

Mayor's Corner
January 19, 2023

The main discussion item at January's city council meeting was the cost of our new Carlton Civic Building, and places where building costs could be reduced. At this point the estimated cost of the building is the same as it was three years ago, but with a very different floor plan, exterior, and greater emphasis on community facilities. Because the police and staff portions of the new design were already at minimum cost, any cost-cutting now will mostly be directed toward the public spaces – the areas that we have promised would be provided to accommodate community needs – and areas we all agreed should not be modified.

Councilors expressed concerns regarding if or how the city finances might be affected given some of the critical infrastructure projects our city is facing. We know Carlton has some immediate and high priority infrastructure needs, and the council wants to be sure those will be addressed even as we move forward with the new building.

City Manager Beaucaire provided a list of the grants and other financial awards our city has received in the last four years, which provided a much needed perspective: Up until 2018, our city's budget for infrastructure repairs and updating was pretty much non-existent; the only way the city had of raising the money to get such projects done was to increase city service fees. So for many years, in an effort to keep the water bills and other city levies low, much of the maintenance and repair work for our city services and streets was deferred.

We finally reached the point where the repairs and replacements couldn't be put off, but we had no money set aside to pay for them...And no income source to help pay. Up until this point, there had been no water increases for several decades – it was a flat fee, no matter how much was used, and over the years, the fee never changed. As a consequence, there was barely enough income to keep the water plant running and certainly not enough to set any money aside for badly needed major repairs and upgrades. That's when you started seeing your water bills increase each year by 3,4, and even 5 times the recommended cost of living increases.

And that's how matters stood until 2018 when then City Manager Chad Olsen connected with State Senator Brian Boquist who helped get our city two grants from the state Lottery Fund, totaling \$10 million, specifically for badly needed repairs and upgrades on our water system. That was a huge help, but with still more work needed for other city infrastructure...such as streets and the wastewater system, we still didn't have an income source.

In 2021, with a virtually new City Council, new mayor and new city manager, we began more aggressively pursuing outside funding opportunities.

This has been an ongoing effort for the last two years, and we've been incredibly successful. With new approaches to funding repairs and maintenance for our city infrastructure, we're in a position to support the financing of this new Civic building while still being able to pay for infrastructure repairs and upgrades. The other consideration for funding the new building, is that we're not planning to rely only on city-sourced funds, but will be embarking on a major fundraising campaign, reaching out to individuals and businesses, many of whom may not actually live in Carlton, but still have an interest in seeing our city grow and prosper.

This doesn't mean your water bills are going to go down, but it does mean you won't be seeing the dramatic increases of past years. We still will need to pay for the basic day-to-day maintenance and that will still be subject to cost of living increases – but we're hoping for the minimal increases that we saw last year.

So, to put this all in perspective, following is a list of the grants and other monies awarded to our city – more than \$20 million – most of them in the last two years. These funds are for projects that will continue to provide our city with clean, safe drinking water, safe wastewater and sewer removal and processing, and upgrading some city streets along with installing curbs, gutters and sidewalks.

Remember, this isn't "extra" money. It's money that would have had to come from our own pockets if we had not been able to tap into these resources:

2018 Lottery Funds/Legislative grant

\$2.5 million - Panther Creek Reservoir dredging (completed 2022)

\$7.5 million - Replace main water transmission line (completed 2021-22)

2021-22 Awarded, projects are in planning stages

\$550,000 - Yamhill County Commission ARPA distribution (*Sewer line and headworks*)

\$5.8 million - Oregon Legislature ARPA distribution - Rep. Noble (*Wastewater treatment plant*)

\$2.2 million - United States - US Senators Ron Wyden & Jeff Merkley (*Replace sewer main under Grant Street from Pine St. to Public Works*)

\$1.5 million - United States - US Senators Ron Wyden & Jeff Merkley (*repair West Main St.*)

\$477,000 - ARPA - United States Congress direct allocation

\$175,000 - TGM Grant - An ODOT program to help fund updating our city transportation plan

\$33,000 - DLCD Grant to support updating our Comprehensive Plan & Development Code

\$28,000 - Carlton PD - Overtime Enforcement focused on: impaired driving, speed enforcement, pedestrian safety, distracted driving, safety belts/child passenger safety – Department of Transportation Safety Office

Total: \$20,968,000 (2018, 2021-22)

These funds are dedicated for the specific programs named...they cannot, and will not be used for anything other than to maintain our city's infrastructure. So, the next time you're wondering what those folks in Salem or Washington, D.C. are doing for all of us, the answer is: Actually, quite a bit!