

Heber City News

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CITY WATER/SEWER SYSTEM

By Mayor Alan McDonald

The Heber City Public Works Department under the direction of Steve Tozier has had some major challenges addressing failed water and sewer lines and will have significant issues in the future. They had two main water blow outs from old lines that decayed along Main Street. Along Center Street, when the Broadhead Estate Subdivision tried to connect onto the sewer system, they found that cement connection junction lines had been disconnected and that tree roots had grown into the pipes. The cost to the city to fix the problem on Center Street was \$24,000.00. Heber City Public Works department is facing an aging pipe network: leaks, infiltration, low pressure, tuberculation, and even collapse. This problem is made even more challenging by the fact that the older pipe often runs under crowded, well-developed, major artery roadways, which necessitates careful planning for repairs and replacement.

The American Society of Civil Engineers recently put together a “2015 Report Card for Utah’s Infrastructure”. This article addresses issues with Utah’s infrastructure including water, wastewater and storm drains. Part of the issue that we have to deal with as a city relates to the aging of the “core” of our systems. Heber City is no different in this regard.

The average life span of pipe depends on a wide variety of factors including the type of pipe, soil and air characteristics, and installation. Network designers often use 50 years as the average life expectancy for most pipe types. Corrosion caused by hydrogen sulfide gas or other sources of acid are the most frequent cause of pipe deterioration. Other factors involved in corrosion include stray electrical currents in surrounding soil, the presence of toxic materials, acidity of the sewage, and turbulence. Soil movement, improper installation, construction activities, and water hammering also can lead to pipe failure. Organic growth and inorganic chemical deposits can also affect the performance of piping systems. Corrosion in the water distribution pipelines, valves, and fixtures reduces the quality of drinking water that we receive. Corrosion of wastewater pipes can result in the release of untreated wastewater into the environment.

The Public Works Department has begun gathering specific detailed operations data on the City’s water and sewer system. They are mapping the system with special video cameras. The department is searching inside the pipes to see where maintenance and replacement is necessary. The department is already working on the task of evaluation by recommending new procedures for the water and sewer pipe design, maintenance, and rehabilitation. The department’s 10-year plan is aimed at replacing pipes that have poor grades with D and F. With careful planning and investment on the part of the City, the community will benefit from sound distribution and collection systems as well as well-maintained and cost-effective infrastructure. There is much uncertainty over how much it will cost to rebuild an aging water infrastructure, but the general sentiment is that it will be very costly.

Funding for the Public Works Department to keep up with the increasing cost of manpower, equipment, maintenance, and replacement of the old system will depend on a combination of higher water and sewer rates, bond sales, and other department revenues. The rate of growth in public water spending far outpaced growth in non-military GDP with few exceptions during the last decade. Inflation erodes local government purchasing power, and over time investments are needed to keep pace with system demands. The rate of growth in public water spending was greater than inflation. Federal and State regulatory standards over the past 40 years have a direct influence on overall cost of service and user rate fees. The cost of service must include the cost of regulatory compliance. Cumulative costs of providing public water services have mounted over time, and investments triggered by compliance and public water investments have outstripped inflation. Purchasing power continues to erode and increased spending is nearly inevitable.

The City Council had a rate survey performed by a professional consulting group to determine appropriate levels of funding in order to keep the water and sewer departments funded. The proposal explained that the water and sewer rate increase is necessary to avoid a deficit in the City’s water and sewer fund. The proposed rate increase from the study will improve the financial position of the City’s water and sewer fund, reduce the risk of revenue shortfalls from projected reduced



water sales, fund identified self-sufficiency related improvements, and improve net operating parameters that are required to issue new municipal debt that may be needed for future water system improvements.

A serious concern of the Council and City staff is the financial impact on households at or below the poverty level, or with low, moderate and fixed income at the lower end of income distribution as user fees command a greater percentage of their annual income.

The Council is trying to mitigate the extent to which financial burdens can reasonably be placed on ratepayers to achieve progress on clean water goals and to afford sustained future public water investments.

The Council then weighed in on the rate increase and decided to spread the increases out in small incremental fee hikes over the next few years and not to do it all at once. Each year the Council and City staff will look at the rate increases very closely, whether it's going to stay the same, decrease or increase in January of each year. The rates are adjusted based on the funding needed for the departments. The rate adopted by the City Council in January 2015 was a 7.8% increase for the culinary water rates. The base fee will increase from \$ 13.45 to \$14.50 per month and usage rates will also increase by the same percent. The water rates are expected to produce an increase in annual revenue of \$85,000. (For more information on the study please contact the City Manager). The rate increases will continue until the departments are being funded to support the demand placed on them.

The rate increase could help fix some of the current problem pipes, but it doesn't address pipes that will deteriorate in coming years and the equipment and manpower needed. Even the department concedes that it is unlikely that it will ever entirely catch up. The City has an opportunity at this time to take measures, which will keep us from being in a desperate situation in the future.

The City is trying to set aside cash reserves to fund infrastructure, maintenance, manpower, and repairs to address the problems. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to catch up. The rate increases will help prevent us from finding ourselves hard pressed in the future to fund these departments. The lack of proper funding has continually been put off with the lack of fee or tax increases. We have come to the point where rate increases can no longer be postponed. We must do something now about funding our infrastructure,

manpower, and the equipment required to maintain our water and sewer systems in order to avoid catastrophe. If we don't act now, we'll simply pay more for it later.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

The Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum is seeking volunteers to help out one or two days a month for 2½ hours, Tuesday through Saturday 11:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m., or 2:00 p.m. until 4:30 p.m. If you are over 18 years old and are interested in volunteering, visit the Museum located at 188 South Main, Heber City, and fill out an application by April 8.



WARMING WEATHER BRINGS OUT MORE PEDESTRIANS

By Sergeant Salvador "Chava" Segura



As the weather conditions improve, individuals from our community will be walking, jogging, or cycling in the neighborhoods. Please drive cautiously and be observant of your surroundings.

If you're using the crosswalks on Main Street, remember to use the bright colored flags where available and wave them in front of you to alert drivers. This will help them observe your movements, so you able to cross the street safely.

ALWAYS REMEMBER! When you're obeying the traffic laws it makes for a safer community.

