

Council Meeting Minutes

February 12, 2024, at 6pm

Townhall

1. Opening Ceremonies:

Mayor Jolly called meeting to order at 5:30pm

Those in attendance were City Secretary Nacona Martinez, City Administrator Derek Stephens and Councilmembers S. Braddock, S. Henderson, J. Craig, J. Forsythe, and S. Overstreet via Zoom

2. Town Hall discussion with the public on Utility/Water bill increase

Derek- There is nobody that is going to be happy about their water bills going up, but it is necessary.

Belew- Town hall meeting is to address things to the public, but my question might be reserved. Ok, so we pay for 5,000 gallons of water each month whether we use it or not. Where does that extra credit go when we don't use it? Does it go into our general fund? Is there any way it can go into a fund where the people that actually use it, I kind of doubt that that would ever happen but, I think we need to address how much of that is being paid for but not being used. That is my first question.

Ronny- Are you talking about the 4 or 5,000 minimum.

Belew- Yes, because I only used 4,000 last month and you know it was still the same. Another thing, I know that there may be some that it's difficult for them to pay this \$9 but there is some that have assistance with their utility bills. Could we find out, not a name but a percentage of how many meters that are getting assistance so that we would know those of us that are paying full price will even make a dent into the money we need.

Derek- When they get assistance, they are still paying the full bill. Right Gloria?

Gloria- Yes, its still the full bill that is coming out of their account. Rather they pay it or South Plains Community Action pays it, its still the full amount. It's not at a discounted rate or anything different.

Belew- Oh, I just thought.

Derek- It's not a discounted rate.

Belew- So, they get Community Action to help play their \$9 right.

Derek- Yes, its their whole entire bill gets paid.

Gloria- So Community Action isn't always helping them they only get funded so much per year. This is only the second year that we are using South Plains Community Action. And they do have a criteria they have to go by that people have to meet in order for them to get assistance. So, what they do is they have to go down there and provide Birth certificates, Social Security, and everything to them and then they are told "Yes, we can help you." Or "No, we can't.". Now it has gotten to where it used to be where they can only help you once a year but here recently, a couple months ago they started helping the same people, there is a lot of people that are on Social Security that are on a fixed income and those are the ones that they are helping pay their bills.

Belew- That's good. I just think if we are going to have another revenue created from the \$9 from everyone. Is this going to be enough or is this going to happen again in 6 months? That is my question.

Debbie- What happens to the donations to the Fire Department. Not everyone can afford that.

Karen- I calculated how much I use which is about 1,000 gallons a month so that's about 30,000 gallons a year. That's pretty stiff. I lived in Denver, and it wasn't that much. Is this absolutely necessary because that's about \$152,000 in revenue. What happens to all of that. And I know there are a lot of them that can't pay that so let's give them a break.

Ross- I want to know if this is even going to be enough to fix what we have to fix.

Derek- So let's get to it. You have about 3 options. We keep doing what we have been doing, playing cat and mouse with TCEQ. We have multiple lift stations that are down. We can keep on doing what you're doing and eventually what will happen is the State will come in and take your water system away. And to your credit about water in Denver. Every water system is unique in what it is. We are very fortunate to have the system that we do from CRMWA. The other side is that you can sell your water utility and we have been approached by that by CSWR that came in. You're going to get pennies on the dollar for your water system and you can get online, and you can read the reviews about what that is actually going to do for you. Your water bill is going to go up to about \$150, K, and if you lose it to the state your water bill is going to go up to whatever they want it to be and start making the necessary improvements. To your credit as to what the money is going to go to, just in lift stations, you have \$440,000 of improvements left on them.

Karen- So its going to take 3 years just to pay for the lift stations?

Derek- Yes, and so and people talk about grants, grants, grants, grants. There is only about 2 grants anymore that are true grants. There is the CDBG grant and then your USDA grants. The other ones are low interest loans but even the USDA and the CDBG they are still grant matched. So, you're paying your interest up front. So, in order for us to start making these improvements I have to have some money to be able to make those improvements. I wish that it wasn't necessary, I wish we could do it on just what we had bid but there isn't a utility in the world that is working with 2015, 2011 prices. The City of Lubbock has gone up on us for what they charge. CRMWA has gone up. Our electricity has gone up. Our fuel. Everything else has gone up in the world. This is the only utility that will give you a voice to comment on and give your reasoning.

