



Happy New Year Hesston!

Welcome to community updates! Another year has passed, and we set our sights on a productive 2024. We are planning a full schedule of work over the next 12 months and will possibly add a few exciting projects to that list. Thank you for your positive feedback regarding community updates. Many of you have reached out to express your support of this effort, so we'll continue. This has worked out well as a quarterly posting to our website.

Here are a few things to look forward to:

- **Strategic Planning.** Our work on the next strategic plan will begin in February. If you recall we went through a similar planning process in 2019. With the help of the community, we created our current 5-year plan which expires at the end of this year. The process will take approximately 6 months and will consist of team selection, leadership interviews, two community conversations, wrap-up, plan consolidation, plan approval by the governing body, and finally, implementation in 2025. Residents will be invited to participate in at least two community conversations. When the schedule is established, it will be announced publicly through the city website and TextMyGov. I hope to see you involved!
- **Projects.** We have a handful of important projects slated for 2024. Most of the improvements are being made in the parks and recreation department.
 - In Heritage Park we are going to add one more pickle ball court. The footprint of the current court will be expanded in size to accommodate the additional court, and both courts will be oriented north and south. Additional fencing will be installed, seating will be re-arranged, and lighting added.
 - A makeover of Children's Park will include hardscaping, landscaping, some tree removal and overgrowth management, and irrigation updates.
 - King Park shelter house will be painted in the spring during warmer weather.
 - Landscaping at the golf course clubhouse is the finishing touch to remodeling we did at that location which couldn't be completed in 2023 due to inclement weather.
- **TextMyGov.** We have reached our goal of signing up 600 new subscribers to TextMyGov by February. To date, we have signed up 735 residents to the service. This is such a helpful tool for you to have. As I was driving to work recently, I could tell that a large



number of you have yet to subscribe to TextMyGov by the number of trash bins out at the curb on a day our trash service wasn't scheduled to run. Nisly delayed service that day due to the recent snowfall and city staff sent out 735 texts alerting residents to that change. If you had subscribed, you would have known! Please subscribe and become better informed! Also, you'll be automatically enrolled in the one-month free utility contest which ends soon.

Thanks to all of you who have subscribed to TextMyGov. I hope you are enjoying the service. We continue to see positive feedback in a variety of ways. We are getting texts from residents asking about road repairs, identifying road hazards, requesting dead animal removal, reporting water outages and water leaks, reporting stray animals, and other issues. Please encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to sign-up!

- **Winter tips!** We rarely get enough snowfall to be concerned about it but in both recent storms, city crews have worked around the clock to open the streets to make them drivable. We begin in the wee morning hours while everyone is sleeping to avoid traffic. Please remember that our priority is to first open the main arteries for public safety, then address school crossings and sidewalk routes, then residential work. It would be tremendously helpful if residents removed all on-street parking to their driveways so that we can better clean residential streets. It also helps save time in plowing by not having to maneuver large snow removal equipment around parked cars. Not to mention it is much safer. Thank you for assisting!

Also, when plowing, our drivers take extreme caution not to run a plow blade over a curb and onto a private lawn, but there are times when it happens. Lay-back curbs are hard to see in snow and gauge distances, and occasionally we will hit a lawn. We will repair the lawn and irrigation damage when it is reported. Our repair policy is that we do not repair damaged lawns with sod, we provide grass seed. If your lawn is damaged, please call the Public Works Superintendent, Chad Mason at 327-4663 and he will assist you.

As we endure frigid temperatures, some of you will no doubt experience freeze-ups at your resident. As a reminder, any water damage resulting from colder temperatures that occurs on the owner side of the public water system is the responsibility of the homeowner. However, if you feel that the damage has been caused by an issue on the city side of the system, please make your first call to the city, so that we can inspect it. Do not make a call to a plumber first. You will be responsible for paying the plumber for the call out, even if the plumber recommends to you that the issue is on the city side of the public water system. The same policy applies to roots that may have penetrated the system and caused backups or leaks. If you call a plumber to first assess the problem, you will be liable for the cost of the plumber services. I don't have the authority to pay for plumbing services incurred.



