

Our City

Eight million, eight hundred sixty-seven thousand, twenty one dollars and twenty-two cents was the amount that was approved for the fiscal year 2020 City of American Falls budget last Wednesday by the City Council. Depending on your circumstances that may or may not seem like a lot of money. In my opinion, if it takes 14 words to write out a number it is significant. It became even more significant when I got to City Hall Thursday afternoon to find Clerk Robyn Herndon in a bit of a state. She had completed the City's L2 form, a financial reporting form, and submitted it to our County Clerk, Sharee Sprague, only to find that our taxing revenue had been decreased \$40,000 the day before by the State. In Robyn's 34 years with the City she had never seen that happen. After several calls to confirm the decrease the response did not change at the State level, we were in fact losing \$40,000 in revenue for FY2020.

As I arrived on the scene Robyn told me of the shortfall. I too had my OH-SHA moment as I thought back to the months of work that went into reconfiguring our salary schedule, trying to make our golf budget whole without depleting other accounts, trying to figure out how to better maintain our streets and parks on fixed income while all the time not decreasing the services provided to you. After we discussed possible solutions I sent emails to all department heads to stop all spending until further notice.

Friday, as I got to City Hall Robyn met me in the hallway at my office and pointed me to my desk and chair. I complied. She asked, "Do you want the good news or the bad news first?" I said the bad. One of our newer employees had resigned effective that day. It happens, you learn to roll with it. The good news had come from County Clerk Sprague after several conversations apparently not only with Robyn but the folks at the State level there seems to have been a "glitch" in the State's calculations and Sprague told Robyn to use the original budget numbers approved by the Council last Wednesday. Yes, I rolled with it too.

While working through all of this in my mind last week I kept going back to the comments during the public hearing on the City's proposed new water, sewer and garbage rates. Several folks were there on fixed incomes and made a compelling case for themselves. We currently have in place what is called the "circuit-breaker" which is a system by which folks on fixed-incomes can apply at the County level for a reduction in tax and if they qualify there they can also receive reduced payment levels for City services. We had a very good discussion on that issue and I believe we are working towards a viable solution for those concerned. Currently, we have 73 households that receive circuit-breaker assistance. If you think you may qualify please check with the County Treasurer for assistance.

Friday after I got the bad and good news from Robyn Councilwomen Kristen Jensen and I met with Parks and Recreation Superintendent Chris Fehringer to discuss the Healthy Community project we are working on with the Blue Cross Foundation. We are working on increasing recreational opportunities within the community while encouraging healthier eating habits and doing the best we can to buy more locally sourced foods as I wrote a few weeks ago. In that same conversation we talked about the state of South City and Lee Street parks. Should our budget remain as originally planned and we get no more surprise glitches Fehringer will be upgrading the irrigation systems in both parks this fall. Idaho Street, Fort Hall and Harrison will look better next year too as we discussed ways to better maintain hanging baskets,

plantings and trees while hiring help to abate and control weeds in and along our streets, gutters and sidewalks.

On an interesting side note, those who were at the City Council meeting last week to voice their concerns about water rates had only positive things to say about our “beautiful golf course.” One lady’s husband actually helped build the original course. She said, “I used to love to golf. I can’t any more. But, I am glad so many enjoy our beautiful course.” From a widow on fixed income I very much appreciated those comments. I hope those who continue to enjoy “our beautiful course” appreciate them too.

Until next week...