Water operator and by fall we should have two more. As Street Superintendent Daren Dahlke stated, ‘We need to do a better job of building our bench.’”

Congratulations to Scott Dalling who passed his Water Distribution II test about 10 days ago and which was verified and posted by the State this last week. Scott had already earned his Waste Water III license prior to coming to work for the City 11 years ago. His new Water II license qualifies him to now be promoted to Water and Waste Water Superintendent; which happened immediately upon the State’s posting of the results of the tests. As I wrote in March, all the other employees within this department continue to study and work for advances in licensure. We are building our bench.

In another effort to promote employee growth and empowerment and thanks largely to the tremendous efforts of City Clerk Robyn Herndon we are close to adopting a new salary schedule that by its design also builds our bench in all departments. The schedule when complete will more fully recognize and promote employee advancement through additional education and training, and provide for more effective cost-of-living increases and has 20 years of longevity built into it.

Of course the proposed new salary schedule will be dependent on annual revenues and this year while the City realized about a 3% increase in revenue much of it was consumed by a blue moon calendar event. Normally, we have to plan for 26 payrolls, one every two weeks. This year as it turns out we have to budget for 27 payrolls because of the way the calendar changes with leap-year and such. Well, an extra payroll equates to about \$35,000, which ate up much of the 3% increase in revenue. The 27th payroll has made budgeting difficult but thanks to everyone’s willingness to work towards the common good, not impossible. That being said, and as an FYI, user rates in Water, Waste Water and Sanitation are being proposed to go up by a total of four dollars. Existing infrastructure cannot adequately be maintained and serviced through the current rates.

Interestingly, at our Water Study Open House last Wednesday a significant amount of discussion was had once again on the possible proposal of the installation of water meters. Put simply, efficiencies within the City’s systems, those operated by the School District and private residences and businesses has to improve. Meters may not be the final solution, but something has to change. As we discussed the need to replace over 70,000 feet of outdated water line those in attendance agreed that it needs to be done. I will be forming a working group to evaluate how to best proceed with the needed improvements. You may remember Mayor Manning did this as we worked to find solutions to our deteriorated Sunbeam Spring waterline, our storage reservoir and our dysfunctional waste water treatment plant. As I have written previously, there will be no long term solution to our water distribution system that is palatable for everyone, but one needs to be found that best serves everyone.

At the Southeast Idaho Council of Governments meeting held here in the American Falls Senior/Community Center last Thursday night every community smaller than Pocatello is facing the same infrastructure issue. The really sad thing is that many are 10 or 12 years behind us in their infrastructure improvements. These issues do not resolve themselves, we must be proactive.

I tip my hat to Governor Little for the efforts he and his cabinet made here in American Falls last Wednesday at being proactive on many issues facing our State. Most of the issues are complex and contentious and will take a coming-together as it were to find solutions that work for all Idahoans. Beyond my role on his Education Task Force I look forward to working with the Governor and all others in doing just that; not only for American Falls and Power County but Idaho as well.

Until next week...have a great 4th of July!