

Mary Jo's Heye-lights

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THE CITY BOND ISSUE: TRANSPARENCY WHY CANNOT SHERWOOD HAVE IT?

I just found out this week that \$3.1 million has been set aside for drainage projects out of the three-quarter cent (0.75% cents on the dollar) sales tax increase that was bonded out to raise \$38.5 million for city projects. Anyone else remember that discussion before the sales tax vote? Anyone else remember that being voted on by the city AFTER the passage of the sales tax?

There were town hall meetings around the city to present the reasons the city needed this tax increase and the quarter cent (0.25% cents on the dollar) sales tax increase for general purposes. To the exclusion of practically all else, street improvements were the given reason. Specific street projects were presented at those town halls such as the Kohl's connection, Hemphill, Maryland, Country Club, and Jacksonville/Cato. Also, the city wanted to partner with the Highway Department to find a solution for congestion on Brockington. Streets were the only projects discussed with the given exception that Country Club was mentioned as needing drainage improvements. Where did the \$3.1 million dollar drainage number come from? No one at the February City Council meeting could answer who approved or agreed upon the \$3.1 million in separate drainage projects.

Speaking of these identified street projects, they are all major projects requiring substantial funding. The estimated costs for the projects are professional estimates at best. There are many variables beyond anyone's control and other variables that must be controlled. Examples of uncontrollable variables are things like weather and cost of

materials. Things we should control are managing the projects to sequence tasks on time. Our city has already made one mistake by forgetting to give AT&T notification to relocate their lines on Maryland. This mistake alone delayed widening the western end of Maryland by a year. It happens; everyone makes mistakes. However, my frustration is why not work on connecting the eastern end while we wait? It is a separate project. Also, it looks like many of our projects may go to bid around the same time making projects more expensive. There are only so many contractors willing and able to bid city projects. More projects and fewer contractors mean less competition and higher bids. Further, the Jacksonville/Cato project will be one of the most expensive requiring realigning, widening, elevation, and straightening due to flooding problems. The engineering for this project has not even really begun because no decision has been made on the alignment. We have no idea the real cost just yet, not even to purchase right-of-way.

The city was very specific about all of these major projects, and other important street projects that didn't get specifically listed. They are all necessary for our city for so many reasons. My fear is that our city could run out of money before these projects are done. Keep in mind we have no idea how much it will cost to fix the bottleneck of Kiehl and Brockington which may be the most expensive project. Metroplan stated that solving the Brockington traffic congestion issue is the most strategically critical transportation issue facing the city of Sherwood in the foreseeable future. Other potential street projects named, if there
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Flooding in Sherwood

Are drainage problems important? ABSOLUTELY. Unfortunately, we have them all over the city. We were provided a map at the January City Council meeting showing problems in every Ward of the city. Prior to the sales tax vote the City Council went through a lengthy process to create the priority list of street improvements. However, a priority list of drainage problems has never been discussed.

Why does it always appear that the Administration's priorities of our city seemed to be solely focused on Club Road and parts south? The first two areas designated for engineering studies are in Sherwood Acres south of Wildwood and in Greenview Circle on the north side of the golf course. Why are these projects top of the list? Of course, the City Council approved them, but honestly they would have probably approved any needy projects. Again, why were those two presented first? We have problems such as in Millers Crossing that have worsened as more housing developments have been built upstream despite city development regulations. And there is more home building downstream from the current problem in Millers Crossing still under the same development standards. How are the new homes going to be affected if the city fixes (and it should) the upstream problem?

The problems occurring in Indianhead are more examples. Homes that have never flooded in 50 years have started flooding in the last decade. This new flooding could have been caused by any of the more recent developments such as the full build out of the other side of the Indianhead Lake, the huge landfill on the other side of Hwy. 67/167, and the development of North Lake Subdivision in Jacksonville.

These are just two examples. There are also problems in Gravel Ridge and throughout the city. Do we need to do something? Absolutely! But we need to have a democratic, above-the-table process with the City Council in the full view of the public to prioritize the most critical problems. Further, the full City Council needs to set the budget for those fixes. As mentioned in the previous article, the \$3.1 million designated for drainage out of the \$38 million dollar bond issue has never been voted on by the City Council. It may not be enough!



Also, we need to take a look at why are still developing new drainage problems. Is our city signing off on projects without looking closer at the downstream affects? Retention areas and additional water collecting green belts can be great opportunities for fishing ponds and park spaces. Are the proper regulations in place and are the right facilities being built in new development? Do we need to have stronger development standards and more complete baseline engineering? I believe we need to take a close look at our regulations. And finally, we also passed the .25% tax that just goes into the city's General Fund. Perhaps, we should set some of that money aside for the studies and solutions, rather than bloating city operating expenses. After the census we should start receiving more tax dollars as well. Instead of growing the government for government's sake, let's use this increase to fix these problems. **MJH**

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was money left over, included widening Woodruff, connecting Claremont, and widening/improving Jacksonville Cutoff. Again, drainage wasn't talked about outside the mentioned street projects. Yet, the engineering for two drainage projects has already been approved by the City Council and its coming out of the bond issue monies. These preliminary estimate on just one of these projects is over \$650,000. I was the only dissenting vote. I was not voting against the need. I voted against using the bond monies.

