

Mayor Lambert: Setting the Record Straight

There has been a great deal of conversation, questions and some community activism concerning the maintenance and upgrade of our streets as well as several other subjects. As mayor, it is appropriate for me to provide a summary of some activities of the City Council to clarify some of these concerns and questions. To summarize the major points:

With rare exceptions, all deliberations of the City Council are during open meetings, and the results are widely reported in the local press and the City's web site.

The first decisions made by the City Council related to streets were in December, 2009. The mayor has led public meetings and presentations and facilitated deliberations as is his appropriate role. There is not and has never been a "Mayor's plan" related to streets.

One of the City Council's decisions made in December, 2009 was that residential streets would only be upgraded and funded by street assessments if requested by a majority of the registered voters on that street. The City Council decided not to initiate any upgrades to residential streets unless there was such a request.

Routine maintenance (primarily pot hole repair and chip sealing) will be done more aggressively than prior to City ownership of the streets, and 100% of the cost will be paid for by the City from its normal sources of funds and not from assessments of any type.

While there are long term plans to accommodate the City's growth requirements, there are no plans for a new city hall or fire station.

The City Council is exploring the possibility of acquiring the airport from HSB Resort at no cost to the City because acquisition funds would be provided by the FAA. The first step in this process was to appoint a committee of seven residents to evaluate the possible acquisition and prepare a report for the community to be submitted around September, 2010.

Your mayor and all members of the City Council consider communication with the community very important and solicit and appreciate input from people who own property or visit here. With a few rare exceptions as specifically allowed by state law, all deliberations among a quorum of the City Council are done in a public meeting. The dates and times of these public meetings are posted weeks in advance on the City's web site (www.horseshoe-bay-tx.gov). Since incorporation, a member of the City Council has written a "Council Comments" article for the Beacon, and the meetings are covered in the local newspapers. There is also a great deal of information on our web site. You are encouraged to discuss issues with any of the six of us.

When the City acquired 122 miles of streets from the HSB POA in April, 2009, there seemed to be two expectations: 1. The City would have more money to perform routine maintenance for streets maintained to their present standard. 2. There would be a street upgrade program.

Routine maintenance (primarily pot hole repair and chip sealing) will absolutely be done more aggressively by the City simply because the City has access to more resources than the HSB POA. This has been done and will continue to be done as part of our general activity financed by property

taxes, the ¼% sales tax and funds from the HSB POA. Property owner assessments for such activities have never been discussed.

The City has three long term options for our streets:

1. Upgrade some streets and finance the upgrade by street assessments. Such assessments would be only to property owners abutting the upgraded street and would be to all such property owners and could not exceed the increase in value to the specific property.
2. Upgrade some streets by using ad valorem property taxes. This would most likely be accomplished with a bond issue that would have to be approved by a majority of the registered voters voting in a special election.
3. Leave the streets at their present standard, either permanently or until we are more comfortable with the economy. Routine maintenance would be enhanced.

There are pros and cons for each alternative, and this article is not to analyze each. Suffice to say, reasonable people can reach different conclusions.

The City Council has evaluated the three options discussed in the preceding paragraph. Since acquiring the streets in April, 2009, the City Council has discussed streets matters during 11 meetings. All of these meetings were open to the public and reported in the local newspapers. To facilitate analysis and discussion, I prepared four versions of a paper attempting to summarize all the issues and suggest alternative solutions. The paper was updated after City Council meetings where the prior version was discussed and based on input we received directly from citizens. All versions of the paper were discussed in local newspapers and were on our web site. The Fairways meeting held at the Marriott in October, 2009 was part of the development of a plan seeking input and feedback from the community and was discussed as such. There has never been a “Mayor’s plan” and, prior to the Fairways meeting, the City Council had not made any decisions about the details of a possible street upgrade plan. After the Fairways meeting, the City Council did make some policy decisions regarding possible street upgrades at workshops in December and January. These policies were discussed in the press and are on the City’s web site.

Since the City did its first full year budget, there has been an overriding concern regarding how much money will be needed for street upgrade and other matters related to the condition of the streets. This has led to the decision to be cautious in further lowering the tax rate. Since incorporation, the rate has been lowered from .50 per \$100 valuation to .33. The City acquired the streets last April, and last summer the City Council discussed this issue in detail. The decision was to only lower the rate to .33 but with the expectation that by the summer of 2010 the need for streets will be clearer. The tax rate will surely be an important matter in this summer’s budget workshops that are all open to the public. These decisions have led to the accumulation of over \$5 million that will likely be used for various aspects of improving streets, drainage, safety and low water crossings.

The City Council is considering major maintenance to the main thoroughfares: Bay West Boulevard for 2010 and HSB Boulevard for 2011. Repairs related to several safety concerns and drainage on Bay West Boulevard are also being evaluated. These would be financed with some of the \$5 million just discussed.

When discussing Bay West Boulevard, an obvious question is: Should the City replace the low water crossing with a bridge? A consulting engineer and the City Council discussed this possibility during public meetings in January and February. The discussion will continue at the March 16 meeting of the City Council.

There are no plans for a new city hall. Every long term capital plan since incorporation has had an item for expansion of city hall. City hall has been expanded several times (by Lake LBJ MUD) and probably will be several more times as the City grows. The City Council decided to acquire the six lots south of the city hall parking lot facing Cardinal. We have acquired two for about \$16,000 each and are actively working on the others. This space will provide for many years growth probably in two or three phases. The first phase is being studied and will likely result in a police building which would hold the entire police activity and free up their present space for others. This will relieve present overcrowding and accommodate a minimum of ten years growth in the entire city staff. The total cost is presently estimated to be \$1.5 million. There are no plans for a new fire station.

Please contact me or any other member of the City Council if you would like to discuss these or any other matters related to our City.

Mayor Bob Lambert
March 10, 2010