



CHOCTAW CITY NEWS

“Celebrating the Past, Enjoying the Present, and Planning for the Future” February 2020

Contact Numbers

City Hall	405-390-8198
Public Works	405-390-1121
Code Enforcement	405-281-6869
Court Clerk	405-390-3333
Permits/Licenses	405-390-2999
Police (non-emergency)	405-769-3821
Fire (non-emergency)	405-390-8300
Police/Fire Emergency	911
Choctaw Creek Golf	405-769-7166
Waste Connections	405-745-2942



Recycling Schedule

Please remember that Waste Connections picks up recycling every other week. Recycling pick-up will occur in the weeks of **February 3rd & 17th**.

Presidents Day

City Hall and its offices will be closed on **Monday, February 17th** for Presidents Day. Trash services will run as scheduled.

Bright Star

The CNP Schools Performance Arts presents *Bright Star*, the musical inspired by a true story, written and scored by Steve Martin and Edie Brickell. A sweeping tale of love and redemption, this uplifting journey will hold you tightly in its grasp. Performances held on **February 21st, 22nd, 28th, & 29th** begin at 7:30pm, with dinner theatre at 6:00pm on the **22nd & 29th**. Matinee performances on **Feb. 23rd & Mar. 1st** are at 2:30pm. Tickets go on sale at Showtix4u.com on **February 3rd** with prices starting at \$15. The ticket box office can be reached at (405) 259-2612. All performances will be held at the Performing Arts Center, 14300 NE 10th Street. For more information please contact Maryjane Burton at (405) 390-6837. Don't miss *Bright Star* the musical!

Choctaw Senior Center

Here are some of our weekly events:

Mondays - Classes

Tuesdays - Bingo @10:00am

Wednesdays - Devotion @10:30am

Thursdays - Bingo @10:00am

Fridays - Games / classes

For more information or to sign up for a meal, an event, or transportation, please call the Senior Center at (405) 390-8040 between 9:00am and 1:00pm. For daily menu & full events calendars, go to <https://mychoctaw.org/255/Choctaw-Senior-Citizens-Center>.

Choctaw Library

To register for a program, call (405) 390-8418 ext 3. Visit their website to view a full calendar of events and more at www.metrolibrary.org. Here are a few events happening this month:

Watercolor Resist Painting: Feb. 9th, 2-3pm, Adults; Beat the winter blues and join us for an afternoon of art and conversation! Create a winter scene with watercolors and learn some watercolor resist techniques. No experience necessary, all supplies provided. Registration required.

Treat Yo' Self! Teen Spa Day: Feb. 13th, 3:30-5pm, Teens; Bath bombs, bath salts, body scrubs, and lip balms: "treat yo' self!" Teens can indulge with us as we discuss the importance of self-care and make Valentine treats of our very own! We'll supply the wares, you take home the spoils!

Hounds & Homework: Feb. 19th, 4-5pm, Ages 6-12; Want to be a more confident reader? Build "paw"-sitive self-esteem and improve your reading skills while reading aloud to certified therapy dogs at the library. You can also team up with a local volunteer to get some extra help with your homework!

Eric Carle Scavenger Hunt: Feb. 25th-Mar. 6th, Families; Pick up a "passport" at any Community Library location (Choctaw, Harrah, Jones, Luther, or Nicoma Park) and visit at least three locations to be entered to win a themed gift basket.

City Manager's Corner

Hello Team Choctaw! These are exciting times for Choctaw as we ready for a General Obligation Bond Election on Feb 11th. Specifically this will establish a perpetual systematic plan to take care of roads well into the future. The scope of the roads issue for Choctaw is enormous, however, unless you live in a bubble, many understand the issue is not restricted just to Choctaw. Oklahoma as a "Sales Tax only" structure (the only State in the Union) presents challenges to cities statewide who struggle to fund failing infra-

structure for their citizens. Cities notoriously approach the problem in one of three ways: 1) Take what money they have and spread as much asphalt as can be spread to cover as many roads as possible—usually done as a mill and overlay, as the sales tax money available is not enough to do the job or 2) Over-build a road to ensure it lasts forever or 3) Wing it and hope for the best—sometimes cities get lucky here but mostly not. None of these approaches lends itself to the fiduciary expenditure of citizens' tax money.

The very first "Big Rock" I took on as City Manager, tasked to do by our City Council, was to work on a solution to fix our roads. When I say solution I mean a process, one that is repeatable, to take care of roads into the future. In order to do so I had to understand the scope of the task. I asked my staff for current inventory, condition, last maintenance or construction project, and scheduled road projects for the future. I knew it might be a stretch that a small town might have this process in place but I had to ask. Our starting point was ground zero, leading to a staff effort to come up with an assessment process to categorize and score every inch of the 127 miles of road in Choctaw. The first step of determining scope was to identify criteria for assessing each road. The criteria Development Services implemented, with the assistance of the City Engineer, went something like this: 1) Class of road—Arterial, Collector, or Residential. The class of road intuitively accounts for traffic numbers. Arterial has more traffic than collector, which has more than residential. 2) Road assessment—staff drove every inch of the 127 miles and scored each road somewhere between very good to failing. There is a Power Point document on the City website with pictures of road types in various stages of wear. 3) Added points for truck routes, snow routes, and school zones. Road sections were scored and recorded on an excel spreadsheet (also found on the City website) highest score to lowest. It took staff 1 year to complete this project, but the list was exactly the scope I was looking for in my original question of what is the process by which we work on roads. We now have one.

With the list, cost, and scope of the problem facing me, my next thought was how do I start working down this list with the limited funds available? I live the city budget every day, and direct your attention to my first statements above: Oklahoma funds cities mostly by Sales Tax alone.

Visit us online at www.mychoctaw.org for even more information.

