

City of Boonville- An Update and Look Forward

The City Council and I wanted to communicate with the citizens we represent on the current status of a number of issues and projects. There has been something of a quiet period over the last couple of years as the economy adjusts to a new reality and as our budget and funding sources adjust accordingly. Further it is not really appropriate to promote speculation about projects when their timetable, shape and most importantly their funding is not certain.

However, somewhat surprisingly, over the last 6 months a clear visibility has emerged over a large number of projects and issues. Now, we believe an achievable way forward has arrived.

It is about this that I can write and provide an update on several “so-called” old projects. We have attempted to provide a clear picture of the current status. Some elements are not our “preferred” alternative. Many of you will wonder if there isn’t a better way in a few places. We are open to better ideas. But they must be realistic.

Looking at the entire “package” of projects, the City Council and I are very pleased. For a community of our size; it is impressive. It is my hope this yields benefits and advancements for Boonville on many fronts.

Thank you for reading-

Mayor Julie Thacher and the Boonville City Council
Irl Tessoroff, City Administrator

Update- New Sales Tax (2012)

First a status report on the parks and stormwater ½ cent sales tax, approved by voters in 2012. This was primarily intended for the sanitary sewer system (as impacted by heavy rains = stormwater) and for recreational facilities/ parks.

The first priority was the sewer work mandated by the EPA. The Inflow/Infiltration abatement project will start construction in 2016. It will cost about \$2.3 million. As of September 30, 2015, this amount is fully funded (with cash – no debt). The sales tax will pay for half of (this money having been saved over the past 2 years) and the sewer fund will pay the other half. The sales tax has thus reduced the burden on the (admittedly) high sewer charge by over \$1.1 million dollars, as promised. We intend to use City crews to do some of the work in an effort to further economize the cost.

The second sewer project involves extending the outflow line from the plant to the Missouri River. The deadline for it is 2020. So we have a little time. But we do have a plan (the same 50/50 arrangement) which is included in the financing plan for all these projects to follow. Its cost is estimated at about \$1.8million.

For long term clarity the entire sewer plant will face a major renovation and upgrade in the early 2020's. New bonds will be necessary for this work (\$10 million +). The existing revenue bonds mature in 2019 so they can be reauthorized which will pay for some but not the entire project. We have a plan for this but at this time it is preliminary and likely somewhat short of the necessary funding level.

The result is that we can now consider some other projects with the sales tax monies in addition to the sewer projects.

Beyond Sewage- The Big Boonville Picture

A. Annexation- Hail Ridge

The owner, the Developer Representative (Darryl Tower) and the City have been strategizing for at least a year on feasible alternatives for a housing development around a golf course. The housing development potential in this area is crucial to our continued growth, given its proximity to Columbia and the opportunity to enhance our status as a bedroom community.

The golf course has been a major area of discussion and frankly concern. While we do not intend to speak for the principle owner (Mr. Ed Rapp) it is apparent that the present course and its' operation is financially at risk. Indeed it is possible, even likely, that the course will close over the next couple of years without some change. Since the marketing plan and physical layout of the planned housing subdivision is intermingled with the golf course itself, it is very important that prospective homeowners have assurances that the golf course itself will be well maintained.

The present plans are for the entire housing development to provide approximately 270 units. Phase 1 (near Hwy 87) would allow for about half that number. Even that will be done in stages over the next several years. Commercial development is anticipated on the I-70 corner and near Pierre Lane and the old concrete plant area along Hwy 87. This layout reduces the golf course from 18 to 9 holes and allows for more lots.

The owner offered to donate to the City land for some recreational fields. This has been evaluated closely. It is doable, although a recent alternative emerged with the school system which will be discussed in the next section. Our evaluation concluded that eliminating these fields and gaining more usable lots for sale at the housing development is the proper course of action.

As to the golf course, the owner has offered to donate the land occupied by the course (9 holes only) to the City. After much discussion and frank conversation, the City has decided to accept that arrangement. Although many cities, our size included, own and operate golf courses, the City was not eager to take on this added responsibility. In addition, the reduction to 9 holes may be viewed as less than desirable. It does reduce maintenance and operation costs significantly. The City does not intend to manage and operate the course itself. Rather it will utilize a management agreement or independent contractor. The City does not intend to subsidize the course operation financially and believes several cost saving measures associated with City ownership make the prospect of a break even course operation realistic.

Most of the 9 holes will be taken as is from the existing course. A modest amount of dirt work will be required to reorient the new 9 holes and the courses' irrigation system needs major improvement. The clubhouse will be relocated to a more central location for the new 9 holes. It is likely that a new small structure will be built. The City will pay for these elements related to the golf course. In addition, the City will contribute to the cost of some basic infrastructure (streets, water line and sewer line) that are necessary to serve the new golf facilities. The future of a golf course is on the table, whatever the size, and it will become a judgement and policy decision for elected officials.

By virtue of the involuntary annexation process by which all this land became part of the Boonville City limits, the City is also obligated for getting adequate water (including fire flows) and sewer service to the site. These responsibilities have nothing to do with the golf course arrangement.

Work on this project is anticipated in 2016. Subdivision plats and plans are being prepared presently. A formal announcement is anticipated in early 2016.

B. Recreation- School System- Soccer

As noted previously with good progress to date financially on the sewer projects, we are able to think about the recreational aspects of the sales tax plan.

Soccer is increasingly popular with our local youth in the community; but it also appears that there is available opportunity for tournaments and other attraction events whereby the soccer facilities can produce an economic benefit to the community from the visiting participants and guests.

