

Our City

Often with the right degree of planning and foresight you can give yourself some options as to how you will choose to address certain issues that arise in the future. And, conversely, it is often seen as easier by some to kick the can down the road and let someone else worry about any potential issues that may arise. The problem with kicking the can is that eventually an obstacle is encountered that prohibits any further delay in needed action to a particular issue. I believe we are fortunate enough to live in a community that is proactive rather than reactive to the extent fiscal abilities allow us to be, we would rather pick the can up and put it properly to rest than leave it for some else to do.

As long as I have been associated with the City of American Falls to the degree fiscally possible we have been proactive. Over the past four months the Water Working Group has become educated and has deliberated on the realities facing our water infrastructure and water use. With one more planned meeting this month I wish to thank them for their service, insight and wisdom. Similarly, the formation and role of an urban renewal agency in our community has been discussed by multiple taxing entities and private citizens as we look for ways to promote sustainable growth and attract business and industry. Both groups have the luxury of time to be able to discuss alternatives and plan the best way forward; however, time marches on and opportunities to be proactive can be missed when decisive action is not taken when an opportunity presents itself.

The Water Working Group faces two distinct but related problems. The first is that of available water and its limited supply. The second is the infrastructure that gets the water where it needs to go. I have written about the amount of water we use per capita in this community multiple times; but this particular issue cannot be kicked down the road much longer. I won't bore you with a bunch of numbers but I will say last year in the month of July the City of American Falls exceeded our firm pumping capacity; we pumped more water than allowable by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. Per capita that amount was over 500 gallons of water per person per day. The Idaho average is less than 130 gallons per person per day. Yes, most of that is for irrigation. No, most of it is not used to irrigate our parks, golf course and school only 21% is, the rest is used by residents watering their yards. Simply, this practice of constant over watering cannot persist; it exceeds State regulations and prohibits any future growth of this community. It must stop.

Underground, our remaining four inch water mains are between 60 and 70 years old. In recent years over 20 water line breaks have occurred in these old pipes. Further, those same pipes no longer meet Idaho fire code for their ability to provide the needed water to fight fire. At some point a water line will break so severely as to allow contamination to the water in the rest of the system. Thank goodness this hasn't happened yet; but given enough time it will.

Interestingly, not only is our community's ability to grow limited by our own gluttony for water use it is also limited by our inability to offer incentives to new business and industry. The potential formation of an urban renewal agency could offer some incentives for growth and development. I do understand that there is skepticism and concern in this regard. If established safeguards and side rails will need to be incorporated into the by-laws that fully address those concerns. Much would need to be done to establish and give authority to an

urban renewal agency but the discussion itself I believe is certainly worth having and I thank those engaged in it.

Ultimately it will be our ability to use water in a manner more in line with the State per capita average, our willingness to upgrade our 60 year old water lines and our ability to attract residential, business and industry growth that will determine the next 10 to 20 years of this community. I applaud the efforts of the Water Working Group, those involved in the discussion on urban renewal and the City Council for their efforts to put together a strategic plan that addresses these and so many other issues while providing viable options for our future as we strive to make American Falls continue to be the best place to live.

Until next week...