

Water rises to top of city improvement wish list

Written by By Holly J. Wagner Sun Correspondent
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Water and water-related projects top the city's priority list for capital improvements in the next year, but other plans are also in store.

The city council approved the list, with one addition, with a little more than a week to spare on the Aug. 19 state deadline. The short list is important because it locks in those priorities for funding opportunities from the state for a year.

Topping the list are new water wells, wastewater treatment plant improvements and replacing cast iron pipes underground, some of which date back to the 1920s.

"We are in desperate need of our wells," Planning and Development Director C.B. Strain said.

Rounding out the short list are plans for a new regional senior citizens center, finishing East Nizhoni Boulevard and, at the behest of Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, surfacing Mentmore Road.

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“I’m gonna throw a wrench in this whole thing. Sorry,” she said. “I need a design for Mentmore Road. Those people have been dealing with a horrible, dangerous road for the longest time, and I told them when I got elected that once Carbon Coal Road was finished, I would work hard to get that paved. It is not on your list but it should be.”

The whole project will cost about \$1.5 million, but a request for \$100,000 in design funding was added to the list to ensure Palochak’s ability to apply for that in the next year.

Councilor Linda Garcia, Dist. 1, asked about progress on plans for the new Regional Senior Center.

“It’s in the design stage now,” Strain said. The senior center is half of a project that will also include a new recreation center. The whole complex is expected to cost \$10 million, so the city hopes to apply for it in halves this year and next year, City Manager Maryann Ustick said.

“We could have ground broken within two years,” Mayor Louie Bonaguidi said, noting that about \$5 million in funding is included in a state bond measure that will be on the ballot in November. “Ninety percent of those pass, so the money will be coming through that bond,” he said.

The state requires municipalities to submit a five-year capital improvements plan at the beginning of each fiscal year to facilitate funding plans. State agencies use the master list to analyze proposed capital outlay bills during State Legislative sessions.

While cities are only asked to prioritize their top five projects, they were chosen from a much longer 20-year project wish list that includes 73 projects totaling more than \$336 million, Strain said.

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