

## What's Happening with the Elmwood Village Board of Trustees?

Wednesday, October 21st, the Village Board of Trustees held their regular meeting at the Village office. All Board members were present, Curt Wilhelm, Chairperson, Pat Wray, Vice Chairperson, Julie Anderson, Park Goddess, Mike Krass, Street Commissioner, and Lou Allgayer, Utilities Commissioner.

The public is always welcome to attend and there are normally a few residents there. The meeting started with the review/approval of the previous meeting's minutes. These are always posted on the Elmwood website if you would like to see them. The agenda for the current meeting is posted there also. We try to get it posted as soon as possible but it is usually the day before the meeting.

At each Board meeting there are some topics that are always discussed so they are standard on the agenda. Items such as Streets, Park, Library, Water, Sewer, Planning/Zoning, and Special Events. We don't always follow the order listed on the agenda but we do get to all of them.

At this meeting we started with Water since Ed had to leave to attend another meeting. Ed provided an update that the water at the ballfields and restrooms was turned off and would be winterized. He has also received and installed a new scale that was needed to measure chlorine at the water treatment plant. The old scale had quit working and was not able to be repaired. At the October 7th meeting we had been provided with a list of deficiencies from DHHS (Dept. Health and Human Services) after they completed an audit of our water system in September. There were five findings that needed to be corrected within a specified time. One of the issues was that the back flow prevention valve at the fire hall was installed incorrectly. The manufacturer of the valve states that it can be installed vertically but DHHS mandates that they be installed horizontally. Ed will notify the fire board to get this corrected.

Next we had the Sewer update. On Friday October 16th the power supply at the sewer treatment plant failed after Ed had finished for the day. Normally the system will automatically call Ed on his cell phone when this happens but the failure to the main power supply didn't allow this to happen. The system ran for a while on the back up batteries until they went dead. Thankfully one of our citizens noticed an outdoor alarm going off at the plant and notified Ed. He was able to come back to town,, contact HOA, one of our contractors, and they came out late Friday and fixed it that evening. HOA has been a good contractor for the village and has saved us numerous times. If HOA had not been willing to assist us late that Friday Ed would have had to make a trip to the sewage treatment plant each hour throughout the weekend resulting in lots of overtime. We're glad it went out Friday and not Saturday or Sunday.

Jennifer Brettmann attended the meeting to discuss a claim she had filed against the Village insurance company. On September 8th the Brettmanns woke to find their basement full of sewage. They had just recently completed a remodel of their basement so they suffered significant loss of personal belongings, the walls and flooring were also ruined. A large root ball was found to have caused the sewer backup. Approximately two years ago the village adopted a recommended sewer maintenance program where we will periodically flush out the sewer lines. This was adopted to help prevent clogs in the sewer lines. During this process caution is taken to catch any big pieces of roots that could cause a clog but not everything can be caught. There is also the possibility of citizens flushing their own lines and sending items into the sewer lines. Prior to the Brettmann sewer back up several lines around town had been

flushed. Because there is no way the Village could have predicted this and did not know there was an issue the insurance claim was denied. This judgement is based on a 2013 ruling by the Nebraska Supreme court that says the municipality must show negligence in order to be at fault. Prior to that claims such as this had been paid. Now it is almost a given that claims like this will be denied unless it is proven that the Village knew about the issue and did not take action. This came as a surprise to the Village Board. We are very sympathetic to the Brettmanns for their loss and for the time it took them to clean it up. Andy and Rob Clements were at the meeting representing the Village Insurance company to explain this to us. Jennifer has already filed an appeal and is waiting for a response. A lesson learned from this is for everyone to check their home owner's insurance policy to see if they are covered in such a situation. Jennifer said if the backup had occurred on her line then her insurance company would have covered it but this was on the city line so it is not covered. The other option is to install a back flow preventer on your sewer line at your house that would stop the sewer from backing up into your house. The village would like to see everyone install a backflow prevention valve however we realize this might not be financially possible. If you are just building your house this may cost you less than a hundred dollars. For those of us who already own a house it would be quite expensive to install it... possibly several thousand. The Board discussed implementing a rule that new construction must have a back flow installed for the home owner's protection or at least strongly recommend it. Nothing was decided about that. Jennifer will keep us posted on her appeal.

