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Press Release

Safety committee celebrates new equipment, cooperative efforts

Citywide recycling more than doubles; 526,000 pounds collected in 2015

ARKANSAS CITY, Kan. (January 14, 2016) — With only one minor injury to review since its last meeting on Dec. 10, 2015, the City of Arkansas City's Safety Committee had plenty of time to discuss more cheerful topics during its monthly meeting Jan. 7 in the city manager's office at City Hall.

The committee — which comprises several employee representatives of the City's police, fire-EMS and public works departments — meets on the first Thursday of each month to discuss injuries, offer safety suggestions, promote safe practices and help to reduce the City's worker's compensation rates.

The optimistic discussion began with a positive financial report for 2015 from City Manager Nick Hernandez. It appears few to no transfers will be made from the utility funds for the second straight year.

Leaving most or all of the money in the utility funds allows it to be reinvested in new equipment and capital expenditures to maintain the system in place, such as by replacing water lines and mains.

"That's why you guys are able to get new trucks," Hernandez said. "The credit goes to you guys for keeping a close eye on things, spending the money wisely and sacrificing. You guys are working harder, without a doubt. ... But I want you guys to be able to do your job when you're actually out there."

Sanitation, sewer and cooperation

Sanitation crews, part of the Public Works Department's Public Services Division, are one of the beneficiaries of freed-up funds. Two new sanitation trucks have been purchased, with two more planned.

That doesn't mean they still don't have to contend with challenges, though. Recently, one of the department's trash trucks broke down during Christmas week, when sanitation workers already were struggling with a tightened schedule due to the county landfill's being closed for two days that week.

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"When our trash trucks did break down, Winfield, our neighbor, really stepped up and let us borrow one of their trucks," said sanitation lead Trencé Robinson.

"And that's a big deal. We've always had that relationship. (City of Winfield sanitation superintendent) Kevin (Neighbors) came through for us with no hesitation at all."

"We have the same relationship with our sewer trucks, too," said wastewater collector Brandon Vardy. "I just think that's great. I think that's just being good neighbors," Robinson replied.

"I don't think people realize how well we work together as cities," Hernandez said of the City of Winfield. "We've always worked well together. Outside of that (football rivalry), it's all positive."

Vardy said the department also has assisted outlying towns such as Geuda Springs and Dexter.

"It's like (Public Works Director) Eric (Broce) said when we went out to Cedar Vale that one time to help them out with lime stops: This is the next closest town and this is where those people come to spend their money," said water distribution lead Anthony Butt.

A recycling renaissance

Robinson also reported that Arkansas City's recycling efforts more than doubled in 2015.

"When we first started, before we got the carts and the trailers, we were doing 70,000 to 80,000 pounds a year," Hernandez said. That number increased to more than 252,000 pounds in 2014, when two recycling trailers were added to the City's Saturday recycling efforts.

The total amount of recycling collected more than doubled in 2015 to 526,000 pounds, thanks to increases at both trailers and a huge jump in the amount of cardboard taken in from commercial sites.

"Cardboard is just out of sight," Robinson said. "We dump that trailer (in the Cowley College parking lot) Monday, and have to turn around again and dump it Tuesday. It's so full, you can't find a place to put cardboard. Recycling's really taking off."

"One of our guys is pretty much full-time recycling," he added. "That's all he does."

Hernandez said the City probably needs to look at buying a couple more trailers and placing them in the east, south or central parts of the town.

"Spread the load so these (two) aren't hit as much," he said, referring to the current trailers in the Cowley College parking lot, west of the police department, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars parking lot.

The total amount of recycling collected in 2015 can be broken down in five ways:

- Cowley College trailer — 141,910 pounds (up from 87,007 in the last nine months of 2014);
- VFW Post 1254 trailer — 128,870 pounds (up from 75,566 in the last nine months of 2014);
- West Madison Avenue collections on Saturdays — 95,130 pounds (up from 89,691 in 2014);
- Cardboard collected — 149,781 (this was not counted separately prior to 2015);
- Glass collected — 10,657 (this also was not counted separately prior to 2015);
- Total amount of recycling collected in 2015 — 526,348 pounds.

About the Safety Committee

The City of Arkansas City's Safety Committee meets monthly to discuss injuries, offer safety suggestions and help to reduce the City's worker's compensation modifier. Current members are:

- Anthony Butt — water distribution;
- Mike Frank — water treatment;
- Capt. Mark McCaslin, chair — police department;
- Justin Parks — fire-EMS department;
- Joe Prochaska — parks and facilities;
- Trence Robinson — sanitation;
- Curtis Tauscher — streets;
- Brandon Vardy — wastewater collection.

Staff advisors are City Manager Nick Hernandez, Human Resources Manager Marla McFarland, Administrative Assistant Katie McCubbin and Public Information Officer Andrew Lawson.