Ross- Is going up \$9. Is that the only option?

Derek- Yes.

Ross- In reality what does it really need to be to be able to do what we need to do for those lift stations?

Derek- 15

Ross- Ok, nobody likes to pay any higher than what we are paying now than I do except, one thing I thought about last night, keep in mind, the difference in our property taxes for most of us got a huge break. Some of that money we were paying in our property taxes, for me trading off \$1,500 a year than \$15 dollars or whatever it is a month if that is what it needs to be than its not that big a deal. And if you want to talk about what Gloria was talking about with the people that are having trouble with their bill, they're not. We need to fix it the right way and not band aid this thing for 3,4 or 5 years it just needs to be done right. If it needs to be \$15 it should be considered so we can fix it.

Derek- I think \$9 and let the city do their due diligence and make the cuts especially in those enterprise funds. We are already down 7% in this first bit from where we should be so we are at 25% in our expenses, and we should be at 32%. So, that's months into the year and that's where we are at.

Karen- Are we going to borrow the money? Do we have a good credit rating with the city?

Derek- So, when we had TCEQ in here that is one of the things that when you go out for these water grants you will send the application off to Austin and its similar to like a poker game. They will consider criteria to what fits best for our community. A lot of these low interest loans there is a lot of forgiveness in them. But we don't even have the means to even make a payment. I'm just telling you right now. We just don't have the means. Yall have seen it. They have done it for years. Everybody here can remember the days of the water leaks. Yall made the investment then to improve your waterlines. This is no different. It's the same type of project. We can keep doing what we are doing and keep getting slapped on the wrist or we can do something about it and sustain ourselves. It's really up to them at this point. But that's where we are at, at this point.

JoJo- Me personally I aint speaking for anyone but me. Going up \$9 might not be hard for some people but it is for somebody like me. It wouldn't bother me but if we don't pay our bills right on the 15th y'all put 10%. And I think giving that \$3 to the Fire Department is very important because one day I might need them. As far as the water goes, I can't drink the water I have to buy the water. Sometimes when I'm taking a bath, I can't smell anything but chlorine. But I'm sorry I didn't put the city in this mess. Years ago, the Council allowed the City to get into this and I know it's not your fault that they are where they are. But, going up on our water bill and still wanting to charge that 10% because we might be a day late, I don't like that. And it's hard when you're living off Social Security check. It's not easy.

Mike- What about those who have more than one meter. You going to hit me every time for that? You stuck me every time I needed a meter and needed a meter, I had to give a deposit for everyone. Even though I'm drafted you still wanted a deposit for each meter I put in. That's kind of bogus, isn't it? What do you do with all that money?

Sam- I think at that point b/c you and I talked on the phone yesterday. Gloria if I'm not mistaken, that has since been fixed with Gary House, hasn't it?

Gloria- What?

Sam- That exact issue he's talking about.

Gloria- As far as having different meters?

Sam- No. Mike will you reiterate what you just said.

Mike- Correct, so if I go and get another meter, you're going to hit me with another deposit.

Gloria- As far as another meter for what?

Mike- Anything!

Gloria- So you can have a water meter. So, there are a lot of people that have meters that run to their homes for their water and then they fill like the need a meter for their lawn b/c I want to water my lawn. So, they get another meter. So yea we have people that have different meters.

Mike- So I put another meter for my barn, and you hit me with another deposit on that. And I think Monica has the same situation where you have multiple meters and you just keep adding deposit, deposit, deposit.

Monica- No, I have rent houses that I needed to check to see if I had water.

Mike- So where does that money go?

Gloria- What we have done is and this is since Julie was here. If it's a landlord, we give it to you for \$75 the deposit b/c that deposit stays on your home. Even though your tenants move out your deposit is still sitting there.

Mike- So, that's my other thing. Like my barn you're charging me for sewer and garbage, and I don't have sewer b/c there is no sewer lines there.

Gloria- So if you are just going to have water at your barn then it's up to you to tell us that.

Derek- Mike, if you're being charged for a garbage bill and you aren't using it come and tell us and we can take it off.

Mike- But I tried to do that, and it hadn't been done yet, that's my point. I guess my point is, where does that money go.

Derek- It goes to the General Fund and then when you close your water account you get it back.

Jojo- When they put in all those new pipes. They didn't put any new pipes where I live. They brought the pipes but never did anything.

Derek- I wasn't here for any of that.

