

The Independence City

INDEPENDENT

Going With the Flow by Improving City Water System

By Anne Scheck

You could call it one small step for city water, one giant leap for leaky pipes.

After years of deferred maintenance, Independence has a range of projects that are literally in the city's pipeline. A revenue bond for \$1.24 million is helping pay to meet capital-improvement goals for its water system — a water system largely fed by wells. First up this year: fixing "old, leaking and undersized pipes" in the southwestern part of the city, not far from the city's "South Well Field" near River Oak Road.

The nearly \$260,000 cost to correct those pipes comes at a time when the price of materials is rising, an apparent result of a state construction boom, according to Mike Danko, community planning director for Independence. So the city's estimated cost of annual operation and maintenance for the next few years — \$200,000 — could run higher. However, the upgrades arrive at a time considered crucial by some municipal water experts.

This past July, infrastructure needs across the state for water were deemed a "significant financial issue

that must be addressed in the near future" by the League of Oregon Cities (LOC), which surveyed Independence along with other municipalities. The price tag was \$6.1 million over the next 20 years from Independence for its treatment facilities, drinking water, distribution system and storage. The city currently is studying the possibility of an elevated reservoir, according to its five-year capital plan.

"Water needs are larger than transportation needs," warns the LOC report, concluding that "the longer infrastructure needs are postponed, the more expensive they will be to address."

Residents of the city have worried about water payments since bills began inching up a few years ago — and many at City Council sessions or in other meetings have reported a combined billing for sewer-and-water that exceeds \$100 monthly. Contributions to debt incurred by the municipally-owned broadband provider, MINET — which was founded by Monmouth and Independence — accounts for \$10-to

Continued on page 2

Continued from Page 1

-\$15 of the water bill, according to information provided by the city. However, the water fund now has the monetary health to back the revenue bond financing — to set rates at a level to operate the system and cover the debt. All of the current capital improvements are being paid for by the Water Fund and water-system development charges for new construction, confirmed Gloria Butsch, city finance director.

That's likely to mean much smaller rate increases, probably three-to-four percent, according to Ray Bartlett, whose firm, *Economic and Financial Analysis*, periodically updated the city on water-system finances over the past years. In a presentation last July, he observed that the city's current fiscal situation is far improved compared with several years ago, a time when Independence didn't appear to be "credit-worthy," he said. In fact, one audit was accompanied by a report "thick with comments about how ill-managed the city had been up to that point," Mr. Bartlett recalled.

The need for capital improvement is forced by two main factors: more water capacity and adequate water protection. Most water now, about 75%, goes to residential use, and current sources can meet the demand. "But as the city continues to grow, the ability of existing wells to accommodate the increased summer and maximum day demands will be strained," according to a 2015 report to the city by 4B Engineering and Consulting in Keizer. Preservation of

clean drinking water is both a state and federal health priority.

Five years ago, potentially hazardous groundwater constituents, primarily tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene, were detected in subsurface water near downtown Independence during a site inspection for the US Environmental Protection Agency. However, none of the samples were found to exceed the maximum level in wells — so there was no indication of a health risk. The contamination was resolved, according to Mr. Danko.

A new pipeline, installed last summer, now serves as a second connection to the expanded iron-filtration plant from the "Polk Street Wells," the city's north well field. This new transmission line "greatly increases capacity" from that well field, Mr. Danko said. In addition, the quality of the drinking water in the city is as good and often better than its municipal counterparts (see Civics Lesson: *H2O Mostly Tops at the Tap*).

Three years ago, Ron Smith, a server at *The Golden Horse* restaurant, complained to the City Council about an allegedly erroneous water-use reading that boosted his bill \$37, following a water-line replacement leading to the installation of a meter. Mr. Smith, known for always being clad in a black apron, said he never learned why the charges escalated. But, like some of his fellow citizens, he remains irritated by water issues — and, in his case, he now serves only bottled water to customers.

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SIDEBAR**Seeking an OK for ozone**

The battle over ozone has begun, and this time it has nothing to do with the upper atmosphere and everything to do with ... water. As cities struggle to find a way to purify water and bring down costs, a treatment alternative that uses the compound ozone — yes, *ozone* — has inspired a coalition of civil engineers — yes, *engineers* — to launch a protest for a process called ozonation.

