



Mayor Graves' Column – June 5, 2014

Budget Priorities

The proposed 2014-2015 budget for the City of Gallatin continues to move ahead. There have been some adjustments made by the Council, but by-and-large it remains as proposed. My priorities for the budget are no new taxes, preserve the Rainy Day Fund, value our employees, invest in needed capital, and plan for our future.

After several years of tight revenues, Gallatin now has more breathing room in our finances. This allows us to undertake some projects that we were not able to pursue in the years following the recession. We will complete our Public Works building complex by finishing the last storage building which will house equipment valued at millions of dollars. This budget replaces old equipment and purchases additional equipment including a new trash truck and street sweeper. This equipment enables the city to provide better services. In this budget, there are vehicles for several departments to replace ones with high mileage – some over 150,000. There is also a cost-of-living increase for employees included in the budget.

Perhaps one of the biggest areas we are investing in is our Leisure Services Department. When revenues are tight, a city is hard-pressed to invest in amenities. But these amenities provide a quality of life that our citizens have come to expect. In this budget, there are upgrades to two playground areas, lights for some of our soccer fields, improvements to some of our ball fields, improvements to the Clearview Park walking track and basketball court, and upgrades to our Civic Center.

Because of extensive use and age, our municipal pool has deteriorated and is in need of significant repairs. In order to achieve some efficiency of staff and overhead, the decision was made to move the outdoor pool up to the Civic Center. Supervision of lifeguards and staff will all be concentrated in one area. Maintenance and testing of the indoor and outdoor pool can be accomplished in one place. Bathroom facilities can be shared and maintained by the same staff at the same time.

Our current Civic Center and equipment are a \$9-million investment in this community. The Civic Center has four racquetball courts, an aerobic exercise room, a free weight room, a machine weight room, a walking track, a double basketball court, a stage area, an upstairs workout room for spinning, Zumba, exercises, and yoga – to mention a few. It also has meeting rooms with kitchen facilities. It currently houses an indoor pool with a sauna and whirlpool. There is also a coffee area for folks to rest and gather.

As you know, two of the last three years, Gallatin has experienced a budget stalemate. Last year, a new marketing specialist – Danielle Eldredge – was hired to promote the Civic Center and increase revenues. This year, we are taking the next step with the plan to consolidate the outdoor pool with the current facility – which is supported by a majority of the City Council – and moves us toward a Gallatin sportsplex concept.

In order to move the pool to the Civic Center, an architect must be hired and the overall concept of a zero entry pool, children's play area, and a therapy pool will need to be designed. Our previous design is six years old and many features may have changed. Also, because of these planned changes, the Leisure Services Department is raising rates. Effective July 1, memberships will increase 15%. The daily rate charged by the Civic Center will change to an overall, uniform rate of \$4.00. The walking track will remain \$1.00. These fees will increase revenue to help cover some of these new improvements.

Gallatin is a fast-growing community with an eye towards the future. These improvements to our Civic Center complex will prepare us for the growth that will occur with the completion of the Albert Gallatin Avenue Extension. This budget will meet the needs of our community for years to come.