

City Business by Michael Leamons

Most of my career has been spent managing electrical contracting and service businesses. With my first job as city administrator, I found it very fulfilling to bring good private sector business practices to bear upon the people's business. The same has been true here in Hico. There are, however, other aspects of the transition from the private sector to the public sector which haven't been as easy.

Having served many years as the vice president of a property rights organization, and being somewhat libertarian in my political philosophy, considerable reflection and soul searching have been required in becoming reconciled to the responsibilities of enforcing codes and ordinances. I have always been a staunch advocate of the rights of the individual, but I've come to see when "individuals" move together into close proximity, or community, there's a fine line between where one individual's rights end and those of his neighbors' begin.

Let's be honest, if someone let's their place go to pot, it can create problems for all the surrounding properties. It might become a haven for rodents; it might create a fire hazard; and, perhaps more likely, it might detract from property values. Whose rights should be protected? Should the right of the one to be messy be protected? Or, should the right of the many to be shielded from rodents, fire hazards and property devaluations be protected?

Not only can unkempt property detract from the value of surrounding properties, but it, and other unkempt properties, can drag down the economic prospects of a whole town. When passing through a trashy town, who wants to stop and shop or eat a bite? Who wants to relocate their residence or business there?

Surely, it was concerns like those above, that over the years prompted the Hico City Council, the peoples' elected representatives, to enact various codes and ordinances aimed at keeping the town clean and orderly. The City staff is responsible for making sure the Council's actions are enforced.

The areas we seem to have the most trouble with are overgrown yards and lots, dilapidated structures, junk vehicles and stray animals. And, even during my short time here, the same individuals have had to be warned time and again. At least with regard to overgrown yards and lots, that is no longer going to be the case. Once a written warning has been issued, by law for a whole year the City has the right to do what is necessary to get things cleaned up without further notice. After the initial written warning, the only thing repeat offenders will be getting is a bill in the mail.

Believe me, we don't like having to go into enforcement mode. Voluntary compliance is preferred. And, you know what, if everyone did what was right without having to be told, there wouldn't be any need for rules and regulations, or codes and ordinances.

Spotlight on the Staff:

Bryan DuBose is a man of many hats. Initially, in July of 2007, the City hired him to deal with code and building related matters; then, he was assigned animal control duties; then, he was asked to oversee special projects. Two lines from his business card most succinctly describe his duties: "Code and Development" and "Project Manager." DuBose had his own landscaping business in Austin, then served as a Branch Manager

for Valley Crest Landscape in Houston where he handled an operation involving over 100 employees. Wanting to get away from the big city, DuBose moved his wife, Natalie, and daughters, Maddie and Abby, to the Hico area where he managed a family owned ranch and tree farm. When those endeavors failed to generate sufficient income, DuBose applied for his current job.

DuBose says the biggest challenge is that when people come to him, usually, “They are unhappy about something---a neighbor, the City or something that is going on. It’s my job,” DuBose continued, “to find out why someone is unhappy and figure out a solution which works best for everybody involved.”

DuBose is good at diffusing tense situations, especially those which arise when he’s helping someone come into compliance with codes and ordinances. Although the law is on his side, DuBose isn’t heavy handed in discharging his duties. His “how can we work this out” approach usually yields good results. Where it doesn’t, the law provides remedies of last resort.

DuBose likes seeing projects through to completion. He considers getting the streets resurfaced and the utility infrastructure updated high priorities. DuBose is hopeful, “It may seem slow, but the City is making progress on infrastructure.” Two requests he would like to make of the public are: 1. Please mow and weed eat all the way out to the street so City workers aren’t distracted from their other duties by having to clean up little patches here and there all over town; and 2. Keep up with your dogs, and report those who don’t. When a dog is picked up, it costs the City from \$100 to \$200. Wouldn’t it be better to direct those funds toward more worthwhile projects?

Thank you for working together with us to make Hico the best that it can be. May God bless the City of Hico.