

LEBANON EXPRESS

Column: May proves busy for mayor

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From the Mayor's Desk - June 5, 2013

This past week went by so fast, but I had a fun time attending many of the Strawberry festivities.

There are a lot of people who help out and volunteer to make this event happen every year.

I want to thank everyone who helped make this 104th Strawberry Parade and Festival a huge success!

I have also been busy attending a lot of other springtime events such as the ABC House dinner, CASA lunch, Chamber Leadership Graduation, Boys & Girls Club auction, Lebanon Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, LHS No Limits Car Show, Mr. LHS and the "Honor Flight" movie.

I had a great time talking with the Lebanon Ministerial Association and, later that day, going to the businesses on Main Street and talking with business owners and others in the community.

We have been busy on the city council.

Since January, we have had 11 public meetings, averaging more than two a month.

The council chose Jon Nelson as our interim city manager, and he is doing an excellent job helping us through the transition while we hire our new city manager.

That process is moving along well, and I will have an update at our June 12 city council meeting.

We are still on track for a late summer hire date for the new city manager.

As you have probably read recently, the city council decided to table the 15 percent increase in water rates this year until we know the actual amount needed for the water treatment plant.

I am glad this was done, to help give residents a break this year.

The down side to this, there may need to be an increase down the road, but that is still not known.

The city staff and council will continue to work on this and, by next year, we will have a better idea of the cost of a water plant.

Recently, I was contacted by U.S. Senator Merkley's office about a bill that he sponsored and the Senate has passed.

It is called the Water Infrastructure Financing Innovation Act.

It would allow communities to get low-cost loans from the federal government to improve or expand their water systems.

I am cautiously optimistic about this.

The bill still has a ways to go, and of course I am concerned about the implications this bill might have.

These are the types of things we are looking at to get the most bang for our buck and get our water treatment plant built.

We recently held a special city council meeting so we could inform the council and public about the Lowe's situation and where we stand.

The agreement with the city and Lowe's back in 2005 had the city to pay about \$7 million for rock fill as an incentive, and about \$3 million in other wetlands mitigation incentives.

So the total the city owes is \$10 million, and this is not news.

This was all discussed in public meetings back in 2005.

What was not expected was Lowe's making an appeal on their taxes that would lower them by nearly half of what it is currently.

The property is already assessed at 35 percent less than the original projections in 2005.

This would significantly reduce the taxes we receive, which would pay toward the \$10 million incentive they received.

Interim City Manager John Nelson drafted a letter to Lowe's asking for three things:

1. to extend the due date from July 1, 2013, to Sept. 1, 2013,
2. Reduce the \$10.1 million payment to coincide with our reduced tax revenue
3. Withdraw the tax appeal.

The city is also looking at paying the \$10 million that is due through the \$12 million bond recently approved partly for this payment and other projects.

This will avoid about \$1.2 million in interest payments.

Casting blame on how or why this happened is not important at this time.

Taking care of the issue and moving forward is what we need to do.

As we are moving forward, we have to make sure we are not making mistakes that will hurt us in the long term and do what is best and makes sense for the city.

All of the documents and meetings are all posted online for you to read and watch.

I encourage you to take advantage of having full access to how we are operating your city.

Remember that all of the city councilors and myself welcome your comments and feedback.

Lebanon Police Chief Frank Stevenson and I will be having Ice Cream with the Mayor and Chief at Herschel's Ice Cream Parlor on Main Street, June 25, 1:30 to 3 p.m.

It is a no-host event and open to the public. We hope to see you there!

Mayor Paul

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