



BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

CITY OF HANNIBAL

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ELECTRIC, WATER AND SEWER DEPARTMENTS

3 INDUSTRIAL LOOP DRIVE • PO BOX 1589 • HANNIBAL, MISSOURI 63401-1589

July 10, 2013

To the Editor:

In 1993 the levy was built to protect downtown Hannibal from a flooding Mississippi River. In 1995 when the river flooded again we figured out the sewer system did not work exactly as we had hoped. When the river came up the sewers began to overflow into downtown streets and back up into basements. This happened even before the levy was built, but nobody noticed because the overflows were happening below the surface of the flood waters. When we pushed the river back the overflows were finally observable.

A temporary fix was constructed which allows BPW staff to open a valve admitting raw sewage into a pond on South Main where it is pumped over the levy into the river. This happens every time river level exceeds 25 ft. The MoDNR was appropriately notified when this bypass was built, and notified every time the valve was operated. So it has been since 1995. The temporary fix is still in place and we have been getting by without any trouble from our regulators.

In 2010 the HBPW was notified that the installation of that temporary fix was a violation of our permit and that each operation of the valve was a further violation of our permit and that we would be required to remove it or face consequences. This Notice of Violation is the first level of enforcement used by the MoDNR. What changed? I'm not positive, but I am pretty sure this is nothing more than the EPA exercising their authority more vigorously than in the past. Only Congress can reign them in and Congress is unwilling to do so.

The HBPW hired an engineering firm to study the problem and recommend a fix. Their solution is not simple or cheap. Space does not permit going into detail, but it involves years of construction efforts with specialty contractors to install fiberglass liners into many miles of existing sewer mains some of which are not even in the low lying parts of town. It involves capping off or rerouting other mains that traverse the downtown area. It may involve new pumping stations. It may involve new ordinances eventually requiring owners of low lying basements to seal them against high ground water leakage. It certainly involves an estimated \$10-20 Million of public expense.

This seems like an obscene amount of money to replace one simple little valve that has been quietly doing its job since 1995 but we have no choice. As part of the Local Government, the HBPW is obligated to make the improvement to comply with the Clean Water Act. But the money to do so must come from the residents of Hannibal.

For weeks I have droned on about our choices and their consequences. Here is another example where it seems our only real choice is how we are going to pay for another mandate. Those choices are the same as I outlined last week. 1) we can raise rates dramatically and pay cash, or 2) we can borrow from a local bank in a rent-to-own plan, or 3) we can borrow by selling bonds, spreading the cost out over the next twenty years.



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Tell us what you think. For more information and to see copies of previous guest columns please go to our website www.hannibalbpw.org or follow us on Facebook. Post your comments or send a letter to the editor of this paper. Finally, watch your mailbox for a brochure from the HBPW detailing many of the projects we plan to accomplish if the bond sale is approved.

I think selling the bonds is the smart way to go, but the choice is not mine. It is yours. Voice your opinions, then go vote on August 6th.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stevenson, P.E.
General Manager

“The mission of the Hannibal Board of Public Works is to provide safe, reliable utility products with excellent customer service at reasonable prices.”