

## **Mayor Deb Higgins Column March 24, 2014**

We are all looking forward to spring and an end to this exceptionally cold winter. While temperatures should begin to rise, after our next few days of cooler temperatures, it could mean watermain breaks will continue to occur across Moose Jaw neighbourhoods. It has been a tough spring for watermain breaks, frozen water lines and potholes in City roads. While many citizens are frustrated, we can all agree that it has been the worst year in memory for these types of calls and occurrences.

What is different this year is that the ground frost level has reached as deep as the underground pipes. Each time the temperature changes significantly, the frost level can move, putting pressure on the pipes causing them to shift. If there are weak spots in the pipe caused by age, corrosion or previous work, it can break. The unusually deep frost levels are also what are causing frozen service lines.

All available staff and contractors are focussed on isolating the location of the breaks, preparing the site for excavation, and repairing the pipe. Different expertise is required at each stage of repairing a water main break, so even if no workers are present, each location is scheduled and will be repaired as quickly as possible.

There are also crews dedicated to filling potholes and grader crews clearing streets and blocked storm sewers of ice. Work is progressing but it will take some time to repair the winter damage.

I can tell you that a considerable amount of effort by City Council and Administration is going into developing a plan to rebuild, replace and renew our aging infrastructure. Infrastructure that isn't just the pavement you see and drive on but also includes the sewer and water utilities below ground. I can't speak to why former Councils may have avoided or delayed this work, but I can tell you that is no longer the case.

This Council has, and is, looking at immediate solutions while developing long-term plans for the City's infrastructure renewal. How to make the best use of available resources and options are currently being reviewed and discussed with Administration. We will be reviewing all options open to us.

We feel it is important to have a long-term plan that lays out a systematic approach to replacement that coordinates underground utility work with above-ground repairs and replacement. While our long-term plan is being developed, we have taken a number of steps to ensure better immediate service for our residents.

Considerable work was done during budget development and deliberations to realign existing revenues with the stated priority of Council, namely infrastructure. Overall, there is an almost 20% increase to Public Works (the department responsible for road work) and an increase specifically to pothole repair of 56%. This will mean that we already have two crews repairing and filling potholes. In the coming week, that will increase to three crews solely dedicated to pothole repair. Because of weather conditions and the continual runoff, we are at this time using cold mix for repairs. While we know that cold mix often does NOT hold up well, many repairs will have to be redone as soon as the weather warms up and hot asphalt is available for permanent repairs.

Also, in our equipment budget, Council allotted funding for the purchase of another truck equipped for hot asphalt repairs, giving us the ability to address immediate issues on our streets and roads on a continual basis.

I understand the frustration of residents and I want to thank everyone for their cooperation and understanding. I also want to thank City workers who have put in long days and worked many weekends, over and above regular hours, in this past month to provide service to the residents of our community.

Deb Higgins  
Mayor