

City Business by Michael Leamons

Telephone Matters. A considerable amount of the front office staff's time is consumed by telephone duties, even more so since the Economic Development Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce opened up an office at City Hall. To provide a measure of relief, one of the components in the new phone system installed during the recent City Hall Renovation has been activated--- the automated answering system.

Now when you phone City Hall, you will be greeted with a recorded message directing you to press: "1" for water emergencies; "2" for Sandra Polk; "3" for Anita Mueller; "4" for the City Administrator; "5" for Code Compliance; "6" for Economic Development or the Chamber of Commerce and "0" for Municipal Court. If no one is available, you will be given an opportunity to leave a voice message.

Most of us prefer to speak with a human attendant rather than an automated one, but to keep payroll costs down, the City needs to make the most productive use of staff's time as possible. In addition to saving time, the automated system provides an easier way for the public to deal with after-hours water emergencies. After business hours when you press "1", your call will automatically be routed to the cell phone kept by the City employee on-call.

Street Improvement Project. At a February 28th Special Meeting, the City Council reviewed paving bids. The bids came in under budget, so the Council elected to extend the re-paving of Pecan Street all the way from Grubbs to Lamar Street (initially the cut off was to be at College, or between College and Lamar). The total contract should cost the City less than \$100,000. The \$101,939 bid submitted by Express Paving of Tolar will have to be adjusted. About \$10,000 of the contract will be paid by Last Dollar Development for work on Iredell and Poplar Streets related to the new subdivision. Also, the paving contractor provided a \$6.00/sq. yd cost for work in excess of the original proposal which will have to be applied to the additional square footage the Council added for Pecan Street.

Some project preparations have already been made. TNMP has moved the electric poles along the west side of Pecan out of the ditch back to the edge of the City's right-of-way(ROW). Century Link should have their poles relocated this week. Atmos Energy will be verifying the depth of its old steel gas line. Depending upon its depth, the line may need to be replaced. The paving contractor expects to start the project by the 2nd to 3rd week of March, provided there isn't a delay related to relocating the gas line.

The project also includes paving one block of Magnolia and one short block of Polk. The Council plans to set aside some funding for repaving the streets in each year's budget. Unused paving funds from this year will be carried over to next year's budget.

Rumors of Good News. Though official written notification hasn't been received, verbal indications of good news have been from some of the State agencies with whom staff has been working. Since June, the City has been attempting to obtain final approval of a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) done in lieu of paying a fine for violations related to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) from several years back. The project involved providing wastewater service to 7 residences which had been on septic systems. The project was completed in June, but final approval has been elusive. Every time it seemed to be within grasp, additional documentation was required.

With the help of Katherine Prater of State Rep't Sid Miller's office, it appears all the obstacles have been overcome. We've been told written notification of approval is on the way.

Additionally, since last summer the City has been working to obtain an extension of the time allowed for the WWTP to come into compliance with its permit regarding the amount of phosphorus in its discharge. The extension had been put on hold pending approval of the SEP. Recent indications are that the extension request only needs to be cleared by one more level of TCEQ management before being awarded.

Finally, the City had encountered some resistance from TxDOT regarding the routing of the new wastewater line along the Hwy 6 ROW. With a modification to KSA Engineers' construction plans and with some mediation by Ralph Gauer of State Senator Troy Fraser's office, verbal assurances have been received from TxDOT staff indicating the project will be able to move forward.

Thanks be to God for granting the City favor with the regulatory agencies. May God bless the City of Hico.