Jojo- I know you weren't.

Ronny- There are some down there for sure. The main thing that they did with those water lines was replace the main feeder lines. The smaller lines didn't get replaced.

Jojo- I'm just saying, down there where I stay, we never get any attention. We pay taxes like everyone else, but we don't get treated the same way.

Ronny- I know that in that waterline project that everything was supposed to have gotten done with the exception of Avenue J. Everything else should've been done on the east side of the highway.

Jojo- Also we were supposed to be working on the street and where I stay there are more holes than a little bit. I always said that if I tear up my car, I was going to sue y'all. I'm sorry but I'm angry b/c I just can't afford the water bill that I'm already paying but it ain't nothing that I can do if y'all choose to raise it up.

Ronny- we got our roller fixed and we are starting to fix the potholes. Felix and I started fixing the ones on South 1st and Ave E. It's a big one. We also started on North 7th, and Ave K I believe. So, we are trying to get started on the big ones.

Cyndi- My last water bill showed that I had used 0 water, so I called, and she said that something happened with our system. So, when it gets fixed am I going to be screwed and have to pay a huge water bill b/c I know I don't usually have a high bill. But now what? Was I the only one that had 0 usage?

Derek- No, there was a huge problem with our system last month and they ran an update. They are supposed to be working on the issue and getting back with us this month on that.

Cyndi- So if I go over then I shouldn't be charged for that correct?

Derek- I don't know that you won't be charged but, you will be charged b/c you used the water. Gloria will just adjust it.

Mike- How did we get to this point that we weren't so proactive that we are where we are.

Ronny- I believe a lot of the problem is that it's kind of like the Perfect Storm between Jerry Webster.

Mike- But how do you go so long without anyone noticing anything. Because now you are at a problem that is going to cost you double b/c you let it get to this point rather than working on it as the years go by.

Ronny- So what I was getting at is that Webster put a band aid on everything and wouldn't fix it so when he retired and came Julie who she went in there and just spent money on top of money and tried to fix everything.

JoJo- So over the years Julie hadn't made this mess that we are in. It's been going on for years. So, who ever was the Councilmen or whatever they allowed this to happen. I'm not saying that it was y'all.

Derek- I just think over the years they have just tried to keep costs down and tried to keep it where it was manageable for everyone. You can fix it and fix it and fix it until one day you are just going to have to repair it and that's just where we are at.

Mike- what is your life expectancy for a lift station?

Derek- 20 years

Mike- So, we knew well in advance that we would get at least we 20 years out of them. So how long has it been since we have done anything with them?

Derek- 50 years

Mike- 50, that's what I'm saying we aren't being proactive.

Belew- Had Julie repaired any of the lift stations?

Derek- Yes, she put a new one in North of the Gin, you have a new well on 8th street and the well was required by TCEQ that you have to have to be able to supplement yourselves in the summer when the demand it high and she also did a lot of other things.

Belew- What happens to the usage that we don't use?

Derek- It goes back into the General Fund.

Karen- I use about 4,000 a month. Couldn't that money go to a different account that the city runs to help people?

Derek- I mean you probably could but it would be a very difficult task to try and sift through just to try and figure out which ones.

Cathy- Is there not grants that we could get for this?

Derek- The grants are kind of, let me just put this out there, the grants sound good but its not a way of life. Its just not a way to run a city hoping that you can get a grant. You at least have to run your water and sanitation like the enterprise that it is. I mean those things HAVE to generate revenue just to sustain themselves.

Belew- So, my sewer on my water bill is \$28.25. Does that mean we don't have any breaks or repairs?

Derek- well when you have \$440,000 in lift station repairs and you have to lift it and such to get to the lagoons in order to pick it up and elevate it and migrate it all and the sewer rate hasn't been adjusted since 2011 .

Judge Braddock- If everyone were to disagree and try and burn the City Hall down and decide not to raise this \$9 where is the money going to come from to cover it? Are you just going to raise taxes?

Ronny- If they burn the City Hall down, we won't have anything but the money from the insurance company.

Braddock- Will you have to raise City taxes?

Derek- We would have to do something.

Braddock- Ok, so in that prospective if this \$9 that means everyone that has a meter pays for it, that's owners, that's renter, that's everybody. If you raise taxes, then that means there are only going to be selective ones that own property is going to do it. So, I'm for raising water b/c it goes all the way across the board, so everyone is going to have to pay for it and not just a few selected ones.