Board / Commission Meeting Dates

(All meetings @ City Hall unless otherwise noted)

7 PMCity Council meeting followed by Choctaw Utilities Authority: **February 4th & 18th**Planning Commission Meeting: **Feb. 6th**Public Recreation Advisory Board Meeting: **February 11th**Board of Adjustments Meeting (as needed): **February 24th****4:30 PM**Choctaw Economic Development Authority (@Choctaw Creek Golf Course): **Feb. 26th**

With our current state, the City funds a Street & Alley account which fluctuates between 30 to 50% of 1 cent, garnering about \$500K a year. Half of that off the top goes to salaries and benefits for Street personnel, leaving about \$250K or so to take care of our streets each year, which is mostly repair and maintenance, with no possibility of construction. Next I looked at our Capital fund. The Capital line item obviously takes care of all equipment and infrastructure capital requirements for the city, including road requirements. It takes many years to build that fund to a point where we might be able to do a mill and overlay project of a section line road—including not committing to any other requirements for equipment. Mill and overlay of a section line road every five years does not come close to addressing problems and only would exacerbate frustration with the roads. Short of shutting city operations down annually, we needed a policy alternative to start attacking the problem. I took the list to Council and they formed a Roads Committee to review the staff's work, come up with funding options, and produce a list of viable roads from the staff's prioritized list. The roads selected come mostly from page 1 and 2 of the staff list. Obviously the committee's work resulted in the funding strategy Council is putting to a vote on Feb. 11th. Cities around the state struggle with the same funding structure problems.

I hear this a lot, "mistakes of the past," I think the statement indicates our Council or staff is responsible for the current state of roads. I submit to you, for a variety of reasons, the biggest cause to the condition of roads in Choctaw is centered on the funding streams available to the cities in Oklahoma. This funding structure, especially for smaller and medium sized cities with minimal tax base, forces cities into a "baling wire and duct tape" approach con-

cerning capital requirements and improvements. Most of our roads, confirmed by the city engineer when explaining the road core samples, were constructed and repaired by the county sometime in the past. Trying to cut costs and stretch funding as far as it could go, the mill and overlay of roads was the standard practice, to include repairs the City funded in 2000. Street crews are no longer able to even make the most basic repairs, like filling potholes, as the multiple layers continue to move and shift as each vehicle passes. This is an important point as I hear people talk about poor preventive maintenance or subpar repairs done by the hardworking Street teams. City crews did the work on 23rd Street in front of Sonic. The difference here is this State Highway is not a mill and overlay road and has a great base, unlike most of our City roads. The patch job is smooth and level and pretty much went unnoticed by the general populace. I am trying to provide that same quality for our City as a whole.

I have read and heard the City is only fixing a small percentage of the roads rated as "failing" in the Staff assessment. As mentioned above, there was more to each road assessment than just condition. Other factors made up the score of each road which created the ranked list. For my piece of mind, I compared the 12 roads selected by the committee for the bond election to the Staff list, and most of the roads are on the 1st page of the list, with a few sections on page 2 and 3. The Roads Committee, in order to get the most from the bond money and Sales Tax projections, had to dove-tail available money to the list of prioritized roads. Therefore it did not make sense to just start at the top and work our way down—there would be no need for a committee had that been the strategy. Some of this comes down to an art to maximize the repair to roads on the list.

What about residential roads? There will be money available to start fixing our worst residential roads. The current estimates for the 12 roads are stand-alone cost estimates, so they are higher estimates than what we expect when we go out for bid. When we start execution of the bid process there will be efficiency in numbers. For instance, the current environment indicates if we advertised for \$10M in roads projects we can expect upwards of about a 20% savings due to efficiencies in the bidding process. With

that savings, neighborhoods like Seikel Oaks and Shadoans Ridgedale will be high on the residential list.

I have answered questions about the Golf Course, and if we just did away with the Golf Course the City would have plenty of money for roads. The golf course is a stand-alone business activity within the Choctaw Utilities Authority's purview. In other words, it is a fee-for-service activity. In a perfect world the golf course would stand on its own with no monetary assistance. With that said, the money we have actually spent on the golf course that is taxpayer fronted is \$435K with a budgeted-but-not-yet-spent \$175K this fiscal year. Yes, in theory we could have paved half a road with that money, but I have to believe the long-term benefit to the community justifies the investment made to date. Something tangible is the City now owns 80 acres of prime real estate. We cannot sell the land to anyone other than the previous owners for ten years, per the purchase contract language, and once that time is past we are just paying down the note and watching the value rise. If the City had not stepped in, the land would have been another housing development on some prime real estate. Now, in 2026 (ten years after purchase date) the City has unlimited options for this land. If we no longer want the golf course we can build a conference center, a recreation area, or something like "Top-Golf." Or, we can even keep nine holes and make a retreat hotel or the like. There is significant future benefit to the City in the long run and it is very short-sighted to focus on the now, debating whether the transferred money could have been used for half a road. Your Council is accepting the risks of owning the 80 acres over re-paving a one-mile stretch of blacktop.

In summary, Council tasked me to produce a long-term approach. I could not pass this on to the next manager, or continue to leave our citizens with growing out-year capital responsibilities. My approach to the other City infrastructure requirements are the same. I ask these questions when trying to assess scope: 1) what do we have, 2) what condition is it in, 3) have we replaced or repaired recently, 4) are we putting away money to recapitalize in the future? The roads assessment has the city seriously looking at taking a bite of the elephant. Our roads are in need of help. Please keep checking the City website for up-to-date FAQs as we answer your citizen questions. Respectfully, your City Manager.

**Choctaw City Hall**

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The City Council agendas as well as all of the back-up information is available on the City's website at:

www.mychoctaw.org

Check it out and subscribe!