This is why I am I afraid that we could run out of money. We have already dipped into it for the Lee Ave Bridge repair – a project not on any list and, as we learned at City Council, not approved to come out of bond funds. Now, we are dipping into for drainage studies with projects to follow. None of these projects were ever mentioned to the City Council or were presented at Town Hall Meetings. I have no idea what other brand-new projects will be proposed next. I truly believe that we MUST first do what we promised.

The following is what the ballot stated:

For or Against an issue of bonds of the City of Sherwood, Arkansas in the maximum principal amount of \$38,500,000 which, together with other available moneys, will finance capital improvements, betterments, and extensions for the City's street system, including but not limited to, the planning, design, inspection, and management of the construction, reconstruction, equipping, and installation of paving and repairing of streets, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, ditches, drainage facilities, bridges, culverts, pipes, stormwater discharge and detention facilities, and related improvements and the acquisition of necessary rights of way and easements, and, in order to pay the bonds, the levy and pledge of a three-quarter of one percent (0.75%) local sales and use tax within the City if such tax is approved by the voters at this special election.

The City Attorney has stated that spending this money on drainage studies followed by improvements would be legal. This is true based on the language of the ballot issue. It just was not heard in town hall meeting with citizens. The \$3.1 million is NOT in the ballot language and it has not been approved by the city council. Why? Who approved this? Is this the right thing or was this a bait and switch? Are we doing what we sold the citizens on? And who is making the decisions?

It has been 20 months since this Bond Issue passed. One small project out of \$38 million dollars has started. **MJH**

Love Biking? We Need You!

Kimberly Mundell's husband John was an avid cyclist. He was killed this past year on Highway 107 by a hit and run driver. Perhaps you have seen the ghost bike memorial on the side of the highway marking the approximate location of this accident. Kimberly has searched for ways to honor her husband, to bring about some good from this tragic accident. She has met with different biking groups in Central Arkansas and has spent a great deal of time studying issues like bike safety. She is organizing a bike advocacy group for Sherwood. This group will be for those that enjoy biking whether on an elite level or who just like to bike around the neighborhood with the kiddos.

Sherwood is clearly behind the national and even regional trend in biking despite having a demographic that should support it. Instead, Sherwood does not have sidewalks on all its major streets, in many of its neighborhoods, zero on-street bike lanes, and few bike-ped trails. Given that reality, more accidents will probably happen, something Kimberly is working hard to prevent. If this effort interests you, please contact Kimberly for more information at kfried3@sbcglobal.net. **MJH**



Huge Regional Biking News

The Metroplan Board of Directors voted at its February meeting to set a funding target of \$55 million dollars for the development and construction of a regional multi-use path network throughout Central Arkansas. This represents half of its expected funding for the next ten years. The Pulaski and Saline sections of the Southwest Trail connecting Little Rock through cities such as Alexander, Bryant, and Benton will be one of the first projects because of its current stage of development. There will probably be a northeast path connecting the Arkansas River Trail through North Little Rock, Sherwood, Jacksonville, and Cabot (perhaps even Ward and Austin). Another path will probably connect the Arkansas River Trail to Maumelle to Conway. This will be an exciting regional project! The entire effort will require a lot of regional and local coordination. The local coordination will not only assist in locating the trail in or near Sherwood, but it should also aid the city in connecting other areas of town to the regional network through a new city system of paths, trails, and sidewalks. What a great reason to be a part of a bike advocacy group to create a better Sherwood.

This a project that John Mundell would have loved! **MJH**

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THE great SHERWOOD CLEANUP

Join Keep Sherwood Beautiful at
8:30 A.M. MARCH 14, 2020
@ JACK EVANS SENIOR CENTER
2301 THORNHILL DRIVE | 501-835-4699

to help pick up litter and beautify our city

TOOLS & T-SHIRTS PROVIDED
>>FREE LUNCH<<
COURTESY OF POPEYE'S & TWO SISTERS CAFE
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

TEAM UP TO CLEANUP!

If you can't join us March 14, get a team together for a local cleanup between March 09 and June 20 and it will still count in the Great American Cleanup. Just send a before and after photo, along with a short report to ksbarkansas@gmail.com and we'll do the rest!

2020 Census

In March, everyone will start receiving Census cards to fill out and send back. This will also include an invitation to complete your information online. The online method is scheduled to be available March 12th. If your information has been received by April 20th, you will not receive a knock on the door by a Census taker. Wherever you live on April 1st, is where you get counted. Sherwood has grown so much over the past decade with a bunch of beautiful new neighborhoods. Why is this information important? Our city receives approximately \$300 per person in turn back tax dollars. In 2010, our city was 29,523 in population. The estimates from 2019 were 31,237 in population. Just based on these figures, we are looking at an **additional** \$514,200 per year for the next ten years (\$5,142,000.00). We all know that there are so many needs in a growing community like ours!