Cathy- so if we do that can you guarantee our taxes won't be raised.

JoJo- I'm going to ask the question that everyone wants to ask but they are scared to ask. The payroll, some are saying it's too much and some think that some of them don't deserve a dollar, but they have to get paid. I know that y'all didn't give a raise this year. But what about next year.

Derek- They only thing I think about that is that not everyone is out at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning fixing a water leak, its not everyone out at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning dealing with drunk people. I see your point I do but there are like the water guys, they do take a beating, they do some things and I'm just going to say that most of y'all wouldn't want to do the things they do.

JoJo- I'll get in the sewer, it don't bother me.

Sally- Raymond can't be everywhere at once. A lot of the time some of these guys are seen parked for an hour or two not doing anything. And that is taking up City gas and City time or just on their phones.

Derek- I haven't seen that.

Sally- oh but they have. We are thinking they could be helping some of the other guys that are needing their help. But we have seen a few who have just been parked.

Raymond- Sometimes you might see them sitting there b/c we are having to wait on parts b/c we sent the other worker to go get it to fix whatever we are fixing. It's not that they are sitting there not doing anything, it's just we are having to wait for these things.

Mac- Would you be able to drink this water after this project is complete? B/c everyone in here is having to pay for water twice. So once the project is complete will we be able to drink the water?

Derek- You should be able to drink it now, bathe in it, cook in it. A lot of it is b/c our water is hard, and we probably aren't going to like it. I mean that is what an RO system is for. But honestly, it's the same water that comes out of Lubbock. Lubbock blends it and it is sent through a pipeline. The only time that it isn't from Lubbock is in the summer when we are running off of the supplement.

Benny- If this passes, how long before we start having to pay for that.

Derek- April 1st

Ronny- I have Shallowater's water bill and it's \$179.

Derek- Did y'all hear that? Shallowater's water bill is \$179. We are very, very fortunate to be a part of CRMWA.

Ross- When I lived in Odessa our water bill was \$150 and that was 2 years ago.

Belew- So, I have another question. So, we have 2 separate people hired for accounts payable and utility billing.

Derek- we just have one for accounts payable. So, Utility biller is money coming in and Accounts Payable is the one that pays our bills so she would be the money going out.

Belew- So, couldn't that just be one person.

Derek- You really want to have those things separate b/c that is where money starts going missing.

Janet- I just wanted to bring this to everyone that I think we are fortunate that our water bill hasn't gone up and we do have a good City Manager now who is really working on trying to look at all aspects to help. I believe he is doing a great job. I think we need to rally behind him and have his back for everything that he has done for us this far. If he thinks our water bill needs to go up, I think we all just need to listen b/c he lives here and he really wants to see growth and development and I just feel like I would hate to see him go.

JoJo- I don't want him to go anywhere I just want to speak my peace and He knows I always speak my mind but I'm going to have his back. Why does the city have a housekeeper. Can't some of the city ladies clean up?

Derek- Oh I sweep and mop.

Ross- I'm going to go back to what I asked earlier. Is \$9 going to cover it?

Derek- Yes

Mike- But are we sure in a couple months from now we aren't going to be back here.

Ross- I think with everything going up and it has to be set up like a business and I think that is what Derek is doing is running the city like a business and it has to stay that way in order to see a difference.

JoJo- So Derek, would it be better to do the \$15 or the \$9 dollars.

Derek- I think the \$9 is going to be good b/c I'm not going to do that to people with the \$15.

Ross- How did you come up with such an odd number? Why not \$10.

Derek- To be honest I was just trying to keep it right at 100 and that was including the Fire Department donations.

Sam- I just want to add and go back to what JoJo said and what Mike has said already. All these years have been mandating things. What we are trying to do now is set the standards for what we need to do going forward. We are having to play catch up in the meantime. It's not fair to us, it's not fair to y'all but we need to start somewhere. We are trying to do the best we can, and I hope everyone can see that. We are trying to meet everyone in the middle. Sometimes that isn't possible. But if we don't start moving forward then all of this is just going to swallow us up. But we are doing the best that we can, and I hope everyone can see us.

Belew- Do we have much income from Code Enforcement?