Rob and Andy also updated the Board on a claim the village had about hail and wind damage to the Village office in back in July. After the storm an agent came out and reviewed all Village owned properties and buildings and determined that the damage was approximately \$586. This was less than our \$2,500 deductible so the claim was denied.

Reilly Kuenning and his dad, Rick, were next on the agenda. Reilly is responsible for the installation of the GaGa Ball Pit at the Elmwood Park. He completed this as his Eagle Scout project. Reilly planned it, fundraised for it, and organized the building of the GaGa pit. He was at the meeting to finalize his paperwork and have the Chairman sign off on the project. We thanked Reilly and told him that the kids have been using the GaGa pit and seem to enjoy it. Pat Wray procured a donation of outdoor carpet that will be installed in the GaGa pit. She asked if Reilly and his fellow Boy Scouts would be able to help with that and he agreed. This should happen in the next couple of weeks.

The Library Board submitted the September Librarian's Report. Total visitors for September was 217 with onsite check outs being 251 and over drive check outs being 17. The computers were used 45 times. The Library Board is planning on purchasing an ornamental bench with funds received from the Richert donation. Planning has already started for the next Shakespeare Festival. They are also making plans for the activities that will be provided for kids at the Holiday Extravaganza. The Library Board moved their monthly meeting to the first Wednesday of the month. Alexis Markham was appointed to the board. If anyone is interested in serving on the Library Board contact Janet at the Library. The Board members must complete continuing accreditation credits for the board to retain accreditation. More information will be coming about this.

Next up - Streets. Quite a few of our streets need to have cracks filled. Mike Krass, Street Superintendent, has been seeking bids for this. He found one company, Hein Construction, that is able to complete this in the spring. Repairs will be charged by the foot. He has a couple other companies to talk to before presenting bids.

Update on Moving the Tree Dump Site: Ed has mowed off the site but there are several cedar trees left standing because the EMMA group wants them for the Elmwood Extravaganza. Lou has plans to install cement barricades to create an entrance and to guide people where to dump their brush. The barricades are owned by the State Department of Roads and are located at the Greenwood yard. They usually put the barricades out for bid but since we are a municipality they will sell them to us for \$30 a piece. Lou will determine how many are needed and Mike will contact the State about purchasing them. The recycle containers from the park will also be moved to this area. Lou has talked to Spracklins about installing a camera at the site. That will be around \$900. We would prefer not to spend the money on a camera but we have had multiple problems in the past with people dumping building materials at our brush site. If building materials are found in the site the village can be fined by the EPA. At this time we do not have a date that our contractor will be coming to grind up the old brush pile but it should be within a few weeks. They are waiting for the ground to get a bit colder and firm up down there.

Park Update: I am the Park (Goddess) Commissioner so I reported that the painting is done for the year simply because it is too cold for the paint to dry. There are some repairs that need to be made to some of the equipment. I will talk to Ed about this. It could possibly wait until spring. I proposed some ideas for adding equipment to the park that may be made from donated items such as a big tire swing and long slipper slides that follow the slope of the land. I have also researched a new trash can that will be installed by the picnic shelter. This way we can have one of the trash dumpsters removed. It has been reported that some residents have been using the Village park dumpsters for their personal garbage. Connie will send them a letter and a sign will be installed to let people know that it is not for personal use.

Pat Wray reports that Josiah Philson completed his Eagle Scout project of installing the disc golf course at the High School in Murdock. Steve Bogatz was instrumental in helping with this. So far 5 holes were installed with the hopes of having more donated. There is room to expand.

