

Most events recorded in history are more remarkable than important, like eclipses of the sun and moon, by which all are attracted, but whose effects no one takes the trouble to calculate.—Henry David Thoreau

FYI

ECLIPSE ADDITION

APRIL 2024

Downtown Progress

Work Downtown continues to make progress, with much of the FIRST phase drainage work along Buchanan Street completed, and moving to improvements along Kate Smith.

Beginning on April 8th, water line work started back up at the intersection of Neal and Buchanan and before they could barely get started, the contractor hit a short stub of a 1938 water line that was still live. City crews worked to fix the leak and determine if it would need to be moved to accommodate the new line.

Traffic downtown was shifted to the south side of the Buchanan Street to accommodate the contractor's work. The new 12" PVC water line will replace a 8" cast iron water line that was installed in 1933, and is being installed in the North traffic lane of Buchanan Street.

All parking along Buchanan will be blocked off until crews complete the water line installation which includes installation of the main water line and extending



the service connections to each building. This work will likely take several weeks to complete.

The traffic on West Buchanan, west of Mock, should be opening up to two lanes again very soon. The drain boxes are nearly constructed and the concrete cured. Once the lanes are graveled and compacted two lanes will be opened back up temporarily, until its time to make road repairs to the whole section.

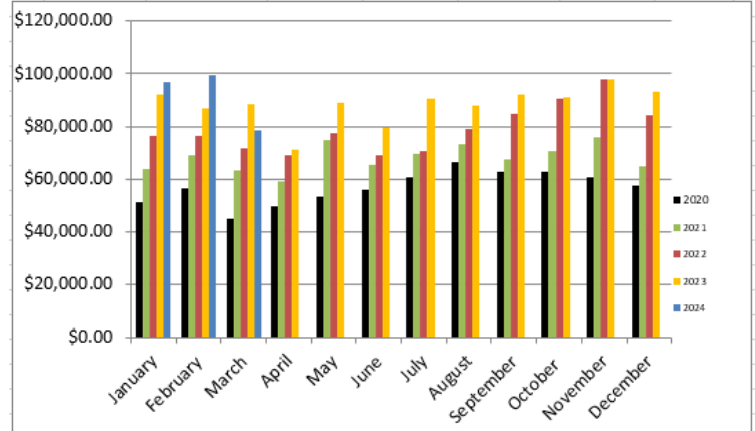
Swepeco is currently moving power lines back and after that sidewalks and curbs can be poured as well as work to connect and create parking along that section.

Sales Tax Seriously Disappoints in March

March Sales Tax receipts were a large downturn from what the City has been seeing in recent years.

March was a big decrease from March of 2023, and was the first losing month since July of 2019. March collections were down 11.6% from March the previous year, and year to date sales tax is now only running 2.6% over the previous year, which is less than the City's budget estimates.

The hope is that this is an anomaly, and other area cities had downturns as well. It could be just a short cutoff for collections and reporting in the months of January or February. April will be watched closely, and the City is hopeful for a significant rebound.



Wastewater Plant Expansion still Waiting for Completion

Staff, contractor, and Engineer all met the last week of March, to discuss the transition of treatment to the new biologic unit #3. This will be necessary to clean out the solids from unit #1 and unit #2. #3 is still waiting for the delivery of the aerator unit and drive which once installed will allow the project to move toward completion.

Startup of a new unit involves "seeding" of biological waste to start the process of treatment. Activated sludge will be transferred from the two

existing units into the new unit to start that biological process. This is needed to start the treatment process and reduce nitrates and phosphorous in the wastewater. The process can take time to fully establish full treatment.

The City is currently averaging between .1 and .2 mg/l for Phosphorus with a permit requirement of .5 mg/l which was lowered when the City started the expansion project from 1 mg/l.

Once #3 is operating, seeded, and treating, they will then take #1 and #2 out of service to start the cleaning process of those two unit. #1 was the only unit operating when the new plant opened in 2011 and around 2020 the City put #2 into service due to increased flows.

The WWTP Contractor did complete a stub out of the plant inlet pipe on April 5th, which will allow a recently bid collection line upgrade to commence construction.

