

**WALLA WALLA CITY COUNCIL**  
**Work Session Minutes**  
**March 10, 2014**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

Mayor Cummins called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Present: Councilmembers Barbara Clark, Dick Morgan, Chris Plucker, Allen Pomraning and Mayor Jerry Cummins

Absent: Councilmembers Jim Barrow and Mary Lou Jenkins.

City staff in attendance: City Manager Nabel Shawa, Deputy City Manager Tim McCarty, Public Works Director Ki Bealey, Parks & Recreation Director Jim Dumont, Public Works Manager Mori Struve, City Engineer Neal Chavre, Water Distribution Supervisor Adrian Sutor, Cross Connection Specialist Rick Guse, and City Clerk Kammy Hill.

City Manager Shawa introduced Pam Taylor, Human Resource Manager, to the City Council.

Mayor Cummins offered condolences to the Newby Family and City of College Place on the untimely passing of Mayor Rick Newby.

**2. ACTIVE AGENDA**

A. Cross Connection Control Program update.

Public Works Manager Struve and Water Distribution Supervisor Sutor provided an overview of backflow prevention devices and the requirements for the City, as a water purveyor, to have a cross connection control program. The focus for this Work Session is on residential requirements.

The first issue to address in the program is completing all residential assessments. The City currently has 8,700 existing residential connections with 1,200 existing backflow device permits. A 2008 survey identified the need to complete 2,700 assessments to determine whether backflow devices are necessary. There are still 2,300 assessments to be completed. Staff is proposing using a public bid process at an estimated cost of \$46,000 to \$69,000 to complete the outstanding residential assessments.

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The second issue is compliance with the requirement for annual testing of the backflow prevention device for the 1,200 existing residential permits. Compliance rates have decreased but the City's goal through the Department of Health approved plan requires an 80 percent compliance rate.

The third issue is the testing. Based on responses to a survey of residents with backflow prevention devices, staff researched the feasibility of providing a City-administered testing program but determined it could not be done cost effectively.

There was discussion on:

- Backflow prevention devices: Who is required to have them and how they work.
- The requirement for residential assessments and why not every residential water user is required to have a backflow prevention device under current statutes.
- There is no penalty for non-compliance except for turning off a customer's water service. Staff has been taking a softer approach to attempt to gain compliance.
- Designing specifications so that testing can only be provided by full-service plumbers.
- Number of residential water customers that have water availability outside the house.
- Devices are required to be tested annually.
- Backflow prevention devices are a completely separate unit from a radio-read water meter.
- Ensuring list of backflow device testers provided to citizens are for local businesses and that all communications are professional.
- Whether a private backflow device tester is required to report device failures if this is a private transaction between the property owner and tester.
- Impact on water system if a device fails; and contamination from failing water lines.

Mayor Cummins invited public input.

Dr. Don Ashley, 1128 SW Bade, College Place, commented on the testing program in College Place and importance of the device in protecting the water system.

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Greg Peterson, 1342 Dakota, Walla Walla, reported he is a certified backflow device tester but not a plumber. He is able to test backflow prevention devices but is not able to do repairs.

Chris Johnson, 964 Olympia, Walla Walla, supported keeping the program local and allowing the public to choose their own device testers.

Jason Stiller, 85205 Highway 339, Milton-Freewater, reported he works for Baker Backflow Testing and is a certified device tester but not a plumber. Mr. Stiller reviewed the different types of devices and situations involved in their testing.

Jeff Knowles, 4665 Old Highway 12, Walla Walla, commented on the devices approved by the State and indicated he would be supportive of the City putting out a contract once per year as there would be efficiencies gained by a systematic approach.

There was discussion on whether the person performing the testing on a backflow prevention device is required to report if it fails. Members of the audience responded that the certified testers are required to report public health hazards but if a plumber is performing the test then the device is normally fixed and reported simultaneously.

- B. Discussion on aligning identified citizen priorities with the City's strategic objectives and options for taking action.

City Manager Shawa reviewed priorities identified in the citizen survey and aligning those priorities with the strategic plan objectives and budget process. According to studies performed over the years, another \$1 million dollars is needed for streets. Options for funding include:

- \$1,000,000 - Property Tax Levy Lid Lift at a rate of 50 cents per \$1,000 assessed value. Requires simple majority vote, effective for six years, then must go back on the ballot. Disadvantage – higher property taxes and will compete with other projects such as school construction.
- \$400,000 - Local Option Vehicle Tab Tax. Councilmatic adoption of up to \$20 per year per vehicle. Advantages: Stable revenue source with low volatility, runs ad infinitum, no citizen vote necessary. Disadvantages: Not a popular option with citizens.

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- \$250,000 – First one-quarter of one percent real estate excise tax. Required to be used for capital improvements. Currently used to pay for parking lot improvements. This obligation expires in 2015. Tax is in place and would need to be redirected after 2015 final payment. This is a conservative estimate and has generated much more in the past (2005-\$410,000; 2006-\$467,000; 2007-\$323,000).
- \$250,000 – Second one-quarter of one percent real estate excise tax. Not being utilized by the City. Working with AWC to clarify and allow Councilmatic adoption in 2015.
- \$166,000 - Remaining banked levy capacity. Available through Councilmatic action. Would raise property tax by about \$.08 cents per \$1,000 assessed value.
- \$230,000 - Senator King's state transportation package proposal. Would increase local governments share of gas tax based on population. Could be passed in 2015. The House version provides \$115,000.

Starting in 2016, there will be \$4.5 million available in infrastructure repair and replacement program funds which will provide for significant improvements.

There was discussion on street improvements and new street preservation products.

City Manager Shawa reported another area that must be addressed is sidewalk repair and replacement. The City's cost in trip and fall claims has increased and this is an area of citizen concern. State law and the City's municipal code allow for improvements to be made and property owners assessed with a ten-year repayment. Staff is proposing to implement a sidewalk assessment program on Alder Street within the project area. These sidewalk assessments will be done on a project by project basis while working with property owners. A potential funding source for low-income property owners are the City's community development block grant funds. There was brief discussion on how to manage street trees and sidewalk replacements.

City Manager Shawa reviewed current efforts and other strategies for increasing shopping opportunities.

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**3. OTHER BUSINESS**

Councilmember Morgan raised the issue of the community's expectation that the City will be working on a pool. The City needs to determine what people want and how to support the effort. Consensus was to have Councilmember Morgan participate with the citizens committee.

Councilmember Pomraning reported the ad-hoc scholarship committee met to review the eight applications received for submittal of a candidate to the Association of Washington Cities Quality Communities scholarship program. The scholarship committee decided to recommend Kiana Molitor for one of the four statewide scholarships.

City Manager Shawa reported that Standard & Poor upgraded the City's bond rating from an "A+" to "AA."

**4. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:13 p.m.