

City Business
by Michael Leamons

Subject to change between now and when it is posted on Friday, Monday's Council Meeting Agenda is expected to consist of: 1. A discussion of local property valuations with Hamilton County Appraisal District Chief Appraiser Doyle Roberts; 2. A discussion of what streets to target for this year's paving program; and, 3. Discussion and possible action regarding changes to the Ball Field Agreement with HISD.

Recent developments suggest additional information regarding the City's local electrician licensing program ("local licensing") is warranted.

The law concerning electrician licensing changed effective September 1, 2004 when the State began issuing electrician licenses. Previously, all licenses were issued at the local level according to local standards. The new law provided a method for anyone holding a local license to convert it to an equivalent state issued license without having to go through the newly established State testing program. Across the State, tens of thousands of locally licensed electricians came into the new State program without taking the State approved tests.

State licenses issued to Hico electricians during that time were later revoked because they were obtained under the premise that the applicants had held licenses issued under a City of Hico local licensing program. Although the City's Building Official had conducted training classes and had issued licenses under the name of the City of Hico, the reality was the City had never adopted an ordinance establishing "local licensing".

In November, 2006, in accordance with State law, the City adopted Ordinance 111306A officially establishing "local licensing" to position local electricians where later, when the City discontinued the program, they could apply for the State issued licenses they previously would have been able to obtain had everything been handled correctly by the City. According to Section 1305.202 of the Texas Occupations Code:

"A person who holds a license to perform electrical work or electrical sign work issued by a municipality or region that elects to discontinue issuing or renewing licenses may apply for an equivalent license under this chapter without complying with the applicable examination requirement if the person: (1) held the municipal or regional license for the preceding year; and (2) submits an application for a license under this chapter within 90 days of the date the municipality or region stops issuing or renewing licenses."

Based on a reading of Council minutes and the way the 2006 Ordinance was written, the intent appears to have been to issue licenses and then discontinue the program in 2008. Licenses were issued; however, the program was never discontinued. Since it wasn't discontinued, local electricians weren't able to apply for the equivalent State Licenses. A license renewal schedule wasn't established under the 2006 Ordinance, so the status of all the licenses issued in 2006 is uncertain. State issued licenses are subject to annual renewal. It's possible, if the City were to end "local licensing" now, the cloud over renewals might once again prevent local electricians from obtaining State licenses.

To do right by local electricians who need a license to make a living, avoid limiting the benefits of competition in the local electrical trade to the citizenry and correct past fumbles by the City, the City Council was provided an opportunity to adopt a new

Local Electrician Licensing Ordinance, and it did so. The new Ordinance requires annual license renewal contingent upon the license holder obtaining 4 hours of approved continuing education (as is required by the State program) by March 1, 2012 (otherwise the electrician will have to pass an approved test before the license will be renewed). The cost of administering "local licensing" is negligible, requiring only a small investment of staff time.

In 2013, the Council will have the option of abolishing the program and allowing those licensed under it to apply for equivalent State issued licenses. This has been an unnecessarily protracted process, but the end is in sight. Since the individual responsible for seeing this through first held a local electrician license in 1981 and has held a State issued Master Electrician License since the inception of that program, this attempt to transition local electricians into the State program should prove successful.

Incidentally, in the interest of public safety, the City requires all new electrical installations, whether installed by home owners, locally licensed electricians or State licensed electricians, be permitted and inspected. Occasionally, corrections have to be made even to work installed by those holding State licenses.

May God bless the City of Hico.