Ozonation is arguably a better disinfectant for drinking water in two different ways: It kills or inactivates viruses and bacteria more effectively than previous methods and it reduces the need for chemical treatment in the water, namely chlorine. That's the opinion of Eric Mende, the capital projects engineering manager for the City of Wilsonville. In fact, Wilsonville has been using ozonation for some time, but formal recognition is being sought because the city hasn't been given credit for it — disinfection credit, that is.

Traditionally, treated water goes through a final "tank" into which chlorine is injected for final disinfection before sending it down the pipe, he explained. This chlorine needs to "spread out" in the tank for a certain amount of contact time. But ozonation would downsize both the chlorine and the container. "If we get ozone credit, the amount of chlorine can be reduced and (so can) the size of the tank needed to 'spread it out,' so the chlorine is thereby reduced, also," he explained.


The ozonation petitioners are

a dozen strong, but they are being led by the City of Wilsonville, along with what is known as the "Lake Oswego/Tigard Water Partnership." Officially, they are known as proponents of the "Oregon Water Utilities Council Ozone Coalition Rule Change Petition," or "Ozone Coalition" for short.

The Ozone Coalition is petitioning the Oregon Health Authority to recognize the disinfection benefits of ozonation. A change in the post-filtration disinfection rule will make ozone a "more feasible treatment alternative, allowing drinking water systems to continue to protect public health, while taking advantage of the other benefits that ozone provides," according to the petition.

The Ozone Coalition is asking for a rule change, based on the fact that the science behind ozonation is reliable and good. However, even Mr. Mende and Wilsonville will have to wait a while for a state decision because the Oregon Health Authority seems in no hurry to make the rule change.


In fact, the way that Wilsonville — and Mr. Mende — could clinch disinfection credit for ozonation "would be for them to apply for a waiver of the construction standard only allowing disinfection credit post-filtration," said Kari Salis, technical manager for Drinking Water Services in the Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority.

Mr. Mende plans to do so.--  TNAS

THE CIVICS LESSON:**Why and How Independence Water is Tops at the Tap**

Independence water has a clean bill of health, said Mary Grant, of the non-profit Food & Water Watch, a corporate and government watchdog group based in Washington DC. Sharp-eyed city residents last year spotted a copper level on the city's 2014 annual drinking-water report, which looked like it had reached the state's limit for the metal, requiring additional steps to be taken. However, that was due to a miscalculation — and it's been straightened out, according to Matthew Carpenter of the Independence city staff. Residents can rely on the most recent drinking-water brochure from the city, which shows the city has just as good — or better! — water quality than most of its neighbors.

However, the Independence drinking-water report may remain a bit confusing. After all, it has so many acronyms one citizen dubbed it “alphabet soup with numbers.” That's because all drinking-water test results are based in a unit of measurement. The most common unit is milligrams per liter, expressed as mg/L. A liter is slightly more than a quart, so about one-thousandth of a quart equals a milliliter. The city reports also use parts-per-million (ppm) which is the same as milligrams per liter (mg/L).

Levels are usually considered the most important feature in the report: they indicate what has been found in water and in what amounts. However, all of the tracked levels in city water are relatively low. Copper — the most prevalent metal in city testing — often arises from the private plumbing inside homes. The city lists 1.3 mg/L as a goal for it — but that number really should be regarded as a regulatory limit or “cap,” since a goal implies a point that is being sought, explained Ms. Grant. She recommends home-based filtration for anyone who wants to purify water beyond that of the city effort. Look for a filter that is certified by NSF International, she advises. That means it has met industry standards. --  AS

THE INDY HOP: *The Nut by Any Other Name that Tastes the Same*

This Independence couple hardly disagrees about anything -- but the right name for a local crop can drive them nuts, and with good reason. Brian Sekafetz calls it a hazelnut but, to Miki Allen, it's a filbert. Who is correct? They both are. That's the judgment of Grant Allen, administrator for the Nut Growers Society, based in Aurora. The 800-member organization he represents prefers the term "hazelnut," but even hazelnut farmers understand why some call it a filbert. Many grew up with that moniker. No one is sure how the name "filbert" arose. Is it named after St. Philibert of Jumièges or because the husk looks like a "full beard"? Either way, it is the same tasty nut, Mr. Allen said.

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