



FRANKLY SPEAKING

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Questions, opinions sought on water treatment facility *Public information meeting set for June 5*



By Frank Boyles
City Manager

Drip, drip, drip. That unmistakable sound you hear when you open the faucet to pour a glass of water, wash your hands, or prepare a home-cooked meal is, of course, the sound of water, and it is a constant wherever you go.

Water is an essential service provided by the City of Prior Lake. But all water is not equal. While it may *sound* the same, water can *taste*, *smell* and even *feel* different from community to community, depending upon factors such as its source (surface or underground wells), filtration, treatment, and in-home factors such as softeners.

In Prior Lake, our water is monitored weekly to ensure that it is safe to drink. Each time, Prior Lake receives a passing grade, confirming what we already knew: that our water is safe to drink.

But while that bottom line is positive news, we also recognize that the water supplied by the Prior Lake system is not perfect. And many of you would agree with that statement, based on the results of our 2005 Resident Survey. In it, respondents were asked to grade the quality of the city's drinking water. Fifty-seven percent said "excellent" or "good." The remaining 43 percent termed it "fair" or "poor."

The type of water quality issues most prevalent in Prior Lake – like odor, water stains and taste – are most commonly caused by high levels of iron and manganese.

While not considered harmful, water with high levels of iron and manganese which exceed secondary drinking water quality standards as set by the EPA cause a variety of problems ranging from clogged water heaters and filters to the staining of clothes and bathroom fixtures. In terms of infrastructure, iron and manganese build up in water mains and service lines, reducing their capacity -- particularly in areas with low water flow or dead-end water lines which are prevalent in lake communities like this one.

If you are wondering what the city is doing about this problem, please know that it is a top priority for this City Council and city staff. First, recognize that all water sources available to Prior Lake that are permitted by the Department of Natural Resources have high levels of iron and manganese.

Given that, in the spring of 2005 we instituted new water rates in anticipation of the need for new wells and the construction and integration of a water filtration facility that would remove the iron and manganese from our water supply before it reaches your homes.

As a result of that decision, we are now positioned to move forward with the construction of the water treatment facility in the Brooksville Hills area, in the same general area as four of the city's five existing underground wells.

We anticipate that the facility and a groundwater storage facility adjacent to it would cost in the neighborhood of \$13 million to bring on line, and that it would take 18-30 months to bring this project to completion.

Given the importance of water, this City Council wisely decided at the start of this year to form a subcommittee to explore all aspects of the water treatment facility. Council members Cheri Dornbush and Chad LeMair sit on that committee along with Public Works Director/City Engineer Steve Albrecht, Street & Utility Supervisor Craig Eldred and Finance Director Ralph Teschner. To further involve the public, two residents were appointed to the committee, with Joe Goracke representing the Brooksville Hills neighborhood and Paul Evenson the community at large.

As spring turns to summer, we are about to enter an important phase for this project.

On Monday, June 5 as part of the regular meeting of the City Council, we will conduct a public information meeting on the water treatment facility. In this setting, we will share important information about this project, including details about the cost and timeline.

This will also be YOUR opportunity to ask questions about the project and voice input about what is being proposed. The council meeting starts at 6 p.m. on June 5. I invite anyone with an interest to attend or watch this meeting on our television channel, PLTV-15.

If Prior Lake is to sustain its image of a wonderful place to call home depicted in our 2030 Vision and Strategic Plan, it must take steps today to ensure that the water that reaches homes in our community is not only safe, but also of the highest quality possible. Hope to see you on the 5th.