City Business

by Michael Leamons

As you are probably aware from previous columns, the City has been working to attain compliance with its TCEQ permit regarding the amount of phosphorus being discharged from the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) into the Bosque River. In February, the TCEQ granted an extension, giving the City until July 1st to come into compliance. Since then, through a chemical treatment regimen involving alum, phosphorus levels were reduced to the point of compliance with the City's permit. Unfortunately, however, every time there is a significant rain, phosphorus levels rise above the permitted level.

Through what is know as "inflow and infiltration" (I & I) some of the runoff from a rain makes its way into Hico's wastewater system. The City's aging clay wastewater lines are probably the biggest source of I & I. These brief lapses are of great concern because to attain compliance, the City has to rack up 3 consecutive months with no violations.

In an attempt to remedy the rain-related violations, staff increased the amount of alum being fed into the system during rain events. This strategy didn't work.

At no cost to participants, TCEQ offers a mentoring program to economically challenged entities needing assistance in complying with TCEQ requirements. When it became apparent the WWTP operational violation was going to occur every time it rained, the City asked to be accepted into the mentoring program. The request was granted and a licensed WWTP operator and consultant has begun to review Hico's operation in search of a solution to our phosphorus problem.

By participating in the program, Hico has acknowledged its commitment to finding a solution and coming into compliance with its permit. Hopefully, through the mentoring program an operational solution can be found.

A long term solution has been outlined in a previous column. With the help of eHT, an engineering firm, the City has applied for a Texas Water Development Board low interest loan and loan forgiveness program to obtain funding to install a system which would enable the City to use 100% of the discharge from the WWTP for irrigation. If the water isn't being discharged into the Bosque River, the concerns over phosphorus are eliminated.

Another potential solution, though in all likelihood economically unfeasible, would be to reduce I & I by replacing the City's old clay wastewater lines.

Nationally, the amount of phosphorus being discharged into streams and rivers has been a concern since the 1970's. Phosphorus is a component in fertilizer and when released into streams and rivers, it causes a significant increase in the growth of algae. For this reason, all WWTP plants are required to limit the amount of phosphorus in their discharge. The City of Hico is held to a standard twice as stringent as most WWTPs because of action arising out of concerns the City of Waco had about the drinking water it draws from the Bosque.

May God bless the City of Hico.