

Governmental Affairs Committee Reports

January 5, 2018

Tri-Lakes MPO – David Whitlow

The Tri-Lakes Metropolitan Planning Organization policy board did not meet in December 2017. The next scheduled meeting of the board is February 22, 2018.

ARDOT held an open house and a public involvement meeting on Tuesday, December 5, 2017 at the Walnut Valley Baptist Church on Highway Seven N. They presented the preliminary design for job number 061438. This project is for safety improvements on Highway Seven N. from Bryant Road to Highway 298 W. The project includes safety improvements at 11 separate sites. A preliminary design map will be available at the January 5 GAC meeting.

An engineering study concluded that a tunnel would not be economically feasible for the extension of the MLK Expressway to the junction of Highways Five and Seven. ARDOT plans on letting bids for the construction phase of the project in the 2019 State Transportation Improvement Program year.

In Garland County's various road and bridge projects that are planned, the low water bridge over Locket Creek on the Danville Road will be replaced. The bridge will be widened by 8 feet.

Broadband Report - Greg Jones

Issues with Broadband access seem to be escalating in the Village. I have received multiple calls this month in addition to emails being sent to the Board requesting action on the availability of Broadband service for residents. As part of the strategic planning process, the issue of broadband access was discussed. Unfortunately, none of the broadband carriers accepted my invitation to participate in this process. Their position is that if we can tell them where we will be doing development they will evaluate and if ROI is acceptable then they will offer service in those areas. AT&T and Suddenlink were apprehensive in detailing any of their buildout plans in a public forum with their competitor. The strategic plan was developed with 2 potential options for broadband services. The first is to continue to work with existing or new carriers to provide access to our residents. This is the current solution. While the carriers are somewhat helpful, it's unlikely we will get them to cover areas that are sparsely populated. The other option would be for the POA to work potentially in a partnership to operate its own broadband wireless service. The cost of infrastructure for this type of solution has decreased dramatically over the past few years. I feel this is something that should be explored as a benefit for our residents. We could also offer free/paid WiFi in all our public buildings. If the POA chooses to explore this path, I know a few companies that might be interested.

Other News

- AT&T has introduced a new wireless service which operates over their LTE network in Arkansas. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any way to order it yet. I did acquire one of the LTE routers they are using for this service and did coverage testing at some of the residents that have contacted me. Many of those residents would see substantial increase in their broadband speeds if this was available. I continue to work with AT&T to understand when/if this will be available in our area.
- AT&T has discontinued DSL services in the Village. Any resident that has DSL and stops their service will not be able to re-subscribe. Several I spoke to have done this as they do not live here several months of the year and are shocked when they can't get service when they come back.
- Arkansas Airwaves has approached many residents. Many have paid them money only to receive no service. I would not recommend them to any residents.

Governmental Affairs Committee Reports

January 5, 2018

- Residents in the Binefar area are circulating a letter that I can forward to Suddenlink to see if I can get them to commit to service in their area. Suddenlink visited this area after I meeting I had with them in October. There are about 30 houses without any service along this street.

Hot Springs—Jerry Yeric

The city of Hot Springs continues to draw acceptable legislation to regulate the interaction of pedestrians and motorists in the public right of way. After a lawsuit was filed by the ACLU, the city withdrew its original ordinance after negotiations between the city, the municipal league and ACLU. U.S. District Judge Billy Roy Wilson granted the preliminary injunction, ruling that the law imposed a content-based restriction of constitutionally protected speech. “(The statue) restricts only a certain species of speech,” Wilson wrote in his September 26 order. “Thus if two people created a traffic hazard or impediment by holding signs, but one asks passers-by to vote for a political candidate and the other asks passers-by to give to a charity, the statue would apply only to the person whose signs asks passers-by to give to a charity.”

Larry Williams, Hot Springs District 4 Director, has announced he will seek the Democratic nomination for commissioner of state lands.

Hot Springs Board of Directors approved an \$8,000 market-adjustment raise for the city attorney, but declined to take action on a pay increase for the city manager. The Finance Department said the action raised City Attorney Brain Albright’s salary to \$140,186, which includes a 3 percent cost-of-living adjustment the Board granted to all full-time city employees for 2018.

The Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) informed the city that the Majestic Hotel property can be redeveloped to the highest levels of residential unrestricted use, giving the city wide latitude in determining a future use for the site.

Construction is well underway for the ASMSA’s new Creativity and Innovation Center.

Garland County—Jerry Yeric

Real and personal property tax rates the Garland County Quorum Court established for the 2017 tax year include a 1.2 mil levy for the county General Fund for the fourth consecutive year.

The 1.2 General Fund mills the county began levying in the 2014 tax year replaced the millage it had been levying for the Road Fund, effectively depriving Hot Spring’s Street Fund of about \$350,000 a year. The state tax code requires cities and counties to split the proceeds from road taxes levied in incorporated areas.

Sara Brown, National Park College director of development, reported that the NPC Foundation has seen a 59 percent increase in the past four years. Brown joined the foundation in 2013 with a fund balance of \$1,962,417. Currently, the foundation investment account has grown to more than \$3,115,000, a 59 percent increase during the time.

The current iteration of the Garland County website www.garlandcounty.org is the digital repository for all things involving Garland County government, improving on the previsions website developed and launched by the state in 2009 at no charge to the county as part of the Arkansas Counties eGov initiative. The website’s \$22,700 annual cost is allocated across the General Fund supported budgets and seven restricted funds. The

Governmental Affairs Committee Reports

January 5, 2018

offices of county judge, circuit clerk, county assessor and the departments of finance and emergency management each contribute \$1,600, with the sheriff's department contributing \$3,600.

Garland County Quorum Court adopted a resolution that effectively authorizes County Judge Rick Davis to include the county in Association of Arkansas Counties and Arkansas Municipal League-sponsored litigation against manufactures and distributors of opioid-based prescription drugs.

The Garland County JPs agreed to create a full-time county attorney position and authorized Judge Davis to work toward filling the post. Ralph Ohm has served as the county's part-time attorney since 1993, with the prosecuting attorney's office providing legal counsel prior to that. In February, he was joined by the John Howard and Sherry Daves law partnership, with whom he shares the \$60,000 county attorney salary.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation's funnel feasibility study has determined it is more cost effective to move a ridge line standing astride of the proposed route for the King Expressway extension than to bore through it.

Soft spots in the bases of Cedar Glade Road, Turkey Trot Lane, Blacksnake Road and Trooper Drive are being cut out and refilled with the expectation that paving will follow.

The Hot Springs Village Area Chamber of Commerce – Michael Dollar

Officers for 2018 were elected at the Board of Directors Meeting on December 11th, 2017. They are:

- Chair – Jennifer Allen, General Manager, GateHouse Media / Arkansas (Hot Springs Village Voice, Hope Star, Arkadelphia's Daily Siftings Herald, Gurdon Times & Nevada County Picayune)
- Vice Chair – Carol Cook, Sr. Vice President/ Sr. Consumer Real Estate Manager, Relyance Bank
- Secretary – Marian Crowder, Broker/Owner, Triple D Realty
- Treasurer – Reverend DeeDee Autry, Senior Pastor, Mountainside United Methodist Church

The Chamber's Annual Retreat will be held January 12th at The Atrium at Serenity Pointe in Hot Springs, a Village Chamber member.

The Chamber's Highway 7 West Gate Visitor Center welcomed 5,765 Village residents and non-resident visitors in 2017, a 4% increase over the previous year. Forty-seven percent (47%) were visiting from outside the area and state. Every month last year two-hundred-and-twenty-six (226) non-residents were assisted on average.

Tours of the Village are available as a service by licensed realtors participating in a new Visitor Center Realtor Program, which began in November. Walk-ins at the Visitor Center Lobby may meet a guide from 10 am to 2 pm Monday-Saturday, and 12:30 to 4:00 pm Sundays, to experience an informative and concise guided tour of the major highlights within the Hot Springs Village area. In addition, tours can be arranged by calling the Visitor Center (501-915-9940).

Amazing Christmas lights, including a music-tempo lightshow (88.1 FM), were on display at the Cordoba Center near the Hwy 7 Gate.

A new office building for accounting/financial services is under construction on N highway 7.