

Wauneta chosen to participate in new water well rehab project with HHS, UNO

Written by Wauneta Breeze
Thursday, 22 May 2014 00:00 -

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

David Blau with Miller and Associates attended last week's village board meeting on Tuesday, May 13 to provide an update on the town's arsenic project.

The Village of Wauneta's water supply currently contains higher levels of arsenic in its water than is allowed by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The village's annual water quality report states that between Jan. 1 and Dec. 31, 2013 the highest level of arsenic reported was 14 parts per billion. The highest acceptable amount is 10 parts per billion.

The village has been trying to correct the arsenic level in the town's water since HHS raised the standard by lowering the allowed level of arsenic in 2006. The most recent attempt to lower the levels was the variable frequency drive project, designed to pull water from the wells at a slower rate.

With the variable frequency drives the village's wells now pump water at the rate of 230 gallons per minute, compared to the previous 500 gallons per minute before the drives were installed. However, the wells now run longer than they did before.

Unfortunately, the variable frequency drives have been unsuccessful in lowering the arsenic level.

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Well rehab study

Blau and Village Superintendent Bill Bischoff told board members the village has been accepted into a new trial study with the Department of Health and Human Services and the University of Nebraska at Omaha. The study will provide funding to inject grout into the village's existing wells to isolate the layers of formation so the water supply will be pulled from a different location. The hope is the isolation will result in much lower arsenic levels in the town's water.

A total of three cities were selected for the well rehab program. Bischoff was informed Tuesday, May 13 that Wauneta was chosen as one of the three trial communities. The project should kick off in Wauneta in July.

Blau and Bischoff are both hopeful the well rehab study will be successful for Wauneta. If not successful, Wauneta and its residents will be forced to implement one of two other solutions, both of which carry hefty price tags.

Other options

Blau explained the village has two options if the well rehab is unsuccessful—dig new wells and hope their arsenic levels are below the allowed limits or put point of use water filtration units in every home and business on Wauneta's water lines.

If the village decides to punch new wells, the anticipated price tag is roughly \$2.3 million, which will cover construction of new wells and transmission mains to get the water into the village.

The point of use filtration units have a much lower initial cost—\$1,500 per household or

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business. There are 350 households and businesses in Wauneta. Each home or business have one filtration unit installed at their primary drinking water source. There will also be significant ongoing maintenance expenses with these units. Blau estimates annual service after installation will cost the village between \$50,000 and \$200,000.

The village is considering implementing three test sites for the point of use filtration units at the same time the well rehab project kicks off. Blau plans to have proposals for purchase of filtration units back to the board at the June meeting.

Approve new zoning ordinance

Board members approved a new zoning ordinance recommended to them by the Wauneta Planning Commission. The commission has been working on revamping the ordinance for several months.

The new ordinance, Ordinance No. 2014-02, includes language to allow the construction of a private non-commercial storage building on lots with no primary structure (such as a house). The previous village ordinances prohibited the construction of storage buildings on lots without a primary structure.

The statutes within the ordinance state the storage buildings can be up to 25 feet in height. Those who wish to build non-commercial storage buildings with a height in excess of 25 feet will have to apply for a conditional use permit from the Zoning Committee.

The ordinance revisions recommended by the Wauneta Planning Commission will also reduce the required front yard setbacks and increase the maximum lot coverage in low density residential districts.

Before the amendment, village ordinances required a 25 foot front yard setback in low density residential districts whereas the required setback in medium and high density residential districts was set at 20 feet. The revision changes the setback in low density districts to 20 feet to match those in other districts.

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The new ordinance also increases the maximum lot coverage in low density residential districts to 40 percent, equal to the current maximum in medium to high density residential districts.

The revision also amends the side yard requirements for corner lots. It requires the side yard on the street side to be at least 10 feet and not less than five feet on the opposite side.

Pasture lease

The village board decided to let the village-owned 30 acre pasture rest for a year or two before considering renting it in the future. They noted the ground has been over grazed and is in need of time to recuperate.

The current occupant of the pasture will have until June 15 to relocate animals currently grazing on the village pasture.

Nursing home

At the May meeting village board members also decided to move the nursing home's audit to Almquist, Maltzahn, Galloway & Luth, the firm that also completes the village's audit.

The nursing home in general is getting along very well, said nursing home committee member Page Johnston. The facility continues to operate "in the black" and currently has 35 residents.

The nursing home's maximum capacity is 36 residents. Johnston told board members he

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understood nursing home administration is currently in the process of reviewing the application for a potential 36th resident.

Other business

Board members discussed limitations and ordinances relevant to the use of Wauneta's alleys at the request of a Wauneta resident.

Bischoff and Village Clerk Evelyn Skelton researched village ordinances prior to the board meeting last week and found that current ordinances do allow public use of alleys within Wauneta.

Village board members also discussed possibly providing the Wauneta Economic Development Committee with pre-approved yearly revenue of \$5,000.

The village currently funds the WEDC when a request is made for community improvements. However, the new arrangement would provide the WEDC up to \$5,000 per year. WEDC members would be able to make a request to the village clerk instead of waiting until a village board meeting, up to the maximum amount of \$5,000 annually.

Board members decided to table the discussion of the WEDC request until the June meeting since two of the four board members present, Rick Einspahr and Tony Cribelli, at the May meeting serve on the WEDC. Einspahr and Cribelli both stated they would like to abstain from voting on the item.

Board members also discussed supplying Southwest Nebraska Community Betterment Corporation with \$3,200 to use as partial matching funds for a grant to study housing in southwest Nebraska. Board members tabled the discussion until more information could be

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sought from SWNCBC.

Superintendent's report

Bischoff told board members the WEDC recently purchased a property that had past due utility bills. Village employees were instructed to look into the number of past due utility bills on the village's records and report back at a future meeting.

Bischoff also reported to the board that a company will be in town soon to put a top coat on the town's walking trail. Board members approved the \$5,000 expenditure last year. In addition to applying a top coat, the company will also patch areas where the trail is gone.

The hope is that the top coat and patches will get the walking trail through the next couple years before the village completely replaces the trail.

Lastly, Bischoff reported there has been an influx of dog complaints starting once again. He told board members, "We're going to have to start putting some more bite back into that ordinance." Village employees have noted more than one home who have more than the allowed two dogs at their residence. "We're just not going to allow having more than two dogs," Bischoff expressed.