- **Grant Application Status.** Last August I submitted a grant application to the Kansas Department of Transportation seeking funding to build a safe pathway for bikers, runners, and walkers between the community west of the interstate and the developing area east of the interstate. I was recently notified that although our project was viewed as important to the safety and well-being of our residents, it was not selected to be funded. I would like to thank those who provided support letters for the project. I appreciate your help. I intend to use those same letters to apply again in February of this year for a second round of grants. I'll keep you posted on that!
- **Personnel.** Chad Mason has been selected as the public works superintendent effective October 6, 2023. When you see him, please take the time to reach out and welcome him to the position. He'll work hard for the community, and I expect our superb service from the public works department will be continued.
 - **Position Vacancy.** The city still has a part-time vacancy at the golf course clubhouse for a kitchen manager/cook. This is an outstanding opportunity for a stay-at-home parent who wants to work between taking the kids to school and picking them up. The routine hours would be 10am – 2pm Tuesday through Saturday. The hours can be somewhat flexible to fit your schedule. Responsibilities include ordering food, cooking, cleaning the kitchen and dining area, and menu selection. We'll start you at a very competitive wage of \$15.00 per hour. This is seasonal work, primarily March through November. If interested, please call Zach Frey at 620-327-2331.
- **Fire/EMS Staffing Increase.** In December the city was granted an increase in public safety funding from the county. The agreement with the county was to use this funding to hire two additional EMS employees. The funding will be paid on an annual basis. With this additional staffing we will have the capability to offer 24-hour EMS service to the community.

In doing so, facility improvements are being made to city hall to accommodate the change in service. The Chamber of Commerce will be re-located to an administrative area at 110 E. Smith St. The current chamber office in city hall will be turned over to EMS staffing for administrative use. The basement at city hall is being remodeled to house on-duty EMS personnel on station. There will be sleeping quarters, a lounge area, restrooms, a shower, laundry facilities, and a kitchenette. Preferred Builders of Hesston was awarded the contract and construction has started. This service will result in decreased response times that are critical in providing more immediate, quicker emergency responses to our



residents. Thanks to the Harvey County Commission and the County Administrator for taking this action. We appreciate your partnership very much!

- **Police Staffing.** At our January 8th council meeting Chief Eilert proposed the hiring of an additional officer to help with the increased investigation case load and replace an officer with a planned departure. The city council approved the hiring. As soon as the officer is hired, we'll make the announcement.
- **Godfather's Pizza Sales.** You may not be aware that you can purchase Godfather's Pizza at the golf course clubhouse. During the winter months when golf play is way down, we offer frozen pizza for pick up. During the off-season, If you want to schedule a luncheon during the week or want to plan a birthday party or other event that would include Godfather's Pizza, or you would like to purchase any number of frozen pizzas to bake at home, contact Zach at 620-327-2331 to schedule your Godfather's Pizza event!
- **City-Wide Clean Up Day.** In 2023 we tested a new version of the city-wide clean up. The "reserve-a-dumpster" program was approved by the governing body and was placed into operation for 2024, replacing the city-wide cleanup day. To learn more about the new program and request a dumpster be placed at your residence for use, please follow the link:

<https://www.hesstonks.org/dumpster>

- **City Website Revision:** If you haven't taken time to browse the recently updated website, I highly encourage you do to so! It is more inclusive and more transparent than ever before. The revision took nearly six months and has been updated to include all pertinent documents related to most anything you need to know regarding city policy, procedures, official documents, department information, contact information, and much more. If there is something you would like to see included on the website, feel free to email staff with your suggestions.
- **Weather Updates.** After Winter Storm Uri, we have all been more attentive to frigid temperatures so that we can avoid unexpected higher heating costs. As an outcome of that storm, our supplier now provides more frequent information to us to make informed decisions regarding notifications to our customers. For those of you who heat with gas, we have two methods of notifying you when usage is peaking, and costs may escalate. You can be notified by signing up on TextMyGov, or you can see updates when posted to the city



website. The only assurance I can give you regarding “real time” notification is through TextMyGov. Please text “HESSTON” to 91896 to opt in for notification texts.

Winter Storm Gerri: Winter Storm Gerri made its appearance in the Northwest on January 10th. Gerri swept eastward across the US with vengeance bringing snow, extremely high winds, and brutal cold temperatures and wind chills. Temperatures in Kansas reached lows around minus 10° with wind chills registering around minus 30°.

Gas production and supply for Hesston held strong and steady during Storm Gerri despite the extreme cold temperatures. Those of you signed up for TextMyGov received storm updates as they were received. I am aware of a couple of gas restrictions of which neither impacted our city. Enable Gas Transmission pipeline curtailed some supply mid-day on Monday, January 15th, due to freeze off in production fields in Oklahoma. This issue was resolved before 10pm on the 15th; and a gas processing plant in Southwest Kansas had a “blip” impacting service around 4am on January 16th. This was short lived and did not impact supply to the city.

Winter Storm Gerri impacted the daily index gas prices over the 4-day period of January 13 through 16. Our supplier, Southern Star, saw prices slightly above \$28.00 per MMBtu during that period, which will eventually show up in your monthly billing.

The good news is that daily natural gas price indexes receded on January 17 as shown back down to \$4.48 per MMBtu.

Forecasts are calling for more cold weather across Kansas for January 18th–20th. All pipelines and distribution systems have extended their Winter Weather Warnings through the 20th. We do not anticipate supply issues but do recommend conserving energy (natural gas and electricity) during this next forecasted cold snap.

Gary Emry
City Administrator