

City Business
“Controversies Over Parks and Junked Vehicles”
by Michael Leamons

There seems to have been a certain amount of confusion over the new Park Policy. The policy was designed primarily to address the reservation and use of the City’s parks for special events. The policy was not intended to restrict private citizens’ access to and enjoyment of the City’s park facilities. Consequently, two sentences have been added to the policy to make this point abundantly clear: “Reservations are not required for general use and enjoyment of the City’s parks and public areas. Individual citizens are free to use the various facilities if they are not already being used by someone else and haven’t been reserved.”

Additionally, the City was informed that it is very difficult for HISD personnel to get a check cut for use as the “fully refundable” deposit. To alleviate this difficulty, the policy was changed to allow anyone with a City utility account to authorize the account to be used in lieu of a deposit. Problem solved!

The ongoing junked vehicle sweep has met with some vocal opposition and many quiet expressions of support. I must confess, in the past I have owned junked vehicles. Upon moving to Mason, Texas in the early 90’s, I owned a 1965 Chevrolet Biscayne. We had driven the vehicle for a few years before it developed engine problems. I had intended on getting it running again. In the meanwhile, it sat in our driveway. One day a deputy placed a tag on the vehicle indicating it needed to be removed (at the time I was not the City Administrator, rather I operated an electrical contracting business). A friend offered to let me park the vehicle on his property in the country, so I promptly removed it (I never did get around to fixing that old Chevy!). Remembering my own junked vehicle experience, I simply didn’t expect passions to run as strong as they have in a few instances.

A total of 137 junked vehicles have been identified within the City of Hico. Since the City began addressing the matter, notices have been served on 117 of the vehicles, 47 of the violations have been remedied and 4 have requested hearings before the Municipal Judge. Notices are currently going out on the last 20 vehicles. Following is a copy of the notice that has been served:

Junked vehicles pose a potential threat to public health and safety by providing habitat for West Nile Virus carrying mosquitoes and other vermin. Also, junked vehicles can have a negative impact on citizens’ quality of life and property values. To address these concerns, the City is identifying and initiating action against junked vehicles located within the city limits in violation of the City of Hico Junked Vehicle Ordinance #021411B (copies of which are available upon request at City Hall).

In Ordinance #021411B, Junked Vehicles are defined as “a vehicle that is self-propelled and inoperable and:

- 1) does not have lawfully attached to it an unexpired license plate or a valid motor vehicle inspection certificate
- 2) is wrecked, dismantled or partially dismantled, or discarded or
- 3) has remained inoperable for more than thirty consecutive days.”

You have been identified either as the last owner of record of a junked vehicle and/or owner and/or occupant of the property upon which the vehicle is located. The

following vehicle(s) have been identified with a yellow City of Hico “Warning” sticker and must be removed within 10 days: _____.

If the above junked vehicle violation has been corrected, thank you, and please disregard this notice. If the above junked vehicle violation has not been corrected, please do so within 10 days of receipt of this letter, and no further action will be taken by the City. If the junked vehicle violation is not corrected within 10 days, the City will make arrangements to have the vehicle removed and disposed of. Please be advised that moving the vehicle to another location within the Hico city limits will not correct the violation.

Anyone wishing to contest the action being initiated by the City may request a hearing before Municipal Judge Charlie Buenger within 10 days of the receipt of this letter. Judge Buenger is scheduled to conduct hearings regarding this matter on Wednesday, April 13, 2011 at Hico City Hall.

Should you wish to request a hearing before Judge Buenger or should you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 254-796-1957.

Once again we’re confronted with the question, “When we live in close proximity to one another in a city, where do my property rights end and those of my neighbor begin?” May God grant us grace and wisdom as we ponder that question and may His blessing continue to abide upon the City of Hico.