

City Business by Michael Leamons

The Code Compliance/Building Inspections/Animal Control workshop announced last week has been postponed due to difficulties in securing a quorum for the night of the meeting. For a regular monthly Council Meeting, 3 aldermen must be present to establish a quorum. For a special called meeting, 4 aldermen must be present, making scheduling a little more difficult. Mayor Tooley has asked that the workshop be rescheduled for Wednesday, October 26th at 5:30 p.m.

Good news regarding the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). Since its construction, the plant has never achieved compliance with its permitted level of phosphorus discharge (3 consecutive months of compliant weekly test results are required). Hico's WWTP is subject to more stringent phosphorus limitations than most of the State's WWTPs due to actions initiated with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) by the City of Waco several years ago regarding phosphorus in the Bosque River watershed.

When it became apparent the City's new WWTP wasn't going to adequately reduce the phosphorus being discharged, a settlement was reached with the design engineer. Then, another engineering firm was hired to construct an aluminum sulphate (alum) feed system (alum causes phosphorus to precipitate). Even with the use of that system, compliance remained elusive.

In the ensuing months several different treatment methods were tried to no avail. Reducing the phosphorus output is a daunting undertaking because it involves both chemical and biological processes. Were it simply a chemical problem, there wouldn't be anything more to solving it than measuring and mixing. However, much of what transpires during the treatment process, involves microbes.

During the past few months, technical guidance obtained from eHT Engineering and the Brazos River Authority has enabled staff to make some operational changes which have resulted in 4 consecutive weeks of satisfactory test results. Evidently, the right amount of alum is being introduced and our microbes are happy.

Though other matters of far less consequence have generated much more attention and concern, from an operational perspective this matter of permit compliance has been the single most important challenge facing the City because of the looming prospect of TCEQ enforcement action and fines.

On two previous occasions when the test results began to improve, progress was disrupted after a rain. Because of its age, the City's wastewater collection system is subject to inflow and infiltration by the run-off from rain. Inflow and infiltration occurs at manholes and along the old clay pipe wastewater lines and increases the volume of liquid entering the WWTP. When flows at the plant reach a certain level, it goes into storm mode, accelerating the rate at which the inflow is processed.

The plant went into storm mode several times during the recent 5" rain; nevertheless, because of the above referenced operational changes, the test results following the rain were still satisfactory. This development suggests the problem has been solved. Only time will tell.

. May God bless the City of Hico.