

City takes on manholes, open fires

Written by Kyle Arnoldy

Street conditions and open fire issues within Holyoke city limits were addressed at the Tuesday, March 18 City Council meeting.

Councilmember Kevin Scott noted that he had received a handful of calls regarding troublesome manholes around the city. Manholes tend to be lower than the street around them, caused from years of seal coating and overlays. As the street gradually becomes higher than the manhole, the manhole creates quite the obstacle similar to a large pothole.

Scott proposed that manholes should be corrected an entire street at a time. Gordon Street and Furry Street were identified as two of the worst streets.

Scott specifically mentioned correcting a manhole on Highway 6 near Lucky's Liquor as well. Because it's on a state highway, Brown mentioned that fixing that particular manhole would require permitting through the state. Brown has already been in contact with the state on the issue and reported that they were willing to help, so the city can work on that.

"I think our money and time would be better spent fixing Sherman (Avenue)—some of these streets, you can hardly even drive down—instead of worrying about a few manholes. That's just my opinion," councilmember David Churchwell said.

Brown pointed out that Sherman Avenue was an item discussed last year before budgeting because of storm drainage problems. It has already been budgeted to repave the road with a coal mix and to put a storm sewer in.

There is roughly \$169,000 in the street maintenance budget for repaving, potholes, manholes and other maintenance work. There is \$27,000 in the storm sewer construction budget that would address the storm sewer on Sherman Avenue. Before work commences on manholes, priority is given to crack sealing and seal coat preparation.

The burning of leaves, grass and twigs was also brought to the city council's attention. Brown

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stated that neighbors of those burning have complained as the smoke funnels through neighborhoods. City Attorney Al Wall mentioned that many cities have ordinances in place that state that people must first get approval from the police or fire departments before going forth with these types of burns.

As Holyoke has no paid fire department, approval could come from Holyoke Police Chief Doug Bergstrom. Approval would be determined by wind direction, level of dryness and any fire restrictions in place.

Mayor Orville Tonsing proposed that if an ordinance is made, it should ban all burns. He stated that there would have to be an opening in the ordinance that would allow for fire pits, however. Brown pointed out that the wording of the ordinance would be crucial, because fire pit is ambiguous. Some ideas for erasing any confusion included limiting fire pits to those with lids that are manufactured and are FDA approved.

Brown stated that one aspect that must be addressed is the city's tumbleweed-burning policy. When tumbleweeds become a nuisance, city crews in past years have gathered them and burned them in the street. An all-encompassing ban could possibly make tumbleweeds a problem, but giving Bergstrom the authority to grant burns would be an ideal situation.

Wall agreed to bring in other city ordinances for reference at the next city council meeting on April 1.

Part-time city employee sick leave policy dissected

With the possibility of Holyoke Pool operations manager Karla Pargas being away from work for an extended period of time due to back surgery, council members discussed payroll options.

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According to Brown, Pargas had not made any payment request, but he thought a route should be chosen if she were to.

As a part-time, monthly salaried employee, Pargas has no sick leave or vacation time. The question of whether or not to prorate her pay for any time she might miss was raised.

“I’d love to be able to pay her for the month, but a bad precedent would be set,” councilmember J.C. Peckham stated. “I hate to be the bad guy, but we don’t really have a choice.”

City Council members chose to keep pay prorated as per city policy.

“In the future, I would like to see her covered in a situation like this, if there is a possibility we can as a council, because she has been there for a long time,” councilmember Scott Murray said.

While Pargas is absent, the city water department will handle the chemicals on a daily basis for water chemistry. Other duties will be spread out among city workers.

Officials report

Brown reported that there had been no power outages since the March 4 meeting. One light pole on South Wynona Avenue toppled during strong winds Saturday, March 15, however.

All electric department trucks were recently tested by Diversified Testing out of Denver, with one failing due to cracks in welds on the lower boom. The truck must be taken to Denver for a certified welder to work on it. Brown noted that he has sent out requests for bids for a

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replacement for the truck, which was budgeted for this year. He hopes to have bids by the April 1 meeting.

Brown also mentioned that the city's new vacuum excavator pothole machine has arrived.

Bergstrom reported that between Feb. 27-March 12, the police department handled 61 calls for service, gave out one citation, made eight reports and issued four warnings.

City Clerk/Treasurer Kathy Olofson informed council members that as of 5 p.m. Tuesday afternoon, March 18, there was no way to get on the ballot for the election. As the city had received three sufficient petitions from council members J.C. Peckham, Brian Akey and Steve Moore-, the election has been canceled.

Olofson also noted that the fire pension board met March 4 and decided to leave the retirement benefit at \$55 a month for the city.

It was also mentioned that the city had received the first quarter payment from the conservation trust fund for \$6,109.45.

Other business

In other business March 18, the council:

—approved a liquor license renewal for The Skillet.

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—approved a liquor license renewal for the Holyoke Golf Course and waived the local fees.

—agreed to purchase a computer, monitor, software and installation from New Age Electronics for a total of \$1,598.

---agreed to pay \$2,500 to the Phillips/Sedgwick counties victim assistance service.

—authorized Tonsing and Brown with up to \$2,000 for an independent fee estimate for the airport project.

—approved the signing of the FAA grant for \$618,526 to begin construction on the airport partial parallel taxiway.

—held a 40-minute executive session for the purpose of receiving legal advice on specific legal questions.

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