

Small town, big worry

'We're barely treading water' - Councilwoman Judy Johnston

By Jodi Rogstad

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BURNS - Things are going to start happening in this town of 285 people.

The state is looking at replacing the elementary school, which holds 216 students.

Two housing developments bringing 25 new homes were approved in the last two years, said Burns Mayor Vernon Testerman Jr.

And the state is upgrading a county road to a highway. When finished, agriculture trucks from the north will be re-routed east of town instead of coming to a rumbling crawl through its center.

Burns town officials also are hoping the sixth-penny sales tax will pay for upgrades to the town's infrastructure.

Recently, the Town Council voted on a list of projects approaching \$2.9 million that they want on the May 6 ballot.

Most of the county's voters live in Cheyenne, and that's where the vast majority of the sixth-penny sales tax is collected.

To protect these projects in 2003, voters got a menu-style ballot in which the small-town projects were grouped with larger projects for Cheyenne and Laramie County.

Town Councilwoman Judy Johnston said it was "a little painful" to see some of the other projects proposed for the ballot.

"We're barely treading water," she said. "We're trying not to be greedy. These aren't fancy projects; they're enough to keep the town going."

Added Testerman, "We tried to be conservative. I won't walk away from the committee without the sewer and water project."

Burns' budget for this fiscal year is \$258,595, Testerman said.

Water projects

\$1.6 million

- 250,000-gallon water storage tank, \$650,000: "It's for the children," Johnston said. Burns is on the list to have a new elementary school, though a date hasn't been set. Health officials say the town must have enough water on hand for fire suppression.

- Two new wells, \$750,000: These are needed to draw enough water for fire suppression at the new school.

- Water line looping, \$204,000: Leon Pierce, the town's utility board president, said tying the four water lines will get rid of the dead ends, improving water pressure and flow.

- Water line replacement, \$37,500: This will enlarge from four inches to six a water main that runs from Main Street to the co-op and elevator.

Sewer improvements

\$180,000

The money will replace the aging clay sewer lines on Wyoming, First and Fourth streets.



LARRY BRINLEE/WTE/ Cars drive along the main street in Burns at sunset. The town is asking for nearly \$2.9 million in the upcoming sixth penny sales tax money.

If these were paved roads, Testerman said, it would almost double the cost of this project.

This year the town got money from the state to replace the sewer line on Prairie Avenue. Testerman said the engineering is complete, and the town soon will be ready to ask for bids.

Reconstruction,

north elementary building

\$677,815

Currently, fourth- and fifth- graders are housed in this 23,978- square-foot building. When the new school is built and ready, the town will buy this building from the school district for \$10.

The cost estimate of the project is based on a cost-per-square-foot estimate from an architect.

The plan is to turn some of that space into a day-care center, government and professional offices and a recreation center.

"We can't grow unless we provide services for parents in town," Johnston said.

The town's business owners have been emphatic about the lack of day care in the community because it's hard to attract local employees, Testerman said.

What he envisions is an incubator model: The town would lease space for a day-care center at a below-market rate, giving business owners time to catch up and get places of their own.

Testerman said other space may be used for town business. Right now a divider sits between the town clerk's office and the room where they serve meals to seniors. The fire district also needs more office space.

Anything that remains could be leased as office space - at fair market value.

This building also has a gym, which provides a chance to turn it into a small recreation center, Testerman said. Right now, unlike Pine Bluffs and Albin, the town has no indoor space for children.

"There's no day care, no latchkey programs for the children; we have nothing," Johnston said.

Lagoon maintenance

\$67,000

On the west side of town lies a pond.

On a Tuesday evening, the idyllic scene of the setting sun and two swimming ducks disguises its purpose: This is where the town's sewage waste ends up.

Currently, there are 143 sewer hookups in Burns, and the lagoon can handle up to 100 more.

Behind it are two more cells for overflow, Testerman said.

Recently, the Town Council voted to ask for \$42,000 to put a chain-link fence around the pond. This will protect the town from liability.

The rest would pay for a five-year supply of microorganisms to process the waste in the lagoon.

Garbage truck

\$175,000

The current truck is in poor repair, Pierce said. This newer model would have a mechanized lift for the trash containers, which would mean "less stress on the backs of the employees."

Buyout for patrol vehicle

\$12,086

The title of the lone police officer is town marshal. This money would pay off the lease on an SUV that was taken out this year.

Dust control

\$64,400

This would pay for magnesium chloride or some other road treatment. That would be mixed with water and sprayed onto the town's gravel roads, making them hard like cement.