

Chickens and Jake Brakes

Yes we have issues! Recently the City Council and our Planning Department got stuck in the middle of the chicken business! Lots of time has been spent to try to come up with a way of handling “quality of life” issues. Pets are important, and most of us see a value in pets that is hard to put a finger on. Does it matter what kind of pet it is? How is this going to affect our neighbors? Will my barking dog irritate my neighbor until they put in a complaint about the barking? Will my 20 chickens create a noise or smell that will be unpleasant to my neighbors? These are real problems that are part of quality of life issues.

Since the chicken issue was really more than about chickens, we aimed for a solution that might fix other similar problems. By requiring people to get a “Conditional Use Permit”, the Community Development Department and the City Council will have an opportunity to evaluate what is occurring within the city limits. It gives us the opportunity to find out what is planned and how the plan will protect the neighbor’s rights as well. Certainly 2 pet chickens (and not crowing roosters) are different than 50 laying hens or pullets being raised for food consumption. A large noisy pet is a lot more likely to cause a problem for the neighbors than a small quiet pet. The proximity to other neighbor’s dwellings is important, and an area with small lots and closely spaced housing will be more difficult than an area with lots more open space. Our Planning & Zoning Commission has worked long and hard on this issue and has come up with an ordinance that we believe will work for us. We will keep monitoring this issue and make changes in the future if need be. Stop by City Hall to pick up a copy of the new ordinance and look it over, or go to our website at www.cityofdouglaswy.com and click the “City Council Meeting Agenda” tab and select the October 22, 2012 meeting agenda.

Recently we received complaints about the noise of trucks going through a neighborhood all hours of the night and using “Jake Brakes” in an area that was very inappropriate. This is a quality of life issue: if you cannot sleep at night because of noise in your neighborhood, it really doesn’t matter to you whether it is a truck, a donkey or some teenager with loud mufflers!

You would think that truckers would have the common sense to not use Jake Brakes within a housing neighborhood when there is a sign just outside the city limits that informs them of “no Jake Brakes”! But then we have to look at who most of those truck drivers are: mostly (but not all) men! I’m one of them and I remember when I was young how much fun it was to make lots of noise with my loud mufflers! Cool! Well it isn’t cool in the middle of the night and especially within a housing area of the town. Those people would like to sleep! I never could comprehend back then how annoying my loud mufflers were, but now that I am in my seventies, it isn’t cool at all! We have tried to make sure that we have “No Jake Brakes” signs in all appropriate places now, so if necessary, our police officers have the grounds to issue a violation notice to offenders who won’t respect your right to peacefulness.

So we keep trying and we do appreciate your input and feedback, even if we don't act like it sometimes! Quality of life involves everything from water and sewer and garbage disposal to nice parks, quiet neighborhoods and people that respect one another and what they enjoy. All of us need to work together. The more we can figure out a way to get along with each other, the less rules and regulations will be needed for us to follow.

We are well into our new budget year with a new City Administrator, and all seems to be going well. Sales tax collections continued to be at a high level which really helps our budget. Why such high sales tax? All the activity in the oil and uranium industries around us creates lots of sales within our area; concrete, gravel and anything that is needed that has sales tax involved. Lots of extra employees living and eating in our community and the things they purchase bring in more sales tax. Industry is helping us pay for many of the infrastructure needs we have in our community, including landfill needs, water system improvements, street repair, and sewer system repairs. If the special use sales tax passes, industry will pay for a large percentage of the new college and library updates. However, along with the extra income benefits for our community, problems come as well. Adding extra people to the community creates more work for the Police Department, the Sanitation Department, the Landfill, the Wastewater Department, Parks; everything in the community is affected as time goes on. With extra income benefits during a boom we get extra problems for our community as well.

Just a word about all the extra unexpected income for the City: the Councilmembers and Mayor all believe it is better to use the extra money to pay off debts that will keep the City in better financial condition for the future. We have paid off the debt on the Water Treatment Plant so water rates will not have to continue to increase. We have prepaid the expense coming up on replacing the Spring House for our water system. We had thought we were going to have a loan to pay off on that but now we have the funds to pay off our obligation instead of creating a debt for the City. We are going to be doing more street repairs than we normally could because we have the money for it now. If we don't do street repairs when needed, the result is increased expense later because the streets will continue to get worse. We have set aside money to build the transfer station for the Landfill so that we will not have to go into debt for that. The transfer station has been a big concern because we are required to start transferring our garbage in the near future, and until recently, we had no way to pay for this. This unexpected cash flow has been a real opportunity for our community to do what is needed without increasing debt at this time. We want to keep the City in the best financial condition we can because we know this "boom" will not last forever. We will continue to do all we can to make Douglas a wonderful place to live, keep your costs as low as we can, and provide needed infrastructure at the lowest possible price to you.