Viney Grove Road Extension Status

There has been lots of Progress on the Viney Grove Road Extension Project this month, with the completion of the drainage boxes, subgrade fill and grading, and the pouring of curbs starting. Once the curbs are poured and completed paving will start with all work projected for completion by mid May. The intersection of Buchanan will have new turn lanes and a four way stop installation.



Building Permit Update

March was a big month for building permits, with 39 permits issued for new single family homes alone.

New homes ranged from 1201 square feet up to 2051 square feet and were primarily in Snyder Grove, Hudson Heights, Wagnon Springs, and Mountain View Subdivisions. The construction value exceeded \$10.6 million and permit fees exceeded \$30,000. The new homes generated \$58,500 in access fees for the Water and Sewer department.

Year to date, 54 new single family homes have been permitted with a population equivalency of 140 new residents once occupied.

In addition to the new homes, one addition was permitted, one pool, one pole barn, and one garage.



Park Committee Meets

The Prairie Grove Park Advisory Committee met on Monday April 1st and reviewed 2023 projects, looked at and discussed proposed 2024 projects, and talked about other goals and wish list items. In 2024 the city is juggling the cost of two projects, additional pickleball courts and a pavilion in Mock Park and may have to make hard choices due to the prices that Chuck Wiley has estimated.

The committee also reviewed a

proposed project in Mock Park from Laura Kraus Mere, that would create a small memorial garden where people could honor loved ones who have passed away. The area would include a bench, and memorial rock garden where rocks could be placed with positive messages on them. Kraus-Mere would foot all of the cost of the memorial in memory of her late husband Zach.



City Looks At Parks Projects

The City is looking at a number of parks projects for 2024, and that includes one that is already underway with a restroom being added to the Tennis Courts. The Pre-fab unit is a single stall restroom, that is connected to utilities, and has ventilation and heating built in.

Other projects that are still under

consideration is the expansion of pickle ball courts, which are becoming very popular and the conversion of the old Skelton Garage in Mock Park to a pavilion.

The estimates on the pickle ball courts came in higher than expected, and the options for the pavilion are still being discussed,

so no decision has been made yet on what project will get first priority at this time. The City budgeted \$60,000 for improvements in 2024, from the Park and Library improvement tax. The fund has continued to grow and is being supplemented by park development fees paid by new developments.



Copper Hill Gets PC Approval for Phase 1 & 2

The Prairie Grove Planning Commission approved the first and second phases of Copper Hill on April 4th, but the developer will be focusing on developing one phase at a time. The utilities and drainage affect both phases which was the reason for submitting both at once.

The approved phases are primarily located on South Pittman, but do also attach to Butler for about one block of Phase 1. The planning commission discussed with the developer widening Butler for that one block, or waiting until the latter phases and doing it all at one time. The City council will discuss the approval at their April meeting.

Top— Future Copper Hill Development

Right— Selah Meadows Development



Affordable Housing Becomes a Big Debate for Cities

With basic starter homes now hitting a price range of around \$280,000, and average rentals approaching \$1800 per month, many low and middle class families are being priced out of housing in this region.

Payments for starter homes, even with a \$10,000 down payment can run close to \$1800 per month which would require a family income of at least \$80,000 to make sense. Interest rates in the region are just under 7% for a 30 year fixed loan. The high prices are eliminating many potential buyers and high rental prices are driving many families to look at other alternatives that include shared family living, tiny homes, apartments, more rural locations to live, and even alternatives such as living in RV's, tents,

and homelessness.

The City of Fayetteville recently adopted a resolution that declared a state of emergency due to the housing crisis in the area. Fayetteville is appointing a task force to look into the problem.

What can city's do? One option is to be flexible with planning and zoning decisions and look at alternatives that add flexibility.

Prairie Grove has seen an increase in people inquiring about tiny houses as well as people looking at accessory structures to be used as family housing for relatives. The city still gets an occasional request for manufactured housing,

but currently those homes are restricted to A-1 and R-3 zones.

The cost of development is much of the current problem with housing prices, so finding land that is less expensive to develop is important to affordable housing. Infill, where areas are already developed and have infrastructure is one way to reduce cost for developers, but the market dictates price and that reduction in development cost, doesn't always translate to a cheaper price for the buyer.

Multi family projects can lower costs, but the City has not seen any multifamily construction since 2021. There are currently two multi-family projects that are proposed, but neither has started.