City Administrators Report

January 7, 2013

Water Treatment Plant

The crew is still working on getting the plant back to operating at a normal level. John Weikel from Montana Rural Water was in town the weekend of December 8th 2012. John spent about 3 days with the crew doing jar testing with different chemicals and came up with a combination that seemed to work, but after a few days things changed back again.

This has been an ongoing issue since June of last year. Whenever the operators find a combination of chemicals in relationship to the incoming waters turbidity level, it will work for a while and suddenly change. This is very frustrating to the operators as they seem to have no control over operating the plant. They have been doing a fantastic job of keeping our numbers well within our permit levels, but they have to spend long hours, at all times of the day doing so.

Another issue that has come up is the valves that control the water flow from the 4 larger filtering tanks to the clarifiers. Two of the valves were starting to act up back in September, but now we’re experiencing problems with all of the valves. The operators are not able to run the plant from the computer at home. If the plant calls for a “back wash” at 2:00 in the morning, an alarm will sound and the operators have to return to work in order to manually open the valves.

This process is normally preformed through the computer without the operators being present. Since we started the problems with turbidity the times on the filters for back washing has increased to having to flush every 8 to 10 hours instead of 3 or 4 days. This requires the operators to be at the plant more because of the valve issues.

To help cut back on overtime I have talked to the operators about the timing of the back washing of the filters. They have been good about only putting in their 10 hour shift, but this could be 4 hours in the early morning, 4 hours in the late afternoon, then coming in at night for a 2 hour period to flush the filters or make chemical changes.

Water Meter Pits

In November Paul Burnham and Jeff Cicon from Morrison and Maierle, talked to the council about the stopped water meters. Paul explained that Rural Development is requiring the city to replace these meters as part of the water distribution upgrades this year.

Last month the city had a total of 120 meters that were not working. I spoke with Jeff Cicon about the replacement cost and if we could look at putting in “Meter Pits” (See attached) next to the curb stop instead of replacing meter in the customer’s homes.

There are a number of disadvantages to installing the meters in the existing home. City crews have found in the past that it is difficult to coordinate meter installation or repairs with the residents. A contractor would have to coordinate a time with the home owner in order to install the meters. With the uncertainty of a fixed time to install the meters, a contractor may inflate the bid to cover the cost of his time, for the project being delayed.

On the other hand, meter pits can be installed with less uncertainty. The contractor digs up the service line near the property boundary and installs the meter pit. Meter pits would be easier for the City to maintain because they would not have to coordinate repairs with the home owner. They would also account for water loss on leaky service lines and charge the residents for that water.

The biggest disadvantage to meter pits is the cost. Jeff contacted Rural Development and asked what costs other communities paid to have a complete meter change out and meter pit installation. Contracted out for meters in homes was roughly $800 per meter and $1500 for the meter pits.

If the City chose to do meter pits, it would be a good time to implement a new policy that any old meters that are not working would be replaced with a meter pit. Also any new construction or services would be required to put in meter pits.

In the future once all the meters were changed out to meter pits, they could all be read in a day from a central location, thus eliminating a need for a person to read meters. It takes our meter reader 5-6 days to complete the meter routes each month.

Departments

Street crews were busy this month with snow removal. Our two newest employees got their first experience plowing city streets. One mail box and two sprinkler systems have been the only causalities, so far. Before the snow came, they were busy repairing equipment and repainting picnic tables for the park.

Wastewater has been ironing out the issues with the pump and the conveyor system from the press. Ron Miller from Strom Electric installed a heat tape around the conveyor and it is set on a timer to come on a few hours before the press is operated. This gives the heat tape time to thaw out any material that may be frozen to the conveyor. Also a thick blanket was installed over the conveyor.

Jim Hammons