Derek- A little bit. Dale does a pretty good job being dual purpose. He put in a gas line; he helps with the water guys. That's kind of been my thing with everyone. Everyone has a dual purpose. And that is the way I'm going to run it from here on out. So as far as his Code Enforcement not making money, Dales make up for it in other ways. He patches potholes, he's helped with water leaks, he's fixed our plumbing at City Hall.

Gloria- He reads meters for us.

Sam- He's a jack of all trades.

Derek- And one thing I plan on doing with him is TCEQ is going to mandate us to inspect every meter and investigate if its PVC or galvanized or if its led or poly or whatever it is b/c we must get that submitted by October 16, 2024. And Dale will be the main one that runs it.

JoJo- I'm going to say this and then I'm going to shut up. We don't get too much attention where I live. But I think we should be looked at sometimes.

Ronny- One thing I want to say while all y'all are here. If y'all have a pothole that is bothering you, call City Hall and tell Gloria. We are trying to get all the bad ones.

JoJo- when Jerry was here, that compress street is terrible. I don't know who it belongs to, but it is terrible.

Sally- we have a little bit of asphalt, and we don't mind putting it in the holes, but we don't want to get in trouble. We don't mind helping.

Ronny- if you cover it up with cement, we won't tell anybody. Anyone else have anything else to say before we move on to the council meeting?

Cyndi- Can you just say anything you want? I'm just wanting to ask; I know that John is leaving, and he's done so much good for the city, and no one ever praises him here. But you can't deny what John has done. He's leaving and I've looked and there are no ads in the paper or anything and all I get told is we are going back to a 3 day kill shelter.

Derek- That's never been said. Let's squash that right now. And John has not turned in his 2 weeks' notice.

Cyndi- We all know he's leaving.

Derek- We have asked him. And we haven't gotten anything from him.

Cyndi- Well we know that he's leaving March 1st.

Derek- Well that is news to me. B/c I haven't gotten anything from him.

Cyndi- But what has been done there wasn't b/c of the city if was b/c of him. Y'all don't act like y'all care at all. Every time that someone tries to do something out there y'all have bashed them or tried to take their money.

Derek- We didn't try and take their money!

Cyndi- Y'all held that \$3000.

Derek- No we didn't. You have to give an accounting for it. That is simple economics and that's simple accounting. And every dollar that was donated went to that project.

Cyndi- It took a long time.

Derek- It did not! It took a while for them to go get it and the second that they had an invoice we cut them a check right then and there. Barbara, please correct me if I'm wrong.

Barbara- No, you did!

Derek- So, that is not fair representation of what happened, and I don't appreciate it.

Cyndi- Well I apologize for that but that is what I was told.

Derek- Well, that's not the truth. And you're sitting here roasting me in a public forum saying that I tried to steal their money.

Cyndi- I just apologized for it.

Derek- Yes, but that is the second time.

Cyndi- That's not the second time. When was the first time?

Derek- When you came here the first time and put everybody on blast for this.

Cyndi- Oh, about all the animals in the city. Well, the truth hurts sometimes.

Carson- I would like to say that this is off topic. The current agenda item is a different item. This is for a different time.

Ronny- It's not an agenda item.

Cyndi- I was told that it was an open forum.

Carson- It is an open forum about the water bill.

Cyndi- Well the truth hurts.

Derek- There will be a dual-purpose person that will work with the animal shelter and public works.

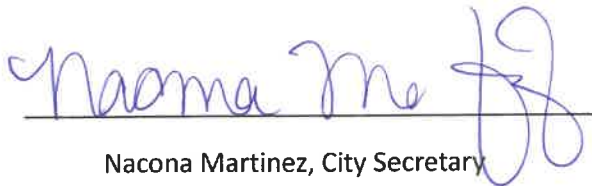
Cyndi- So, no one will be responsible for the Animal Shelter

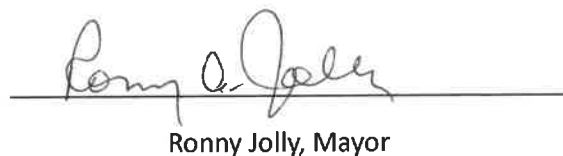
Derek- There will be 5 guys capable of running the shelter. Instead of it just falling on one person.

Ronny- Ok, we are ready to move onto the council meeting.

(Townhall meeting was adjourned at 6:30)

These meeting minutes were **PASSED** and **APPROVED** on the 4 day of March 2024


Nacona Martinez, City Secretary


Ronny Jolly, Mayor