The Village Board has been waiting on a grant to be approved by the NRD that will provide a protective cover for our water wells. This could possibly save the Village thousands of dollars a year. We have been waiting for approximately a year for the decision, we hope to have an answer soon. Lou pointed out that we could ruin a well by doing this so it would be good if the liability for that is taken by the NRD.

Update on Pet ordinance update: The draft ordinance will be presented at the next meeting. There will be three readings at subsequent meetings and then it will be adopted. I contacted the Sarpy/Cass County Health Department to see what they have to offer. Jenny Stevenson suggested implementing clear ordinances and then following through when the ordinance is violated.

Connie reported that she sent out 244 water bills and then after receiving payment had to send out 61 late notices. She said that quite often she sends a second notice to the same people every month. This

costs the Village time for her to process the second notices and also cost for the cards and postage. Suggestions for bringing this number down are welcome. Connie is investigating adapting the billing so that they can be paid on line. This might help. It was also noted that residents with outstanding bills for other issues need to receive another reminder letter. If no action is taken then we will need to pursue this. The Village is losing money when these bills are not paid.

Request for a building permit was tabled because we have questions and the party did not attend the meeting. Connie will ask them to attend the next meeting to get this finalized. Side note: If you apply for any kind of permit it is a good idea to attend the meeting where it is being discussed just in case the Board has questions.

Village Board Chairman, Curt Wilhelm, requested that we create a cell phone use policy for phones that are provided for Village personnel. Connie will check with other villages and see what they have for a policy and at the next meeting we will discuss what we want for guidelines.

Claims were presented and approved to be paid.

A letter was received from an Elmwood resident who expressed displeasure with the recent increase in the base water rate, the way it was presented, and the timing of the increase. He felt that the Board only viewed residents as "cash cows" which is not true. We agree that we should have done a better job in explaining the increase and how it came to be. I've been sitting in on the board meetings since I was elected and every meeting beginning in early 2014.. At almost every meeting it was discussed that Elmwood is in the red for water and sewer. We have been warned by our auditor that this is violation of state ordinance. A lot of ideas were tossed around on how to make up the deficit. If we raised the rate per gallons used then the people with large families would be paying more. This didn't seem quite fair. We would like to make it as fair and equitable for everyone as much as we can. Ed and Lou have done a lot of work to track down several leaks and meters that were not working like they should. This has helped to reduce our water costs but not nearly enough. They also made changes in the water processing to gain improvements. This helped as well but still was not enough to make up the deficit. Connie provided a list of similar communities to see what they charge and we were one of the very lowest for the base rate charge. The only thing we could think of to be fair to everyone was to raise the base rate and it is still one of the lower rates. Curt has challenged us as Village Board Members to do everything we can to reduce the costs to our water system over the next year. If possible we would like to reduce the rates next year. This increase affected each board member as well. No one was happy about doing it. We look forward to the day next year when we can possibly tell everyone that we are able to lower their water bills! No promises but that is our goal.

The Board also decided that we need to communicate with the Village residents more so they understand why we make the decisions we do. Everyone is always welcome to attend the meetings but we think if we provided a monthly update such as this it would help keep everyone informed. The Village Board does take into consideration how our decisions affect the town. It is not easy to vote yes to raise rates or taxes.

For your information about the water this is how it played out for last month:

Water Pumped: 1,821,000 gallons  
Water Treated: 1,620,000 gallons  
Water Billed: 1,608,293 gallons  
Water Wasted: 201,000 gallons  
Average Daily Use: 60,700 gallons  
Average Nitrates: 4.3 mg/l (that is really good!)

Pat Wray requested a Community Development Agency (CDA) meeting be scheduled for December 9, 6:00 pm. We need an update on the blight study/redevelopment plan so Connie will request that Jeff Ray attend. Those involved with the new development area will also be invited. The TIF attorney will be invited to discuss Phase 1. Curt points out that the water flow west of south 2nd street needs to be evaluated and changed to handle the amount of water that flows during a rain. Lou suggested using the NRD as a resource for this.

Meeting Adjourned.

Julie Anderson