After working and analyzing some facilities at the Hail Ridge site, the city was approached informally by members of the School District raising the possibility of locating the facilities at the High School. The School owns some underutilized land and they would make it available free of charge.

The City had some preliminary engineering work done on the available land at the High School. We found that the idea had promise- indeed it was probably a better idea in that no additional parking areas would need to be built and that there is already one field with all-weather turf at the high school which can be used for soccer. Water and sewer is already near, restroom and concession facilities are available. These positives are only moderately offset with the fact that the available land at the high school requires extensive fill and there is probably not quite enough space available. The City is in the process of purchasing some adjoining land to fill out the needed space for the fields. Taken as a whole, this site still presented savings that approach \$2 million to the overall project and does increase the feasibility of the recreational development plan greatly.

It is anticipated that all the new fields at the High School will be soccer fields. The City recognizes that there are desires for more ball fields for other sports. These are still possible in an overall plan but won't be on the front end of the work or funding. We are not mortgaging the long term future here- most of this work will be pay as you go, using the new sales tax, some gaming funds and perhaps a portion of the use tax (if approved).

The School System did ask for financial assistance with improving the baseball field at the High School. The City has agreed to help with this which will allow lighting and an all-weather turf infield. It is anticipated that this project will likely be completed in 2016. This will provide a second high quality full size field to pair with Twillman Field at Harley Park. Management and maintenance of the fields is the subject of future discussion.

All in all the City is appreciative of the schools initiative and cooperative attitude on this joint project, which is legitimately viewed as "win-win" for the community as a whole. It is not often 2 political subdivisions actually work together to achieve a project on a very cost effective basis. This appears to be one such case.

C. Traditional Projects

This category primarily includes the animal shelter, airport terminal and fire truck. There obviously is periodic talk about these projects- particularly, the animal shelter in the community. These projects are the remaining elements of the plan which started with the Aquatic Center, Fire Station, Water Tower by the hospital, Salt Building and Police station earlier.

The accomplishment of these remaining projects was interrupted a few years ago by the economic issues nationally and eventually here in Boonville. The loss of jobs here has been significant and the gaming monies received have themselves declined near \$500,000 per year from levels 5 years ago. That decline itself is enough to have built 3 or 4 animal shelters. So these projects were not forgotten- they were deferred. It was necessary to determine what the financial impact of the job loss would be on the City finances and to determine how far the gaming monies would decline.

The lost jobs have not been replaced locally (they probably will not be in the manufacturing sense) but the unemployment rate is down- I'm sure there is a lot of "underemployed", lower paying alternatives and more commuting than many would prefer. The City monies also appear to have stabilized over the last 12-15 months.

So we can begin to entertain these projects again. They will not all be funded in the next year or two- there is no exact schedule. But planning and costing can start and progress can be made for these elements. The cost of any specific projects will depend on how practical, "elaborate or nice" the project is desired to be.

- Animal Shelter

There is some public sentiment to move forward with a new animal shelter. A group from the private sector will assist in fundraising in order to accelerate the building of a new shelter by the City.

- Fire Trucks and Equipment

Evaluation will also be advanced as to the kind of fire truck needed. The focus has been on a ladder truck but our pumper trucks are also advancing in age and may merit consideration. Both carry high price tags.

- Additional Park Development

As noted the focus initially will be on soccer fields (including the full size baseball field at the high school). Other baseball/softball fields may be desired- the land at the rear of Kemper Grounds has been evaluated as a possible site. It will accommodate 2 fields nicely. Access and parking is more challenging. But it is an alternative in a nice setting. It would be where the football field/track is presently. So the football field and track would be lost- a tradeoff for more baseball/softball fields.

The green field area of Kemper behind the buildings up to the pedestrian Bridge will remain open space. It may be enhanced with some trails and landscaping to take advantage of the stream that flows on the north side and eventually be linked to the 2nd Street corridor (now owned by the City) down to the Depot and onward to the Katy Bridge (up Cliff Drive to Harley Park even). All this area adjoining the Katy Trail and the Gingrich building, currently under renovation for an expanded visitor center, has the potential to be a very attractive linear park area (with a revived Kemper Lake perhaps). These adjoin the statewide Katy Trail. Funding for this general area is not intended to compete with all the forgoing projects, rather it is anticipated to be from Park funds, tourism and associated monies over time.

After a period of reevaluation and apparent quiet time, I believe things have stabilized whereby; tangible movement forward can be responsibly done. All this work is dependent on the new sales tax (passed in 2012 and valid through 2038), the use tax which will be on the April 5th, 2016 ballot and a substantial contribution from gaming funds.

Use Tax

Information about the use tax is attached. This new tax income (perhaps \$200,000/year) could be used in a twofold manner as a supplement toward capital projects discussed herein and to the general fund which is losing sales tax income to internet and out of state sales. This tax, which was passed by the County in April of 2013, will be on the April 2016 ballot.

These projects and plans are our best judgement presently. They will inevitably change as implementation proceeds and other ideas emerge. But, I think the general path will remain intact.

We appreciate the community support and resilience over the last several years. The City has maintained a conservative posture throughout. The implementation of these projects will not compromise that posture.

The Council and I will respond to your questions as you may have them. I've endeavored to provide accurate and frank information herein to prevent misunderstanding and miscommunication. Many details remain unresolved, however and subject to change during the normal evolution of a project.

Thank you again

Julie and City Council